

# The Novels of Aldous Huxley - Part 1

Aldous Huxley

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Version 1

# Title Page

The Complete Works of  
ALDOUS HUXLEY

By Delphi Classics, 2018

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**Crome Yellow**



As a young boy he was taught by his mother, but after she became ill, he attended Eton College and then graduated from Oxford University in 1916. He had attempted to join the British Army at the start of 1916, but had been rejected due to his severely impaired vision. After graduation, he took a position at the Air Ministry before acquiring a teaching position at Eton for a year. One of his students was George Orwell, who considered Huxley an incompetent teacher in many regards, but commended him for his excellent mastery of French. Towards the end of the First World War, Huxley worked for Lady Ottoline Morrell at Garsington Manor, where he encountered members of the 'Bloomsbury Group', which included Virginia Woolf, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and John Maynard Keynes.

*Crome Yellow* was first published in Britain by Chatto and Windus in 1921. It was the author's debut novel, although he had completed an unpublished book when he was only seventeen years old. It centres around a young poet, Denis Stone, who is searching for literary validation from more experienced writers. He visits *Crome Yellow*, a manor, where an array of authors and artists gather to socialise and network. The book is satirical and takes aim at those Huxley knew from his time at Garsington Manor. He creates a host of amusing and ridiculous characters that typified the self-obsession of the literary scene at that time, such as Priscilla Wimbush, who is an obvious depiction and mockery of Lady Ottoline Morrell.

The first edition

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Lady Ottoline Morrell

Bloomsbury Group members — left to right: Lady Ottoline Morrell, Maria Nys, Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell

## Chapter I.

ALONG THIS PARTICULAR stretch of line no express had ever passed. All the trains — the few that there were — stopped at all the stations. Denis knew the names of those stations by heart. Bole, Tritton, Spavin Delawarr, Knipswich for Timpany, West Bowlby, and, finally, Camlet-on-the-Water. Camlet was where he always got out, leaving the train to creep indolently onward, goodness only knew whither, into the green heart of England.

They were snorting out of West Bowlby now. It was the next station, thank Heaven. Denis took his chattels off the rack and piled them neatly in the corner opposite his own. A futile proceeding. But one must have something to do. When he had finished, he sank back into his seat and closed his eyes. It was extremely hot.

Oh, this journey! It was two hours cut clean out of his life; two hours in which he might have done so much, so much — written the perfect poem, for example, or read the one illuminating book. Instead of which — his gorge rose at the smell of the dusty cushions against which he was leaning.

Two hours. One hundred and twenty minutes. Anything might be done in that time. Anything. Nothing. Oh, he had had hundreds of hours, and what had he done with them? Wasted them, spilt the precious minutes as though his reservoir were

inexhaustible. Denis groaned in the spirit, condemned himself utterly with all his works. What right had he to sit in the sunshine, to occupy corner seats in third-class carriages, to be alive? None, none, none.

Misery and a nameless nostalgic distress possessed him. He was twenty-three, and oh! so agonizingly conscious of the fact.

The train came bumpingly to a halt. Here was Camlet at last. Denis jumped up, crammed his hat over his eyes, deranged his pile of baggage, leaned out of the window and shouted for a porter, seized a bag in either hand, and had to put them down again in order to open the door. When at last he had safely bundled himself and his baggage on to the platform, he ran up the train towards the van.

"A bicycle, a bicycle!" he said breathlessly to the guard. He felt himself a man of action. The guard paid no attention, but continued methodically to hand out, one by one, the packages labelled to Camlet. "A bicycle!" Denis repeated. "A green machine, cross-framed, name of Stone. S-T-O-N-E."

"All in good time, sir," said the guard soothingly. He was a large, stately man with a naval beard. One pictured him at home, drinking tea, surrounded by a numerous family. It was in that tone that he must have spoken to his children when they were tiresome. "All in good time, sir." Denis's man of action collapsed, punctured.

He left his luggage to be called for later, and pushed off on his bicycle. He always took his bicycle when he went into the country. It was part of the theory of exercise. One day one would get up at six o'clock and pedal away to Kenilworth, or Stratford-on-Avon — anywhere. And within a radius of twenty miles there were always Norman churches and Tudor mansions to be seen in the course of an afternoon's excursion. Somehow they never did get seen, but all the same it was nice to feel that the bicycle was there, and that one fine morning one really might get up at six.

Once at the top of the long hill which led up from Camlet station, he felt his spirits mounting. The world, he found, was good. The far-away blue hills, the harvests whitening on the slopes of the ridge along which his road led him, the treeless sky-lines that changed as he moved — yes, they were all good. He was overcome by the beauty of those deeply embayed combs, scooped in the flanks of the ridge beneath him. Curves, curves: he repeated the word slowly, trying as he did so to find some term in which to give expression to his appreciation. Curves — no, that was inadequate. He made a gesture with his hand, as though to scoop the achieved expression out of the air, and almost fell off his bicycle. What was the word to describe the curves of those little valleys? They were as fine as the lines of a human body, they were informed with the subtlety of art...

Galbe. That was a good word; but it was French. *Le galbe evase de ses hanches*: had one ever read a French novel in which that phrase didn't occur? Some day he would compile a dictionary for the use of novelists. Galbe, gonfle, goulou: parfum, peau, pervers, potele, pudeur: vertu, volupte.

But he really must find that word. Curves curves...Those little valleys had the lines of a cup moulded round a woman's breast; they seemed the dented imprints of

some huge divine body that had rested on these hills. Cumbersome locutions, these; but through them he seemed to be getting nearer to what he wanted. Dinted, dimpled, wimpled — his mind wandered down echoing corridors of assonance and alliteration ever further and further from the point. He was enamoured with the beauty of words.

Becoming once more aware of the outer world, he found himself on the crest of a descent. The road plunged down, steep and straight, into a considerable valley. There, on the opposite slope, a little higher up the valley, stood Crome, his destination. He put on his brakes; this view of Crome was pleasant to linger over. The facade with its three projecting towers rose precipitously from among the dark trees of the garden. The house basked in full sunlight; the old brick rosily glowed. How ripe and rich it was, how superbly mellow! And at the same time, how austere! The hill was becoming steeper and steeper; he was gaining speed in spite of his brakes. He loosed his grip of the levers, and in a moment was rushing headlong down. Five minutes later he was passing through the gate of the great courtyard. The front door stood hospitably open. He left his bicycle leaning against the wall and walked in. He would take them by surprise.

## Chapter II.

HE TOOK NOBODY by surprise; there was nobody to take. All was quiet; Denis wandered from room to empty room, looking with pleasure at the familiar pictures and furniture, at all the little untidy signs of life that lay scattered here and there. He was rather glad that they were all out; it was amusing to wander through the house as though one were exploring a dead, deserted Pompeii. What sort of life would the excavator reconstruct from these remains; how would he people these empty chambers? There was the long gallery, with its rows of respectable and (though, of course, one couldn't publicly admit it) rather boring Italian primitives, its Chinese sculptures, its unobtrusive, dateless furniture. There was the panelled drawing-room, where the huge chintz-covered arm-chairs stood, oases of comfort among the austere flesh-mortifying antiques. There was the morning-room, with its pale lemon walls, its painted Venetian chairs and rococo tables, its mirrors, its modern pictures. There was the library, cool, spacious, and dark, book-lined from floor to ceiling, rich in portentous folios. There was the dining-room, solidly, portwinily English, with its great mahogany table, its eighteenth-century chairs and sideboard, its eighteenth-century pictures — family portraits, meticulous animal paintings. What could one reconstruct from such data? There was much of Henry Wimbush in the long gallery and the library, something of Anne, perhaps, in the morning-room. That was all. Among the accumulations of ten generations the living had left but few traces.

Lying on the table in the morning-room he saw his own book of poems. What tact! He picked it up and opened it. It was what the reviewers call "a slim volume." He read at hazard:

"...But silence and the topless dark  
Vault in the lights of Luna Park;  
And Blackpool from the nightly gloom  
Hollows a bright tumultuous tomb."

He put it down again, shook his head, and sighed. "What genius I had then!" he reflected, echoing the aged Swift. It was nearly six months since the book had been published; he was glad to think he would never write anything of the same sort again. Who could have been reading it, he wondered? Anne, perhaps; he liked to think so. Perhaps, too, she had at last recognised herself in the Hamadryad of the poplar sapling; the slim Hamadryad whose movements were like the swaying of a young tree in the wind. "The Woman who was a Tree" was what he had called the poem. He had given her the book when it came out, hoping that the poem would tell her what he hadn't dared to say. She had never referred to it.

He shut his eyes and saw a vision of her in a red velvet cloak, swaying into the little restaurant where they sometimes dined together in London — three quarters of an hour late, and he at his table, haggard with anxiety, irritation, hunger. Oh, she was damnable!

It occurred to him that perhaps his hostess might be in her boudoir. It was a possibility; he would go and see. Mrs. Wimbush's boudoir was in the central tower on the garden front. A little staircase cork-screwed up to it from the hall. Denis mounted, tapped at the door. "Come in." Ah, she was there; he had rather hoped she wouldn't be. He opened the door.

Priscilla Wimbush was lying on the sofa. A blotting-pad rested on her knees and she was thoughtfully sucking the end of a silver pencil.

"Hullo," she said, looking up. "I'd forgotten you were coming."

"Well, here I am, I'm afraid," said Denis deprecatingly. "I'm awfully sorry."

Mrs. Wimbush laughed. Her voice, her laughter, were deep and masculine. Everything about her was manly. She had a large, square, middle-aged face, with a massive projecting nose and little greenish eyes, the whole surmounted by a lofty and elaborate coiffure of a curiously improbable shade of orange. Looking at her, Denis always thought of Wilkie Bard as the cantatrice.

"That's why I'm going to  
Sing in op'ra, sing in op'ra,  
Sing in op-pop-pop-pop-pop-popera."

Today she was wearing a purple silk dress with a high collar and a row of pearls. The costume, so richly dowagerish, so suggestive of the Royal Family, made her look more than ever like something on the Halls.

"What have you been doing all this time?" she asked.

“Well,” said Denis, and he hesitated, almost voluptuously. He had a tremendously amusing account of London and its doings all ripe and ready in his mind. It would be a pleasure to give it utterance. “To begin with,” he said...

But he was too late. Mrs. Wimbush’s question had been what the grammarians call rhetorical; it asked for no answer. It was a little conversational flourish, a gambit in the polite game.

“You find me busy at my horoscopes,” she said, without even being aware that she had interrupted him.

A little pained, Denis decided to reserve his story for more receptive ears. He contented himself, by way of revenge, with saying “Oh?” rather icily.

“Did I tell you how I won four hundred on the Grand National this year?”

“Yes,” he replied, still frigid and mono-syllabic. She must have told him at least six times.

“Wonderful, isn’t it? Everything is in the Stars. In the Old Days, before I had the Stars to help me, I used to lose thousands. Now” — she paused an instant — “well, look at that four hundred on the Grand National. That’s the Stars.”

Denis would have liked to hear more about the Old Days. But he was too discreet and, still more, too shy to ask. There had been something of a bust up; that was all he knew. Old Priscilla — not so old then, of course, and sprightlier — had lost a great deal of money, dropped it in handfuls and hatfuls on every race-course in the country. She had gambled too. The number of thousands varied in the different legends, but all put it high. Henry Wimbush was forced to sell some of his Primitives — a Taddeo da Poggibonsi, an Amico di Taddeo, and four or five nameless Sienese — to the Americans. There was a crisis. For the first time in his life Henry asserted himself, and with good effect, it seemed.

Priscilla’s gay and gadding existence had come to an abrupt end. Nowadays she spent almost all her time at Crome, cultivating a rather ill-defined malady. For consolation she dallied with New Thought and the Occult. Her passion for racing still possessed her, and Henry, who was a kind-hearted fellow at bottom, allowed her forty pounds a month betting money. Most of Priscilla’s days were spent in casting the horoscopes of horses, and she invested her money scientifically, as the stars dictated. She betted on football too, and had a large notebook in which she registered the horoscopes of all the players in all the teams of the League. The process of balancing the horoscopes of two elevens one against the other was a very delicate and difficult one. A match between the Spurs and the Villa entailed a conflict in the heavens so vast and so complicated that it was not to be wondered at if she sometimes made a mistake about the outcome.

“Such a pity you don’t believe in these things, Denis, such a pity,” said Mrs. Wimbush in her deep, distinct voice.

“I can’t say I feel it so.”

“Ah, that’s because you don’t know what it’s like to have faith. You’ve no idea how amusing and exciting life becomes when you do believe. All that happens means

something; nothing you do is ever insignificant. It makes life so jolly, you know. Here am I at Crome. Dull as ditchwater, you'd think; but no, I don't find it so. I don't regret the Old Days a bit. I have the Stars..." She picked up the sheet of paper that was lying on the blotting-pad. "Inman's horoscope," she explained. "(I thought I'd like to have a little fling on the billiards championship this autumn.) I have the Infinite to keep in tune with," she waved her hand. "And then there's the next world and all the spirits, and one's Aura, and Mrs. Eddy and saying you're not ill, and the Christian Mysteries and Mrs. Besant. It's all splendid. One's never dull for a moment. I can't think how I used to get on before — in the Old Days. Pleasure — running about, that's all it was; just running about. Lunch, tea, dinner, theatre, supper every day. It was fun, of course, while it lasted. But there wasn't much left of it afterwards. There's rather a good thing about that in Barbecue-Smith's new book. Where is it?"

She sat up and reached for a book that was lying on the little table by the head of the sofa.

"Do you know him, by the way?" she asked.

"Who?"

"Mr. Barbecue-Smith."

Denis knew of him vaguely. Barbecue-Smith was a name in the Sunday papers. He wrote about the Conduct of Life. He might even be the author of "What a Young Girl Ought to Know".

"No, not personally," he said.

"I've invited him for next week-end." She turned over the pages of the book. "Here's the passage I was thinking of. I marked it. I always mark the things I like."

Holding the book almost at arm's length, for she was somewhat long-sighted, and making suitable gestures with her free hand, she began to read, slowly, dramatically.

"What are thousand pound fur coats, what are quarter million incomes?" She looked up from the page with a histrionic movement of the head; her orange coiffure nodded portentously. Denis looked at it, fascinated. Was it the Real Thing and henna, he wondered, or was it one of those Complete Transformations one sees in the advertisements?

"What are Thrones and Sceptres?"

The orange Transformation — yes, it must be a Transformation — bobbed up again.

"What are the gaieties of the Rich, the splendours of the Powerful, what is the pride of the Great, what are the gaudy pleasures of High Society?"

The voice, which had risen in tone, questioningly, from sentence to sentence, dropped suddenly and boomed reply.

"They are nothing. Vanity, fluff, dandelion seed in the wind, thin vapours of fever. The things that matter happen in the heart. Seen things are sweet, but those unseen are a thousand times more significant. It is the unseen that counts in Life."

Mrs. Wimbush lowered the book. "Beautiful, isn't it?" she said.

Denis preferred not to hazard an opinion, but uttered a non-committal "H'm."



“Ah, it’s a fine book this, a beautiful book,” said Priscilla, as she let the pages flick back, one by one, from under her thumb. “And here’s the passage about the Lotus Pool. He compares the Soul to a Lotus Pool, you know.” She held up the book again and read. “‘A Friend of mine has a Lotus Pool in his garden. It lies in a little dell embowered with wild roses and eglantine, among which the nightingale pours forth its amorous descant all the summer long. Within the pool the Lotuses blossom, and the birds of the air come to drink and bathe themselves in its crystal waters...’ Ah, and that reminds me,” Priscilla exclaimed, shutting the book with a clap and uttering her big profound laugh— “that reminds me of the things that have been going on in our bathing-pool since you were here last. We gave the village people leave to come and bathe here in the evenings. You’ve no idea of the things that happened.”

She leaned forward, speaking in a confidential whisper; every now and then she uttered a deep gurgle of laughter. “...mixed bathing...saw them out of my window...sent for a pair of field-glasses to make sure...no doubt of it...” The laughter broke out again. Denis laughed too. Barbecue-Smith was tossed on the floor.

“It’s time we went to see if tea’s ready,” said Priscilla. She hoisted herself up from the sofa and went swishing off across the room, striding beneath the trailing silk. Denis followed her, faintly humming to himself:

“That’s why I’m going to

Sing in op’ra, sing in op’ra,

Sing in op-pop-pop-pop-pop-popera.”

And then the little twiddly bit of accompaniment at the end: “ra-ra.”

## Chapter III.

THE TERRACE IN front of the house was a long narrow strip of turf, bounded along its outer edge by a graceful stone balustrade. Two little summer-houses of brick stood at either end. Below the house the ground sloped very steeply away, and the terrace was a remarkably high one; from the balusters to the sloping lawn beneath was a drop of thirty feet. Seen from below, the high unbroken terrace wall, built like the house itself of brick, had the almost menacing aspect of a fortification — a castle bastion, from whose parapet one looked out across airy depths to distances level with the eye. Below, in the foreground, hedged in by solid masses of sculptured yew trees, lay the stone-brimmed swimming-pool. Beyond it stretched the park, with its massive elms, its green expanses of grass, and, at the bottom of the valley, the gleam of the narrow river. On the farther side of the stream the land rose again in a long slope, chequered with cultivation. Looking up the valley, to the right, one saw a line of blue, far-off hills.

The tea-table had been planted in the shade of one of the little summer-houses, and the rest of the party was already assembled about it when Denis and Priscilla made

their appearance. Henry Wimbush had begun to pour out the tea. He was one of those ageless, unchanging men on the farther side of fifty, who might be thirty, who might be anything. Denis had known him almost as long as he could remember. In all those years his pale, rather handsome face had never grown any older; it was like the pale grey bowler hat which he always wore, winter and summer — unageing, calm, serenely without expression.

Next him, but separated from him and from the rest of the world by the almost impenetrable barriers of her deafness, sat Jenny Mullion. She was perhaps thirty, had a tilted nose and a pink-and-white complexion, and wore her brown hair plaited and coiled in two lateral buns over her ears. In the secret tower of her deafness she sat apart, looking down at the world through sharply piercing eyes. What did she think of men and women and things? That was something that Denis had never been able to discover. In her enigmatic remoteness Jenny was a little disquieting. Even now some interior joke seemed to be amusing her, for she was smiling to herself, and her brown eyes were like very bright round marbles.

On his other side the serious, moonlike innocence of Mary Bracegirdle's face shone pink and childish. She was nearly twenty-three, but one wouldn't have guessed it. Her short hair, clipped like a page's, hung in a bell of elastic gold about her cheeks. She had large blue china eyes, whose expression was one of ingenuous and often puzzled earnestness.

Next to Mary a small gaunt man was sitting, rigid and erect in his chair. In appearance Mr. Scogan was like one of those extinct bird-lizards of the Tertiary. His nose was beaked, his dark eye had the shining quickness of a robin's. But there was nothing soft or gracious or feathery about him. The skin of his wrinkled brown face had a dry and scaly look; his hands were the hands of a crocodile. His movements were marked by the lizard's disconcertingly abrupt clockwork speed; his speech was thin, fluty, and dry. Henry Wimbush's school-fellow and exact contemporary, Mr. Scogan looked far older and, at the same time, far more youthfully alive than did that gentle aristocrat with the face like a grey bowler.

Mr. Scogan might look like an extinct saurian, but Gombauld was altogether and essentially human. In the old-fashioned natural histories of the 'thirties he might have figured in a steel engraving as a type of *Homo Sapiens* — an honour which at that time commonly fell to Lord Byron. Indeed, with more hair and less collar, Gombauld would have been completely Byronic — more than Byronic, even, for Gombauld was of Provencal descent, a black-haired young corsair of thirty, with flashing teeth and luminous large dark eyes. Denis looked at him enviously. He was jealous of his talent: if only he wrote verse as well as Gombauld painted pictures! Still more, at the moment, he envied Gombauld his looks, his vitality, his easy confidence of manner. Was it surprising that Anne should like him? Like him? — it might even be something worse, Denis reflected bitterly, as he walked at Priscilla's side down the long grass terrace.

Between Gombauld and Mr. Scogan a very much lowered deck-chair presented its back to the new arrivals as they advanced towards the tea-table. Gombauld was leaning

over it; his face moved vivaciously; he smiled, he laughed, he made quick gestures with his hands. From the depths of the chair came up a sound of soft, lazy laughter. Denis started as he heard it. That laughter — how well he knew it! What emotions it evoked in him! He quickened his pace.

In her low deck-chair Anne was nearer to lying than to sitting. Her long, slender body reposed in an attitude of listless and indolent grace. Within its setting of light brown hair her face had a pretty regularity that was almost doll-like. And indeed there were moments when she seemed nothing more than a doll; when the oval face, with its long-lashed, pale blue eyes, expressed nothing; when it was no more than a lazy mask of wax. She was Henry Wimbush's own niece; that bowler-like countenance was one of the Wimbush heirlooms; it ran in the family, appearing in its female members as a blank doll-face. But across this dollish mask, like a gay melody dancing over an unchanging fundamental bass, passed Anne's other inheritance — quick laughter, light ironic amusement, and the changing expressions of many moods. She was smiling now as Denis looked down at her: her cat's smile, he called it, for no very good reason. The mouth was compressed, and on either side of it two tiny wrinkles had formed themselves in her cheeks. An infinity of slightly malicious amusement lurked in those little folds, in the puckers about the half-closed eyes, in the eyes themselves, bright and laughing between the narrowed lids.

The preliminary greetings spoken, Denis found an empty chair between Gombauld and Jenny and sat down.

"How are you, Jenny?" he shouted to her.

Jenny nodded and smiled in mysterious silence, as though the subject of her health were a secret that could not be publicly divulged.

"How's London been since I went away?" Anne inquired from the depth of her chair.

The moment had come; the tremendously amusing narrative was waiting for utterance. "Well," said Denis, smiling happily, "to begin with..."

"Has Priscilla told you of our great antiquarian find?" Henry Wimbush leaned forward; the most promising of buds was nipped.

"To begin with," said Denis desperately, "there was the Ballet..."

"Last week," Mr. Wimbush went on softly and implacably, "we dug up fifty yards of oaken drain-pipes; just tree trunks with a hole bored through the middle. Very interesting indeed. Whether they were laid down by the monks in the fifteenth century, or whether..."

Denis listened gloomily. "Extraordinary!" he said, when Mr. Wimbush had finished; "quite extraordinary!" He helped himself to another slice of cake. He didn't even want to tell his tale about London now; he was damped.

For some time past Mary's grave blue eyes had been fixed upon him. "What have you been writing lately?" she asked. It would be nice to have a little literary conversation.

"Oh, verse and prose," said Denis — "just verse and prose."

"Prose?" Mr. Scogan pounced alarmingly on the word. "You've been writing prose?" "Yes."

"Not a novel?"

"Yes."

"My poor Denis!" exclaimed Mr. Scogan. "What about?"

Denis felt rather uncomfortable. "Oh, about the usual things, you know."

"Of course," Mr. Scogan groaned. "I'll describe the plot for you. Little Percy, the hero, was never good at games, but he was always clever. He passes through the usual public school and the usual university and comes to London, where he lives among the artists. He is bowed down with melancholy thought; he carries the whole weight of the universe upon his shoulders. He writes a novel of dazzling brilliance; he dabbles delicately in Amour and disappears, at the end of the book, into the luminous Future."

Denis blushed scarlet. Mr. Scogan had described the plan of his novel with an accuracy that was appalling. He made an effort to laugh. "You're entirely wrong," he said. "My novel is not in the least like that." It was a heroic lie. Luckily, he reflected, only two chapters were written. He would tear them up that very evening when he unpacked.

Mr. Scogan paid no attention to his denial, but went on: "Why will you young men continue to write about things that are so entirely uninteresting as the mentality of adolescents and artists? Professional anthropologists might find it interesting to turn sometimes from the beliefs of the Blackfellow to the philosophical preoccupations of the undergraduate. But you can't expect an ordinary adult man, like myself, to be much moved by the story of his spiritual troubles. And after all, even in England, even in Germany and Russia, there are more adults than adolescents. As for the artist, he is preoccupied with problems that are so utterly unlike those of the ordinary adult man — problems of pure aesthetics which don't so much as present themselves to people like myself — that a description of his mental processes is as boring to the ordinary reader as a piece of pure mathematics. A serious book about artists regarded as artists is unreadable; and a book about artists regarded as lovers, husbands, dipsomaniacs, heroes, and the like is really not worth writing again. Jean-Christophe is the stock artist of literature, just as Professor Radium of 'Comic Cuts' is its stock man of science."

"I'm sorry to hear I'm as uninteresting as all that," said Gombauld.

"Not at all, my dear Gombauld," Mr. Scogan hastened to explain. "As a lover or a dipsomaniac, I've no doubt of your being a most fascinating specimen. But as a combiner of forms, you must honestly admit it, you're a bore."

"I entirely disagree with you," exclaimed Mary. She was somehow always out of breath when she talked. And her speech was punctuated by little gasps. "I've known a great many artists, and I've always found their mentality very interesting. Especially in Paris. Tschuplitski, for example — I saw a great deal of Tschuplitski in Paris this spring..."

"Ah, but then you're an exception, Mary, you're an exception," said Mr. Scogan. "You are a femme superieure."

A flush of pleasure turned Mary's face into a harvest moon.

## Chapter IV.

DENIS WOKE UP next morning to find the sun shining, the sky serene. He decided to wear white flannel trousers — white flannel trousers and a black jacket, with a silk shirt and his new peach-coloured tie. And what shoes? White was the obvious choice, but there was something rather pleasing about the notion of black patent leather. He lay in bed for several minutes considering the problem.

Before he went down — patent leather was his final choice — he looked at himself critically in the glass. His hair might have been more golden, he reflected. As it was, its yellowness had the hint of a greenish tinge in it. But his forehead was good. His forehead made up in height what his chin lacked in prominence. His nose might have been longer, but it would pass. His eyes might have been blue and not green. But his coat was very well cut and, discreetly padded, made him seem robuster than he actually was. His legs, in their white casing, were long and elegant. Satisfied, he descended the stairs. Most of the party had already finished their breakfast. He found himself alone with Jenny.

“I hope you slept well,” he said.

“Yes, isn’t it lovely?” Jenny replied, giving two rapid little nods. “But we had such awful thunderstorms last week.”

Parallel straight lines, Denis reflected, meet only at infinity. He might talk for ever of care-charmer sleep and she of meteorology till the end of time. Did one ever establish contact with anyone? We are all parallel straight lines. Jenny was only a little more parallel than most.

“They are very alarming, these thunderstorms,” he said, helping himself to porridge. “Don’t you think so? Or are you above being frightened?”

“No. I always go to bed in a storm. One is so much safer lying down.”

“Why?”

“Because,” said Jenny, making a descriptive gesture, “because lightning goes downwards and not flat ways. When you’re lying down you’re out of the current.”

“That’s very ingenious.”

“It’s true.”

There was a silence. Denis finished his porridge and helped himself to bacon. For lack of anything better to say, and because Mr. Scogan’s absurd phrase was for some reason running in his head, he turned to Jenny and asked:

“Do you consider yourself a *femme superieure*?” He had to repeat the question several times before Jenny got the hang of it.

“No,” she said, rather indignantly, when at last she heard what Denis was saying. “Certainly not. Has anyone been suggesting that I am?”

“No,” said Denis. “Mr. Scogan told Mary she was one.”

“Did he?” Jenny lowered her voice. “Shall I tell you what I think of that man? I think he’s slightly sinister.”

Having made this pronouncement, she entered the ivory tower of her deafness and closed the door. Denis could not induce her to say anything more, could not induce her even to listen. She just smiled at him, smiled and occasionally nodded.

Denis went out on to the terrace to smoke his after-breakfast pipe and to read his morning paper. An hour later, when Anne came down, she found him still reading. By this time he had got to the Court Circular and the Forthcoming Weddings. He got up to meet her as she approached, a Hamadryad in white muslin, across the grass.

"Why, Denis," she exclaimed, "you look perfectly sweet in your white trousers."

Denis was dreadfully taken aback. There was no possible retort. "You speak as though I were a child in a new frock," he said, with a show of irritation.

"But that's how I feel about you, Denis dear."

"Then you oughtn't to."

"But I can't help it. I'm so much older than you."

"I like that," he said. "Four years older."

"And if you do look perfectly sweet in your white trousers, why shouldn't I say so? And why did you put them on, if you didn't think you were going to look sweet in them?"

"Let's go into the garden," said Denis. He was put out; the conversation had taken such a preposterous and unexpected turn. He had planned a very different opening, in which he was to lead off with, "You look adorable this morning," or something of the kind, and she was to answer, "Do I?" and then there was to be a pregnant silence. And now she had got in first with the trousers. It was provoking; his pride was hurt.

That part of the garden that sloped down from the foot of the terrace to the pool had a beauty which did not depend on colour so much as on forms. It was as beautiful by moonlight as in the sun. The silver of water, the dark shapes of yew and ilex trees remained, at all hours and seasons, the dominant features of the scene. It was a landscape in black and white. For colour there was the flower-garden; it lay to one side of the pool, separated from it by a huge Babylonian wall of yews. You passed through a tunnel in the hedge, you opened a wicket in a wall, and you found yourself, startlingly and suddenly, in the world of colour. The July borders blazed and flared under the sun. Within its high brick walls the garden was like a great tank of warmth and perfume and colour.

Denis held open the little iron gate for his companion. "It's like passing from a cloister into an Oriental palace," he said, and took a deep breath of the warm, flower-scented air. "'In fragrant volleys they let fly...' How does it go?"

"'Well shot, ye firemen! Oh how sweet

And round your equal fires do meet;

Whose shrill report no ear can tell,

But echoes to the eye and smell...'"

"You have a bad habit of quoting," said Anne. "As I never know the context or author, I find it humiliating."

Denis apologized. "It's the fault of one's education. Things somehow seem more real and vivid when one can apply somebody else's ready-made phrase about them. And then there are lots of lovely names and words — Monophysite, Iamblichus, Pomponazzi; you bring them out triumphantly, and feel you've clinched the argument with the mere magical sound of them. That's what comes of the higher education."

"You may regret your education," said Anne; "I'm ashamed of my lack of it. Look at those sunflowers! Aren't they magnificent?"

"Dark faces and golden crowns — they're kings of Ethiopia. And I like the way the tits cling to the flowers and pick out the seeds, while the other loutish birds, grubbing dirtily for their food, look up in envy from the ground. Do they look up in envy? That's the literary touch, I'm afraid. Education again. It always comes back to that." He was silent.

Anne had sat down on a bench that stood in the shade of an old apple tree. "I'm listening," she said.

He did not sit down, but walked backwards and forwards in front of the bench, gesticulating a little as he talked. "Books," he said— "books. One reads so many, and one sees so few people and so little of the world. Great thick books about the universe and the mind and ethics. You've no idea how many there are. I must have read twenty or thirty tons of them in the last five years. Twenty tons of ratiocination. Weighted with that, one's pushed out into the world."

He went on walking up and down. His voice rose, fell, was silent a moment, and then talked on. He moved his hands, sometimes he waved his arms. Anne looked and listened quietly, as though she were at a lecture. He was a nice boy, and to-day he looked charming — charming!

One entered the world, Denis pursued, having ready-made ideas about everything. One had a philosophy and tried to make life fit into it. One should have lived first and then made one's philosophy to fit life...Life, facts, things were horribly complicated; ideas, even the most difficult of them, deceptively simple. In the world of ideas everything was clear; in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising that one was miserable, horribly unhappy? Denis came to a halt in front of the bench, and as he asked this last question he stretched out his arms and stood for an instant in an attitude of crucifixion, then let them fall again to his sides.

"My poor Denis!" Anne was touched. He was really too pathetic as he stood there in front of her in his white flannel trousers. "But does one suffer about these things? It seems very extraordinary."

"You're like Scogan," cried Denis bitterly. "You regard me as a specimen for an anthropologist. Well, I suppose I am."

"No, no," she protested, and drew in her skirt with a gesture that indicated that he was to sit down beside her. He sat down. "Why can't you just take things for granted and as they come?" she asked. "It's so much simpler."

"Of course it is," said Denis. "But it's a lesson to be learnt gradually. There are the twenty tons of ratiocination to be got rid of first."

"I've always taken things as they come," said Anne. "It seems so obvious. One enjoys the pleasant things, avoids the nasty ones. There's nothing more to be said."

"Nothing — for you. But, then, you were born a pagan; I am trying laboriously to make myself one. I can take nothing for granted, I can enjoy nothing as it comes along. Beauty, pleasure, art, women — I have to invent an excuse, a justification for everything that's delightful. Otherwise I can't enjoy it with an easy conscience. I make up a little story about beauty and pretend that it has something to do with truth and goodness. I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos. Pleasure is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite — the ecstasies of drinking, dancing, love-making. As for women, I am perpetually assuring myself that they're the broad highway to divinity. And to think that I'm only just beginning to see through the silliness of the whole thing! It's incredible to me that anyone should have escaped these horrors."

"It's still more incredible to me," said Anne, "that anyone should have been a victim to them. I should like to see myself believing that men are the highway to divinity." The amused malice of her smile planted two little folds on either side of her mouth, and through their half-closed lids her eyes shone with laughter. "What you need, Denis, is a nice plump young wife, a fixed income, and a little congenial but regular work."

"What I need is you." That was what he ought to have retorted, that was what he wanted passionately to say. He could not say it. His desire fought against his shyness. "What I need is you." Mentally he shouted the words, but not a sound issued from his lips. He looked at her despairingly. Couldn't she see what was going on inside him? Couldn't she understand? "What I need is you." He would say it, he would — he would.

"I think I shall go and bathe," said Anne. "It's so hot." The opportunity had passed.

## Chapter V.

MR. WIMBUSH HAD taken them to see the sights of the Home Farm, and now they were standing, all six of them — Henry Wimbush, Mr. Scogan, Denis, Gombauld, Anne, and Mary — by the low wall of the piggery, looking into one of the styes.

"This is a good sow," said Henry Wimbush. "She had a litter of fourteen."

"Fourteen?" Mary echoed incredulously. She turned astonished blue eyes towards Mr. Wimbush, then let them fall onto the seething mass of elan vital that fermented in the sty.

An immense sow reposed on her side in the middle of the pen. Her round, black belly, fringed with a double line of dugs, presented itself to the assault of an army of small, brownish-black swine. With a frantic greed they tugged at their mother's flank. The old sow stirred sometimes uneasily or uttered a little grunt of pain. One small pig, the runt, the weakling of the litter, had been unable to secure a place at the banquet. Squealing shrilly, he ran backwards and forwards, trying to push in among



his stronger brothers or even to climb over their tight little black backs towards the maternal reservoir.

"There ARE fourteen," said Mary. "You're quite right. I counted. It's extraordinary."

"The sow next door," Mr. Wimbush went on, "has done very badly. She only had five in her litter. I shall give her another chance. If she does no better next time, I shall fat her up and kill her. There's the boar," he pointed towards a farther sty. "Fine old beast, isn't he? But he's getting past his prime. He'll have to go too."

"How cruel!" Anne exclaimed.

"But how practical, how eminently realistic!" said Mr. Scogan. "In this farm we have a model of sound paternal government. Make them breed, make them work, and when they're past working or breeding or begetting, slaughter them."

"Farming seems to be mostly indecency and cruelty," said Anne.

With the ferrule of his walking-stick Denis began to scratch the boar's long bristly back. The animal moved a little so as to bring himself within easier range of the instrument that evoked in him such delicious sensations; then he stood stock still, softly grunting his contentment. The mud of years flaked off his sides in a grey powdery scurf.

"What a pleasure it is," said Denis, "to do somebody a kindness. I believe I enjoy scratching this pig quite as much as he enjoys being scratched. If only one could always be kind with so little expense or trouble..."

A gate slammed; there was a sound of heavy footsteps.

"Morning, Rowley!" said Henry Wimbush.

"Morning, sir," old Rowley answered. He was the most venerable of the labourers on the farm — a tall, solid man, still unbent, with grey side-whiskers and a steep, dignified profile. Grave, weighty in his manner, splendidly respectable, Rowley had the air of a great English statesman of the mid-nineteenth century. He halted on the outskirts of the group, and for a moment they all looked at the pigs in a silence that was only broken by the sound of grunting or the squelch of a sharp hoof in the mire. Rowley turned at last, slowly and ponderously and nobly, as he did everything, and addressed himself to Henry Wimbush.

"Look at them, sir," he said, with a motion of his hand towards the wallowing swine. "Rightly is they called pigs."

"Rightly indeed," Mr. Wimbush agreed.

"I am abashed by that man," said Mr. Scogan, as old Rowley plodded off slowly and with dignity. "What wisdom, what judgment, what a sense of values! 'Rightly are they called swine.' Yes. And I wish I could, with as much justice, say, 'Rightly are we called men.'"

They walked on towards the cowsheds and the stables of the cart-horses. Five white geese, taking the air this fine morning, even as they were doing, met them in the way. They hesitated, cackled; then, converting their lifted necks into rigid, horizontal snakes, they rushed off in disorder, hissing horribly as they went. Red calves paddled in the dung and mud of a spacious yard. In another enclosure stood the bull, massive as a locomotive. He was a very calm bull, and his face wore an expression of melancholy

stupidity. He gazed with reddish-brown eyes at his visitors, chewed thoughtfully at the tangible memories of an earlier meal, swallowed and regurgitated, chewed again. His tail lashed savagely from side to side; it seemed to have nothing to do with his impassive bulk. Between his short horns was a triangle of red curls, short and dense.

"Splendid animal," said Henry Wimbush. "Pedigree stock. But he's getting a little old, like the boar."

"Fat him up and slaughter him," Mr. Scogan pronounced, with a delicate old-maidish precision of utterance.

"Couldn't you give the animals a little holiday from producing children?" asked Anne. "I'm so sorry for the poor things."

Mr. Wimbush shook his head. "Personally," he said, "I rather like seeing fourteen pigs grow where only one grew before. The spectacle of so much crude life is refreshing."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," Gombauld broke in warmly. "Lots of life: that's what we want. I like pullulation; everything ought to increase and multiply as hard as it can."

Gombauld grew lyrical. Everybody ought to have children — Anne ought to have them, Mary ought to have them — dozens and dozens. He emphasised his point by thumping with his walking-stick on the bull's leather flanks. Mr. Scogan ought to pass on his intelligence to little Scogans, and Denis to little Denises. The bull turned his head to see what was happening, regarded the drumming stick for several seconds, then turned back again satisfied, it seemed, that nothing was happening. Sterility was odious, unnatural, a sin against life. Life, life, and still more life. The ribs of the placid bull resounded.

Standing with his back against the farmyard pump, a little apart, Denis examined the group. Gombauld, passionate and vivacious, was its centre. The others stood round, listening — Henry Wimbush, calm and polite beneath his grey bowler; Mary, with parted lips and eyes that shone with the indignation of a convinced birth-controller. Anne looked on through half-shut eyes, smiling; and beside her stood Mr. Scogan, bolt upright in an attitude of metallic rigidity that contrasted strangely with that fluid grace of hers which even in stillness suggested a soft movement.

Gombauld ceased talking, and Mary, flushed and outraged, opened her mouth to refute him. But she was too slow. Before she could utter a word Mr. Scogan's fluty voice had pronounced the opening phrases of a discourse. There was no hope of getting so much as a word in edgeways; Mary had perforce to resign herself.

"Even your eloquence, my dear Gombauld," he was saying — "even your eloquence must prove inadequate to reconvert the world to a belief in the delights of mere multiplication. With the gramophone, the cinema, and the automatic pistol, the goddess of Applied Science has presented the world with another gift, more precious even than these — the means of dissociating love from propagation. Eros, for those who wish it, is now an entirely free god; his deplorable associations with Lucina may be broken at will. In the course of the next few centuries, who knows? the world may see a more complete severance. I look forward to it optimistically. Where the great Erasmus Darwin

and Miss Anna Seward, Swan of Lichfield, experimented — and, for all their scientific ardour, failed — our descendants will experiment and succeed. An impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower through a sunlit world."

"It sounds lovely," said Anne.

"The distant future always does."

Mary's china blue eyes, more serious and more astonished than ever, were fixed on Mr. Scogan. "Bottles?" she said. "Do you really think so? Bottles..."

## Chapter VI.

MR. BARBECUE-SMITH ARRIVED in time for tea on Saturday afternoon. He was a short and corpulent man, with a very large head and no neck. In his earlier middle age he had been distressed by this absence of neck, but was comforted by reading in Balzac's "Louis Lambert" that all the world's great men have been marked by the same peculiarity, and for a simple and obvious reason: Greatness is nothing more nor less than the harmonious functioning of the faculties of the head and heart; the shorter the neck, the more closely these two organs approach one another; argal...It was convincing.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith belonged to the old school of journalists. He sported a leonine head with a greyish-black mane of oddly unappetising hair brushed back from a broad but low forehead. And somehow he always seemed slightly, ever so slightly, soiled. In younger days he had gaily called himself a Bohemian. He did so no longer. He was a teacher now, a kind of prophet. Some of his books of comfort and spiritual teaching were in their hundred and twentieth thousand.

Priscilla received him with every mark of esteem. He had never been to Crome before; she showed him round the house. Mr. Barbecue-Smith was full of admiration.

"So quaint, so old-world," he kept repeating. He had a rich, rather unctuous voice.

Priscilla praised his latest book. "Splendid, I thought it was," she said in her large, jolly way.

"I'm happy to think you found it a comfort," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith.

"Oh, tremendously! And the bit about the Lotus Pool — I thought that so beautiful."

"I knew you would like that. It came to me, you know, from without." He waved his hand to indicate the astral world.

They went out into the garden for tea. Mr. Barbecue-Smith was duly introduced.

"Mr. Stone is a writer too," said Priscilla, as she introduced Denis.

"Indeed!" Mr. Barbecue-Smith smiled benignly, and, looking up at Denis with an expression of Olympian condescension, "And what sort of things do you write?"

Denis was furious, and, to make matters worse, he felt himself blushing hotly. Had Priscilla no sense of proportion? She was putting them in the same category — Barbecue-Smith and himself. They were both writers, they both used pen and ink. To Mr. Barbecue-Smith's question he answered, "Oh, nothing much, nothing," and looked away.

"Mr. Stone is one of our younger poets." It was Anne's voice. He scowled at her, and she smiled back exasperatingly.

"Excellent, excellent," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith, and he squeezed Denis's arm encouragingly. "The Bard's is a noble calling."

As soon as tea was over Mr. Barbecue-Smith excused himself; he had to do some writing before dinner. Priscilla quite understood. The prophet retired to his chamber.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith came down to the drawing-room at ten to eight. He was in a good humour, and, as he descended the stairs, he smiled to himself and rubbed his large white hands together. In the drawing-room someone was playing softly and ramblingly on the piano. He wondered who it could be. One of the young ladies, perhaps. But no, it was only Denis, who got up hurriedly and with some embarrassment as he came into the room.

"Do go on, do go on," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "I am very fond of music."

"Then I couldn't possibly go on," Denis replied. "I only make noises."

There was a silence. Mr. Barbecue-Smith stood with his back to the hearth, warming himself at the memory of last winter's fires. He could not control his interior satisfaction, but still went on smiling to himself. At last he turned to Denis.

"You write," he asked, "don't you?"

"Well, yes — a little, you know."

"How many words do you find you can write in an hour?"

"I don't think I've ever counted."

"Oh, you ought to, you ought to. It's most important."

Denis exercised his memory. "When I'm in good form," he said, "I fancy I do a twelve-hundred-word review in about four hours. But sometimes it takes me much longer."

Mr. Barbecue-Smith nodded. "Yes, three hundred words an hour at your best." He walked out into the middle of the room, turned round on his heels, and confronted Denis again. "Guess how many words I wrote this evening between five and half-past seven."

"I can't imagine."

"No, but you must guess. Between five and half-past seven — that's two and a half hours."

"Twelve hundred words," Denis hazarded.

"No, no, no." Mr. Barbecue-Smith's expanded face shone with gaiety. "Try again."

"Fifteen hundred."

“No.”

“I give it up,” said Denis. He found he couldn’t summon up much interest in Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s writing.

“Well, I’ll tell you. Three thousand eight hundred.”

Denis opened his eyes. “You must get a lot done in a day,” he said.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith suddenly became extremely confidential. He pulled up a stool to the side of Denis’s arm-chair, sat down in it, and began to talk softly and rapidly.

“Listen to me,” he said, laying his hand on Denis’s sleeve. “You want to make your living by writing; you’re young, you’re inexperienced. Let me give you a little sound advice.”

What was the fellow going to do? Denis wondered: give him an introduction to the editor of “John o’ London’s Weekly”, or tell him where he could sell a light middle for seven guineas? Mr. Barbecue-Smith patted his arm several times and went on.

“The secret of writing,” he said, breathing it into the young man’s ear— “the secret of writing is Inspiration.”

Denis looked at him in astonishment.

“Inspiration...” Mr. Barbecue-Smith repeated.

“You mean the native wood-note business?”

Mr. Barbecue-Smith nodded.

“Oh, then I entirely agree with you,” said Denis. “But what if one hasn’t got Inspiration?”

“That was precisely the question I was waiting for,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “You ask me what one should do if one hasn’t got Inspiration. I answer: you have Inspiration; everyone has Inspiration. It’s simply a question of getting it to function.”

The clock struck eight. There was no sign of any of the other guests; everybody was always late at Crome. Mr. Barbecue-Smith went on.

“That’s my secret,” he said. “I give it you freely.” (Denis made a suitably grateful murmur and grimace.) “I’ll help you to find your Inspiration, because I don’t like to see a nice, steady young man like you exhausting his vitality and wasting the best years of his life in a grinding intellectual labour that could be completely obviated by Inspiration. I did it myself, so I know what it’s like. Up till the time I was thirty-eight I was a writer like you — a writer without Inspiration. All I wrote I squeezed out of myself by sheer hard work. Why, in those days I was never able to do more than six-fifty words an hour, and what’s more, I often didn’t sell what I wrote.” He sighed. “We artists,” he said parenthetically, “we intellectuals aren’t much appreciated here in England.” Denis wondered if there was any method, consistent, of course, with politeness, by which he could dissociate himself from Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s “we.” There was none; and besides, it was too late now, for Mr. Barbecue-Smith was once more pursuing the tenor of his discourse.

“At thirty-eight I was a poor, struggling, tired, overworked, unknown journalist. Now, at fifty...” He paused modestly and made a little gesture, moving his fat hands

outwards, away from one another, and expanding his fingers as though in demonstration. He was exhibiting himself. Denis thought of that advertisement of Nestle's milk — the two cats on the wall, under the moon, one black and thin, the other white, sleek, and fat. Before Inspiration and after.

"Inspiration has made the difference," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith solemnly. "It came quite suddenly — like a gentle dew from heaven." He lifted his hand and let it fall back on to his knee to indicate the descent of the dew. "It was one evening. I was writing my first little book about the Conduct of Life— 'Humble Heroisms'. You may have read it; it has been a comfort — at least I hope and think so — a comfort to many thousands. I was in the middle of the second chapter, and I was stuck. Fatigue, overwork — I had only written a hundred words in the last hour, and I could get no further. I sat biting the end of my pen and looking at the electric light, which hung above my table, a little above and in front of me." He indicated the position of the lamp with elaborate care. "Have you ever looked at a bright light intently for a long time?" he asked, turning to Denis. Denis didn't think he had. "You can hypnotise yourself that way," Mr. Barbecue-Smith went on.

The gong sounded in a terrific crescendo from the hall. Still no sign of the others. Denis was horribly hungry.

"That's what happened to me," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "I was hypnotised. I lost consciousness like that." He snapped his fingers. "When I came to, I found that it was past midnight, and I had written four thousand words. Four thousand," he repeated, opening his mouth very wide on the "ou" of thousand. "Inspiration had come to me."

"What a very extraordinary thing," said Denis.

"I was afraid of it at first. It didn't seem to me natural. I didn't feel, somehow, that it was quite right, quite fair, I might almost say, to produce a literary composition unconsciously. Besides, I was afraid I might have written nonsense."

"And had you written nonsense?" Denis asked.

"Certainly not," Mr. Barbecue-Smith replied, with a trace of annoyance. "Certainly not. It was admirable. Just a few spelling mistakes and slips, such as there generally are in automatic writing. But the style, the thought — all the essentials were admirable. After that, Inspiration came to me regularly. I wrote the whole of 'Humble Heroisms' like that. It was a great success, and so has everything been that I have written since." He leaned forward and jabbed at Denis with his finger. "That's my secret," he said, "and that's how you could write too, if you tried — without effort, fluently, well."

"But how?" asked Denis, trying not to show how deeply he had been insulted by that final "well."

"By cultivating your Inspiration, by getting into touch with your Subconscious. Have you ever read my little book, 'Pipe-Lines to the Infinite'?"

Denis had to confess that that was, precisely, one of the few, perhaps the only one, of Mr. Barbecue-Smith's works he had not read.

"Never mind, never mind," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "It's just a little book about the connection of the Subconscious with the Infinite. Get into touch with the Subconscious and you are in touch with the Universe. Inspiration, in fact. You follow me?"

"Perfectly, perfectly," said Denis. "But don't you find that the Universe sometimes sends you very irrelevant messages?"

"I don't allow it to," Mr. Barbecue-Smith replied. "I canalise it. I bring it down through pipes to work the turbines of my conscious mind."

"Like Niagara," Denis suggested. Some of Mr. Barbecue-Smith's remarks sounded strangely like quotations — quotations from his own works, no doubt.

"Precisely. Like Niagara. And this is how I do it." He leaned forward, and with a raised forefinger marked his points as he made them, beating time, as it were, to his discourse. "Before I go off into my trance, I concentrate on the subject I wish to be inspired about. Let us say I am writing about the humble heroisms; for ten minutes before I go into the trance I think of nothing but orphans supporting their little brothers and sisters, of dull work well and patiently done, and I focus my mind on such great philosophical truths as the purification and uplifting of the soul by suffering, and the alchemical transformation of leaden evil into golden good." (Denis again hung up his little festoon of quotation marks.) "Then I pop off. Two or three hours later I wake up again, and find that inspiration has done its work. Thousands of words, comforting, uplifting words, lie before me. I type them out neatly on my machine and they are ready for the printer."

"It all sounds wonderfully simple," said Denis.

"It is. All the great and splendid and divine things of life are wonderfully simple." (Quotation marks again.) "When I have to do my aphorisms," Mr. Barbecue-Smith continued, "I prelude my trance by turning over the pages of any Dictionary of Quotations or Shakespeare Calendar that comes to hand. That sets the key, so to speak; that ensures that the Universe shall come flowing in, not in a continuous rush, but in aphorismic drops. You see the idea?"

Denis nodded. Mr. Barbecue-Smith put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a notebook. "I did a few in the train to-day," he said, turning over the pages. "Just dropped off into a trance in the corner of my carriage. I find the train very conducive to good work. Here they are." He cleared his throat and read:

"The Mountain Road may be steep, but the air is pure up there, and it is from the Summit that one gets the view."

"The Things that Really Matter happen in the Heart."

It was curious, Denis reflected, the way the Infinite sometimes repeated itself.

"Seeing is Believing. Yes, but Believing is also Seeing. If I believe in God, I see God, even in the things that seem to be evil."

Mr. Barbecue-Smith looked up from his notebook. "That last one," he said, "is particularly subtle and beautiful, don't you think? Without Inspiration I could never have hit on that." He re-read the apophthegm with a slower and more solemn utterance.

“Straight from the Infinite,” he commented reflectively, then addressed himself to the next aphorism.

“The flame of a candle gives Light, but it also Burns.”

Puzzled wrinkles appeared on Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s forehead. “I don’t exactly know what that means,” he said. “It’s very gnostic. One could apply it, of course to the Higher Education — illuminating, but provoking the Lower Classes to discontent and revolution. Yes, I suppose that’s what it is. But it’s gnostic, it’s gnostic.” He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The gong sounded again, clamorously, it seemed imploringly: dinner was growing cold. It roused Mr. Barbecue-Smith from meditation. He turned to Denis.

“You understand me now when I advise you to cultivate your Inspiration. Let your Subconscious work for you; turn on the Niagara of the Infinite.”

There was the sound of feet on the stairs. Mr. Barbecue-Smith got up, laid his hand for an instant on Denis’s shoulder, and said:

“No more now. Another time. And remember, I rely absolutely on your discretion in this matter. There are intimate, sacred things that one doesn’t wish to be generally known.”

“Of course,” said Denis. “I quite understand.”

## Chapter VII.

AT CROME ALL the beds were ancient hereditary pieces of furniture. Huge beds, like four-masted ships, with furled sails of shining coloured stuff. Beds carved and inlaid, beds painted and gilded. Beds of walnut and oak, of rare exotic woods. Beds of every date and fashion from the time of Sir Ferdinando, who built the house, to the time of his namesake in the late eighteenth century, the last of the family, but all of them grandiose, magnificent.

The finest of all was now Anne’s bed. Sir Julius, son to Sir Ferdinando, had had it made in Venice against his wife’s first lying-in. Early seicento Venice had expended all its extravagant art in the making of it. The body of the bed was like a great square sarcophagus. Clustering roses were carved in high relief on its wooden panels, and luscious putti wallowed among the roses. On the black ground-work of the panels the carved reliefs were gilded and burnished. The golden roses twined in spirals up the four pillar-like posts, and cherubs, seated at the top of each column, supported a wooden canopy fretted with the same carved flowers.

Anne was reading in bed. Two candles stood on the little table beside her, in their rich light her face, her bare arm and shoulder took on warm hues and a sort of peach-like quality of surface. Here and there in the canopy above her carved golden petals shone brightly among profound shadows, and the soft light, falling on the sculptured panel of the bed, broke restlessly among the intricate roses, lingered in a broad caress



on the blown cheeks, the dimpled bellies, the tight, absurd little posteriors of the sprawling putti.

There was a discreet tap at the door. She looked up. "Come in, come in." A face, round and childish, within its sleek bell of golden hair, peered round the opening door. More childish-looking still, a suit of mauve pyjamas made its entrance.

It was Mary. "I thought I'd just look in for a moment to say good-night," she said, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

Anne closed her book. "That was very sweet of you."

"What are you reading?" She looked at the book. "Rather second-rate, isn't it?" The tone in which Mary pronounced the word "second-rate" implied an almost infinite denigration. She was accustomed in London to associate only with first-rate people who liked first-rate things, and she knew that there were very, very few first-rate things in the world, and that those were mostly French.

"Well, I'm afraid I like it," said Anne. There was nothing more to be said. The silence that followed was a rather uncomfortable one. Mary fiddled uneasily with the bottom button of her pyjama jacket. Leaning back on her mound of heaped-up pillows, Anne waited and wondered what was coming.

"I'm so awfully afraid of repressions," said Mary at last, bursting suddenly and surprisingly into speech. She pronounced the words on the tail-end of an expiring breath, and had to gasp for new air almost before the phrase was finished.

"What's there to be depressed about?"

"I said repressions, not depressions."

"Oh, repressions; I see," said Anne. "But repressions of what?"

Mary had to explain. "The natural instincts of sex..." she began didactically. But Anne cut her short.

"Yes, yes. Perfectly. I understand. Repressions! old maids and all the rest. But what about them?"

"That's just it," said Mary. "I'm afraid of them. It's always dangerous to repress one's instincts. I'm beginning to detect in myself symptoms like the ones you read of in the books. I constantly dream that I'm falling down wells; and sometimes I even dream that I'm climbing up ladders. It's most disquieting. The symptoms are only too clear."

"Are they?"

"One may become a nymphomaniac if one's not careful. You've no idea how serious these repressions are if you don't get rid of them in time."

"It sounds too awful," said Anne. "But I don't see that I can do anything to help you."

"I thought I'd just like to talk it over with you."

"Why, of course; I'm only too happy, Mary darling."

Mary coughed and drew a deep breath. "I presume," she began sententiously, "I presume we may take for granted that an intelligent young woman of twenty-three who has lived in civilised society in the twentieth century has no prejudices."

"Well, I confess I still have a few."

"But not about repressions."

"No, not many about repressions; that's true."

"Or, rather, about getting rid of repressions."

"Exactly."

"So much for our fundamental postulate," said Mary. Solemnity was expressed in every feature of her round young face, radiated from her large blue eyes. "We come next to the desirability of possessing experience. I hope we are agreed that knowledge is desirable and that ignorance is undesirable."

Obedient as one of those complaisant disciples from whom Socrates could get whatever answer he chose, Anne gave her assent to this proposition.

"And we are equally agreed, I hope, that marriage is what it is."

"It is."

"Good!" said Mary. "And repressions being what they are..."

"Exactly."

"There would therefore seem to be only one conclusion."

"But I knew that," Anne exclaimed, "before you began."

"Yes, but now it's been proved," said Mary. "One must do things logically. The question is now..."

"But where does the question come in? You've reached your only possible conclusion — logically, which is more than I could have done. All that remains is to impart the information to someone you like — someone you like really rather a lot, someone you're in love with, if I may express myself so baldly."

"But that's just where the question comes in," Mary exclaimed. "I'm not in love with anybody."

"Then, if I were you, I should wait till you are."

"But I can't go on dreaming night after night that I'm falling down a well. It's too dangerous."

"Well, if it really is TOO dangerous, then of course you must do something about it; you must find somebody else."

"But who?" A thoughtful frown puckered Mary's brow. "It must be somebody intelligent, somebody with intellectual interests that I can share. And it must be somebody with a proper respect for women, somebody who's prepared to talk seriously about his work and his ideas and about my work and my ideas. It isn't, as you see, at all easy to find the right person."

"Well" said Anne, "there are three unattached and intelligent men in the house at the present time. There's Mr. Scogan, to begin with; but perhaps he's rather too much of a genuine antique. And there are Gombauld and Denis. Shall we say that the choice is limited to the last two?"

Mary nodded. "I think we had better," she said, and then hesitated, with a certain air of embarrassment.

"What is it?"

"I was wondering," said Mary, with a gasp, "whether they really were unattached. I thought that perhaps you might...you might..."

"It was very nice of you to think of me, Mary darling," said Anne, smiling the tight cat's smile. "But as far as I'm concerned, they are both entirely unattached."

"I'm very glad of that," said Mary, looking relieved. "We are now confronted with the question: Which of the two?"

"I can give no advice. It's a matter for your taste."

"It's not a matter of my taste," Mary pronounced, "but of their merits. We must weigh them and consider them carefully and dispassionately."

"You must do the weighing yourself," said Anne; there was still the trace of a smile at the corners of her mouth and round the half-closed eyes. "I won't run the risk of advising you wrongly."

"Gombauld has more talent," Mary began, "but he is less civilised than Denis." Mary's pronunciation of "civilised" gave the word a special and additional significance. She uttered it meticulously, in the very front of her mouth, hissing delicately on the opening sibilant. So few people were civilised, and they, like the first-rate works of art, were mostly French. "Civilisation is most important, don't you think?"

Anne held up her hand. "I won't advise," she said. "You must make the decision."

"Gombauld's family," Mary went on reflectively, "comes from Marseilles. Rather a dangerous heredity, when one thinks of the Latin attitude towards women. But then, I sometimes wonder whether Denis is altogether serious-minded, whether he isn't rather a dilettante. It's very difficult. What do you think?"

"I'm not listening," said Anne. "I refuse to take any responsibility."

Mary sighed. "Well," she said, "I think I had better go to bed and think about it."

"Carefully and dispassionately," said Anne.

At the door Mary turned round. "Good-night," she said, and wondered as she said the words why Anne was smiling in that curious way. It was probably nothing, she reflected. Anne often smiled for no apparent reason; it was probably just a habit. "I hope I shan't dream of falling down wells again to-night," she added.

"Ladders are worse," said Anne.

Mary nodded. "Yes, ladders are much graver."

## Chapter VIII.

BREAKFAST ON SUNDAY morning was an hour later than on week-days, and Priscilla, who usually made no public appearance before luncheon, honoured it by her presence. Dressed in black silk, with a ruby cross as well as her customary string of pearls round her neck, she presided. An enormous Sunday paper concealed all but the extreme pinnacle of her coiffure from the outer world.

"I see Surrey has won," she said, with her mouth full, "by four wickets. The sun is in Leo: that would account for it!"

"Splendid game, cricket," remarked Mr. Barbecue-Smith heartily to no one in particular; "so thoroughly English."

Jenny, who was sitting next to him, woke up suddenly with a start. "What?" she said. "What?"

"So English," repeated Mr. Barbecue-Smith.

Jenny looked at him, surprised. "English? Of course I am."

He was beginning to explain, when Mrs. Wimbush vailed her Sunday paper, and appeared, a square, mauve-powdered face in the midst of orange splendours. "I see there's a new series of articles on the next world just beginning," she said to Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "This one's called 'Summer Land and Gehenna.'"

"Summer Land," echoed Mr. Barbecue-Smith, closing his eyes. "Summer Land. A beautiful name. Beautiful — beautiful."

Mary had taken the seat next to Denis's. After a night of careful consideration she had decided on Denis. He might have less talent than Gombauld, he might be a little lacking in seriousness, but somehow he was safer.

"Are you writing much poetry here in the country?" she asked, with a bright gravity.

"None," said Denis curtly. "I haven't brought my typewriter."

"But do you mean to say you can't write without a typewriter?"

Denis shook his head. He hated talking at breakfast, and, besides, he wanted to hear what Mr. Scogan was saying at the other end of the table.

"...My scheme for dealing with the Church," Mr. Scogan was saying, "is beautifully simple. At the present time the Anglican clergy wear their collars the wrong way round. I would compel them to wear, not only their collars, but all their clothes, turned back to frantic — coat, waistcoat, trousers, boots — so that every clergyman should present to the world a smooth facade, unbroken by stud, button, or lace. The enforcement of such a livery would act as a wholesome deterrent to those intending to enter the Church. At the same time it would enormously enhance, what Archbishop Laud so rightly insisted on, the 'beauty of holiness' in the few incorrigibles who could not be deterred."

"In hell, it seems," said Priscilla, reading in her Sunday paper, "the children amuse themselves by flaying lambs alive."

"Ah, but, dear lady, that's only a symbol," exclaimed Mr. Barbecue-Smith, "a material symbol of a h-piritual truth. Lambs signify..."

"Then there are military uniforms," Mr. Scogan went on. "When scarlet and pipe-clay were abandoned for khaki, there were some who trembled for the future of war. But then, finding how elegant the new tunic was, how closely it clipped the waist, how voluptuously, with the lateral bustles of the pockets, it exaggerated the hips; when they realized the brilliant potentialities of breeches and top-boots, they were reassured. Abolish these military elegances, standardise a uniform of sack-cloth and mackintosh, you will very soon find that..."

“Is anyone coming to church with me this morning?” asked Henry Wimbush. No one responded. He baited his bare invitation. “I read the lessons, you know. And there’s Mr. Bodiham. His sermons are sometimes worth hearing.”

“Thank you, thank you,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “I for one prefer to worship in the infinite church of Nature. How does our Shakespeare put it? ‘Sermons in books, stones in the running brooks.’” He waved his arm in a fine gesture towards the window, and even as he did so he became vaguely, but none the less insistently, none the less uncomfortably aware that something had gone wrong with the quotation. Something — what could it be? Sermons? Stones? Books?

## Chapter IX.

MR. BODIHAM WAS sitting in his study at the Rectory. The nineteenth-century Gothic windows, narrow and pointed, admitted the light grudgingly; in spite of the brilliant July weather, the room was sombre. Brown varnished bookshelves lined the walls, filled with row upon row of those thick, heavy theological works which the second-hand booksellers generally sell by weight. The mantelpiece, the over-mantel, a towering structure of spindly pillars and little shelves, were brown and varnished. The writing-desk was brown and varnished. So were the chairs, so was the door. A dark red-brown carpet with patterns covered the floor. Everything was brown in the room, and there was a curious brownish smell.

In the midst of this brown gloom Mr. Bodiham sat at his desk. He was the man in the Iron Mask. A grey metallic face with iron cheek-bones and a narrow iron brow; iron folds, hard and unchanging, ran perpendicularly down his cheeks; his nose was the iron beak of some thin, delicate bird of rapine. He had brown eyes, set in sockets rimmed with iron; round them the skin was dark, as though it had been charred. Dense wiry hair covered his skull; it had been black, it was turning grey. His ears were very small and fine. His jaws, his chin, his upper lip were dark, iron-dark, where he had shaved. His voice, when he spoke and especially when he raised it in preaching, was harsh, like the grating of iron hinges when a seldom-used door is opened.

It was nearly half-past twelve. He had just come back from church, hoarse and weary with preaching. He preached with fury, with passion, an iron man beating with a flail upon the souls of his congregation. But the souls of the faithful at Crome were made of india-rubber, solid rubber; the flail rebounded. They were used to Mr. Bodiham at Crome. The flail thumped on india-rubber, and as often as not the rubber slept.

That morning he had preached, as he had often preached before, on the nature of God. He had tried to make them understand about God, what a fearful thing it was to fall into His hands. God — they thought of something soft and merciful. They blinded themselves to facts; still more, they blinded themselves to the Bible. The passengers on the “Titanic” sang “Nearer my God to Thee” as the ship was going down. Did they

realise what they were asking to be brought nearer to? A white fire of righteousness, an angry fire...

When Savonarola preached, men sobbed and groaned aloud. Nothing broke the polite silence with which Crome listened to Mr. Bodiham — only an occasional cough and sometimes the sound of heavy breathing. In the front pew sat Henry Wimbush, calm, well-bred, beautifully dressed. There were times when Mr. Bodiham wanted to jump down from the pulpit and shake him into life, — times when he would have liked to beat and kill his whole congregation.

He sat at his desk dejectedly. Outside the Gothic windows the earth was warm and marvellously calm. Everything was as it had always been. And yet, and yet...It was nearly four years now since he had preached that sermon on Matthew xxiv. 7: "For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." It was nearly four years. He had had the sermon printed; it was so terribly, so vitally important that all the world should know what he had to say. A copy of the little pamphlet lay on his desk — eight small grey pages, printed by a fount of type that had grown blunt, like an old dog's teeth, by the endless champing and champing of the press. He opened it and began to read it yet once again.

"'For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.'

"Nineteen centuries have elapsed since Our Lord gave utterance to those words, and not a single one of them has been without wars, plagues, famines, and earthquakes. Mighty empires have crashed in ruin to the ground, diseases have unpeopled half the globe, there have been vast natural cataclysms in which thousands have been overwhelmed by flood and fire and whirlwind. Time and again, in the course of these nineteen centuries, such things have happened, but they have not brought Christ back to earth. They were 'signs of the times' inasmuch as they were signs of God's wrath against the chronic wickedness of mankind, but they were not signs of the times in connection with the Second Coming.

"If earnest Christians have regarded the present war as a true sign of the Lord's approaching return, it is not merely because it happens to be a great war involving the lives of millions of people, not merely because famine is tightening its grip on every country in Europe, not merely because disease of every kind, from syphilis to spotted fever, is rife among the warring nations; no, it is not for these reasons that we regard this war as a true Sign of the Times, but because in its origin and its progress it is marked by certain characteristics which seem to connect it almost beyond a doubt with the predictions in Christian Prophecy relating to the Second Coming of the Lord.

"Let me enumerate the features of the present war which most clearly suggest that it is a Sign foretelling the near approach of the Second Advent. Our Lord said that 'this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' Although it would be presumptuous for us to say what degree of evangelisation will be regarded by God as sufficient, we may at

least confidently hope that a century of unflagging missionary work has brought the fulfilment of this condition at any rate near. True, the larger number of the world's inhabitants have remained deaf to the preaching of the true religion; but that does not vitiate the fact that the Gospel HAS been preached 'for a witness' to all unbelievers from the Papist to the Zulu. The responsibility for the continued prevalence of unbelief lies, not with the preachers, but with those preached to.

"Again, it has been generally recognised that 'the drying up of the waters of the great river Euphrates,' mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation, refers to the decay and extinction of Turkish power, and is a sign of the near approaching end of the world as we know it. The capture of Jerusalem and the successes in Mesopotamia are great strides forward in the destruction of the Ottoman Empire; though it must be admitted that the Gallipoli episode proved that the Turk still possesses a 'notable horn' of strength. Historically speaking, this drying up of Ottoman power has been going on for the past century; the last two years have witnessed a great acceleration of the process, and there can be no doubt that complete desiccation is within sight.

"Closely following on the words concerning the drying up of Euphrates comes the prophecy of Armageddon, that world war with which the Second Coming is to be so closely associated. Once begun, the world war can end only with the return of Christ, and His coming will be sudden and unexpected, like that of a thief in the night.

"Let us examine the facts. In history, exactly as in St. John's Gospel, the world war is immediately preceded by the drying up of Euphrates, or the decay of Turkish power. This fact alone would be enough to connect the present conflict with the Armageddon of Revelation and therefore to point to the near approach of the Second Advent. But further evidence of an even more solid and convincing nature can be adduced.

"Armageddon is brought about by the activities of three unclean spirits, as it were toads, which come out of the mouths of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. If we can identify these three powers of evil much light will clearly be thrown on the whole question.

"The Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet can all be identified in history. Satan, who can only work through human agency, has used these three powers in the long war against Christ which has filled the last nineteen centuries with religious strife. The Dragon, it has been sufficiently established, is pagan Rome, and the spirit issuing from its mouth is the spirit of Infidelity. The Beast, alternatively symbolised as a Woman, is undoubtedly the Papal power, and Popery is the spirit which it spews forth. There is only one power which answers to the description of the False Prophet, the wolf in sheep's clothing, the agent of the devil working in the guise of the Lamb, and that power is the so-called 'Society of Jesus.' The spirit that issues from the mouth of the False Prophet is the spirit of False Morality.

"We may assume, then, that the three evil spirits are Infidelity, Popery, and False Morality. Have these three influences been the real cause of the present conflict? The answer is clear.

“The spirit of Infidelity is the very spirit of German criticism. The Higher Criticism, as it is mockingly called, denies the possibility of miracles, prediction, and real inspiration, and attempts to account for the Bible as a natural development. Slowly but surely, during the last eighty years, the spirit of Infidelity has been robbing the Germans of their Bible and their faith, so that Germany is to-day a nation of unbelievers. Higher Criticism has thus made the war possible; for it would be absolutely impossible for any Christian nation to wage war as Germany is waging it.

“We come next to the spirit of Popery, whose influence in causing the war was quite as great as that of Infidelity, though not, perhaps, so immediately obvious. Since the Franco-Prussian War the Papal power has steadily declined in France, while in Germany it has steadily increased. To-day France is an anti-papal state, while Germany possesses a powerful Roman Catholic minority. Two papally controlled states, Germany and Austria, are at war with six anti-papal states — England, France, Italy, Russia, Serbia, and Portugal. Belgium is, of course, a thoroughly papal state, and there can be little doubt that the presence on the Allies’ side of an element so essentially hostile has done much to hamper the righteous cause and is responsible for our comparative ill-success. That the spirit of Popery is behind the war is thus seen clearly enough in the grouping of the opposed powers, while the rebellion in the Roman Catholic parts of Ireland has merely confirmed a conclusion already obvious to any unbiased mind.

“The spirit of False Morality has played as great a part in this war as the two other evil spirits. The Scrap of Paper incident is the nearest and most obvious example of Germany’s adherence to this essentially unchristian or Jesuitical morality. The end is German world-power, and in the attainment of this end, any means are justifiable. It is the true principle of Jesuitry applied to international politics.

“The identification is now complete. As was predicted in Revelation, the three evil spirits have gone forth just as the decay of the Ottoman power was nearing completion, and have joined together to make the world war. The warning, ‘Behold, I come as a thief,’ is therefore meant for the present period — for you and me and all the world. This war will lead on inevitably to the war of Armageddon, and will only be brought to an end by the Lord’s personal return.

“And when He returns, what will happen? Those who are in Christ, St. John tells us, will be called to the Supper of the Lamb. Those who are found fighting against Him will be called to the Supper of the Great God — that grim banquet where they shall not feast, but be feasted on. ‘For,’ as St. John says, ‘I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried in a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the Great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.’ All the enemies of Christ will be slain with the sword of him that sits upon the horse, ‘and all the fowls will be filled with their flesh.’ That is the Supper of the Great God.



“It may be soon or it may, as men reckon time, be long; but sooner or later, inevitably, the Lord will come and deliver the world from its present troubles. And woe unto them who are called, not to the Supper of the Lamb, but to the Supper of the Great God. They will realise then, but too late, that God is a God of Wrath as well as a God of Forgiveness. The God who sent bears to devour the mockers of Elisha, the God who smote the Egyptians for their stubborn wickedness, will assuredly smite them too, unless they make haste to repent. But perhaps it is already too late. Who knows but that to-morrow, in a moment even, Christ may be upon us unawares, like a thief? In a little while, who knows? The angel standing in the sun may be summoning the ravens and vultures from their crannies in the rocks to feed upon the putrefying flesh of the millions of unrighteous whom God’s wrath has destroyed. Be ready, then; the coming of the Lord is at hand. May it be for all of you an object of hope, not a moment to look forward to with terror and trembling.”

Mr. Bodiham closed the little pamphlet and leaned back in his chair. The argument was sound, absolutely compelling; and yet — it was four years since he had preached that sermon; four years, and England was at peace, the sun shone, the people of Crome were as wicked and indifferent as ever — more so, indeed, if that were possible. If only he could understand, if the heavens would but make a sign! But his questionings remained unanswered. Seated there in his brown varnished chair under the Ruskinian window, he could have screamed aloud. He gripped the arms of his chair — gripping, gripping for control. The knuckles of his hands whitened; he bit his lip. In a few seconds he was able to relax the tension; he began to rebuke himself for his rebellious impatience.

Four years, he reflected; what were four years, after all? It must inevitably take a long time for Armageddon to ripen to yeast itself up. The episode of 1914 had been a preliminary skirmish. And as for the war having come to an end — why, that, of course, was illusory. It was still going on, smouldering away in Silesia, in Ireland, in Anatolia; the discontent in Egypt and India was preparing the way, perhaps, for a great extension of the slaughter among the heathen peoples. The Chinese boycott of Japan, and the rivalries of that country and America in the Pacific, might be breeding a great new war in the East. The prospect, Mr. Bodiham tried to assure himself, was hopeful; the real, the genuine Armageddon might soon begin, and then, like a thief in the night...But, in spite of all his comfortable reasoning, he remained unhappy, dissatisfied. Four years ago he had been so confident; God’s intention seemed then so plain. And now? Now, he did well to be angry. And now he suffered too.

Sudden and silent as a phantom Mrs. Bodiham appeared, gliding noiselessly across the room. Above her black dress her face was pale with an opaque whiteness, her eyes were pale as water in a glass, and her strawy hair was almost colourless. She held a large envelope in her hand.

“This came for you by the post,” she said softly.

The envelope was unsealed. Mechanically Mr. Bodiham tore it open. It contained a pamphlet, larger than his own and more elegant in appearance. “The House of Sheeny, Clerical Outfitters, Birmingham.” He turned over the pages. The catalogue was taste-

fully and ecclesiastically printed in antique characters with illuminated Gothic initials. Red marginal lines, crossed at the corners after the manner of an Oxford picture frame, enclosed each page of type, little red crosses took the place of full stops. Mr. Bodiham turned the pages.

“Soutane in best black merino. Ready to wear; in all sizes. Clerical frock coats. From nine guineas. A dressy garment, tailored by our own experienced ecclesiastical cutters.”

Half-tone illustrations represented young curates, some dapper, some Rugbeian and muscular, some with ascetic faces and large ecstatic eyes, dressed in jackets, in frock-coats, in surplices, in clerical evening dress, in black Norfolk suitings.

“A large assortment of chasubles.

“Rope girdles.

“Sheeny’s Special Skirt Cassocks. Tied by a string about the waist...When worn under a surplice presents an appearance indistinguishable from that of a complete cassock...Recommended for summer wear and hot climates.”

With a gesture of horror and disgust Mr. Bodiham threw the catalogue into the waste-paper basket. Mrs. Bodiham looked at him; her pale, glaucous eyes reflected his action without comment.

“The village,” she said in her quiet voice, “the village grows worse and worse every day.”

“What has happened now?” asked Mr. Bodiham, feeling suddenly very weary.

“I’ll tell you.” She pulled up a brown varnished chair and sat down. In the village of Crome, it seemed, Sodom and Gomorrah had come to a second birth.

## Chapter X.

DENIS DID NOT dance, but when ragtime came squirting out of the pianola in gushes of treacle and hot perfume, in jets of Bengal light, then things began to dance inside him. Little black nigger corpuscles jigged and drummed in his arteries. He became a cage of movement, a walking palais de danse. It was very uncomfortable, like the preliminary symptoms of a disease. He sat in one of the window-seats, glumly pretending to read.

At the pianola, Henry Wimbush, smoking a long cigar through a tunnelled pillar of amber, trod out the shattering dance music with serene patience. Locked together, Gombauld and Anne moved with a harmoniousness that made them seem a single creature, two-headed and four-legged. Mr. Scogan, solemnly buffoonish, shuffled round the room with Mary. Jenny sat in the shadow behind the piano, scribbling, so it seemed, in a big red notebook. In arm-chairs by the fireplace, Priscilla and Mr. Barbecue-Smith discussed higher things, without, apparently, being disturbed by the noise on the Lower Plane.

“Optimism,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith with a tone of finality, speaking through strains of the “Wild, Wild Women”—“optimism is the opening out of the soul towards the light; it is an expansion towards and into God, it is a h-piritual self-unification with the Infinite.”

“How true!” sighed Priscilla, nodding the baleful splendours of her coiffure.

“Pessimism, on the other hand, is the contraction of the soul towards darkness; it is a focusing of the self upon a point in the Lower Plane; it is a h-piritual slavery to mere facts; to gross physical phenomena.”

“They’re making a wild man of me.” The refrain sang itself over in Denis’s mind. Yes, they were; damn them! A wild man, but not wild enough; that was the trouble. Wild inside; raging, writhing — yes, “writhing” was the word, writhing with desire. But outwardly he was hopelessly tame; outwardly — baa, baa, baa.

There they were, Anne and Gombauld, moving together as though they were a single supple creature. The beast with two backs. And he sat in a corner, pretending to read, pretending he didn’t want to dance, pretending he rather despised dancing. Why? It was the baa-baa business again.

Why was he born with a different face? Why WAS he? Gombauld had a face of brass — one of those old, brazen rams that thumped against the walls of cities till they fell. He was born with a different face — a woolly face.

The music stopped. The single harmonious creature broke in two. Flushed, a little breathless, Anne swayed across the room to the pianola, laid her hand on Mr. Wim-bush’s shoulder.

“A waltz this time, please, Uncle Henry,” she said.

“A waltz,” he repeated, and turned to the cabinet where the rolls were kept. He trod off the old roll and trod on the new, a slave at the mill, uncomplaining and beautifully well bred.

“Rum; Tum; Rum-ti-ti; Tum-ti-ti...”

The melody wallowed oozily along, like a ship moving forward over a sleek and oily swell. The four-legged creature, more graceful, more harmonious in its movements than ever, slid across the floor. Oh, why was he born with a different face?

“What are you reading?”

He looked up, startled. It was Mary. She had broken from the uncomfortable embrace of Mr. Scogan, who had now seized on Jenny for his victim.

“What are you reading?”

“I don’t know,” said Denis truthfully. He looked at the title page; the book was called “The Stock Breeder’s Vade Mecum.”

“I think you are so sensible to sit and read quietly,” said Mary, fixing him with her china eyes. “I don’t know why one dances. It’s so boring.”

Denis made no reply; she exacerbated him. From the arm-chair by the fireplace he heard Priscilla’s deep voice.

“Tell me, Mr Barbecue-Smith — you know all about science, I know—” A deprecating noise came from Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s chair. “This Einstein theory. It seems

to upset the whole starry universe. It makes me so worried about my horoscopes. You see..."

Mary renewed her attack. "Which of the contemporary poets do you like best?" she asked. Denis was filled with fury. Why couldn't this pest of a girl leave him alone? He wanted to listen to the horrible music, to watch them dancing — oh, with what grace, as though they had been made for one another! — to savour his misery in peace. And she came and put him through this absurd catechism! She was like "Mangold's Questions": "What are the three diseases of wheat?"— "Which of the contemporary poets do you like best?"

"Blight, Mildew, and Smut," he replied, with the laconism of one who is absolutely certain of his own mind.

It was several hours before Denis managed to go to sleep that night. Vague but agonising miseries possessed his mind. It was not only Anne who made him miserable; he was wretched about himself, the future, life in general, the universe. "This adolescence business," he repeated to himself every now and then, "is horribly boring." But the fact that he knew his disease did not help him to cure it.

After kicking all the clothes off the bed, he got up and sought relief in composition. He wanted to imprison his nameless misery in words. At the end of an hour, nine more or less complete lines emerged from among the blots and scratchings.

"I do not know what I desire  
When summer nights are dark and still,  
When the wind's many-voiced quire  
Sleeps among the muffled branches.  
I long and know not what I will:  
And not a sound of life or laughter stanches  
Time's black and silent flow.  
I do not know what I desire,  
I do not know."

He read it through aloud; then threw the scribbled sheet into the waste-paper basket and got into bed again. In a very few minutes he was asleep.

## Chapter XI.

MR. BARBECUE-SMITH WAS gone. The motor had whirled him away to the station; a faint smell of burning oil commemorated his recent departure. A considerable detachment had come into the courtyard to speed him on his way; and now they were walking back, round the side of the house, towards the terrace and the garden. They walked in silence; nobody had yet ventured to comment on the departed guest.

"Well?" said Anne at last, turning with raised inquiring eyebrows to Denis.

"Well?" It was time for someone to begin.

Denis declined the invitation; he passed it on to Mr Scogan. "Well?" he said.

Mr. Scogan did not respond; he only repeated the question, "Well?"

It was left for Henry Wimbush to make a pronouncement. "A very agreeable adjunct to the week-end," he said. His tone was obituary.

They had descended, without paying much attention where they were going, the steep yew-walk that went down, under the flank of the terrace, to the pool. The house towered above them, immensely tall, with the whole height of the built-up terrace added to its own seventy feet of brick façade. The perpendicular lines of the three towers soared up, uninterrupted, enhancing the impression of height until it became overwhelming. They paused at the edge of the pool to look back.

"The man who built this house knew his business," said Denis. "He was an architect."

"Was he?" said Henry Wimbush reflectively. "I doubt it. The builder of this house was Sir Ferdinando Lapith, who flourished during the reign of Elizabeth. He inherited the estate from his father, to whom it had been granted at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries; for Crome was originally a cloister of monks and this swimming-pool their fish-pond. Sir Ferdinando was not content merely to adapt the old monastic buildings to his own purposes; but using them as a stone quarry for his barns and byres and outhouses, he built for himself a grand new house of brick — the house you see now."

He waved his hand in the direction of the house and was silent, severe, imposing, almost menacing, Crome loomed down on them.

"The great thing about Crome," said Mr. Scogan, seizing the opportunity to speak, "is the fact that it's so unmistakably and aggressively a work of art. It makes no compromise with nature, but affronts it and rebels against it. It has no likeness to Shelley's tower, in the 'Epipsychidion,' which, if I remember rightly—"

"Seems not now a work of human art,  
But as it were titanic, in the heart  
Of earth having assumed its form and grown  
Out of the mountain, from the living stone,  
Lifting itself in caverns light and high."

"No, no, there isn't any nonsense of that sort about Crome. That the hovels of the peasantry should look as though they had grown out of the earth, to which their inmates are attached, is right, no doubt, and suitable. But the house of an intelligent, civilised, and sophisticated man should never seem to have sprouted from the clods. It should rather be an expression of his grand unnatural remoteness from the cloddish life. Since the days of William Morris that's a fact which we in England have been unable to comprehend. Civilised and sophisticated men have solemnly played at being peasants. Hence quaintness, arts and crafts, cottage architecture, and all the rest of it. In the suburbs of our cities you may see, reduplicated in endless rows, studiously quaint imitations and adaptations of the village hovel. Poverty, ignorance, and a limited range of materials produced the hovel, which possesses undoubtedly, in suitable surroundings, its own 'as it were titanic' charm. We now employ our wealth, our technical knowledge,

our rich variety of materials for the purpose of building millions of imitation hovels in totally unsuitable surroundings. Could imbecility go further?"

Henry Wimbush took up the thread of his interrupted discourse. "All that you say, my dear Scogan," he began, "is certainly very just, very true. But whether Sir Ferdinando shared your views about architecture or if, indeed, he had any views about architecture at all, I very much doubt. In building this house, Sir Ferdinando was, as a matter of fact, preoccupied by only one thought — the proper placing of his privies. Sanitation was the one great interest of his life. In 1573 he even published, on this subject, a little book — now extremely scarce — called, 'Certaine Priuy Counsels' by 'One of Her Maiestie's Most Honourable Priuy Counsels, F.L. Knight', in which the whole matter is treated with great learning and elegance. His guiding principle in arranging the sanitation of a house was to secure that the greatest possible distance should separate the privy from the sewage arrangements. Hence it followed inevitably that the privies were to be placed at the top of the house, being connected by vertical shafts with pits or channels in the ground. It must not be thought that Sir Ferdinando was moved only by material and merely sanitary considerations; for the placing of his privies in an exalted position he had also certain excellent spiritual reasons. For, he argues in the third chapter of his 'Priuy Counsels', the necessities of nature are so base and brutish that in obeying them we are apt to forget that we are the noblest creatures of the universe. To counteract these degrading effects he advised that the privy should be in every house the room nearest to heaven, that it should be well provided with windows commanding an extensive and noble prospect, and that the walls of the chamber should be lined with bookshelves containing all the ripest products of human wisdom, such as the Proverbs of Solomon, Boethius's 'Consolations of Philosophy', the apophthegms of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, the 'Enchiridion' of Erasmus, and all other works, ancient or modern, which testify to the nobility of the human soul. In Crome he was able to put his theories into practice. At the top of each of the three projecting towers he placed a privy. From these a shaft went down the whole height of the house, that is to say, more than seventy feet, through the cellars, and into a series of conduits provided with flowing water tunnelled in the ground on a level with the base of the raised terrace. These conduits emptied themselves into the stream several hundred yards below the fish-pond. The total depth of the shafts from the top of the towers to their subterranean conduits was a hundred and two feet. The eighteenth century, with its passion for modernisation, swept away these monuments of sanitary ingenuity. Were it not for tradition and the explicit account of them left by Sir Ferdinando, we should be unaware that these noble privies had ever existed. We should even suppose that Sir Ferdinando built his house after this strange and splendid model for merely aesthetic reasons."

The contemplation of the glories of the past always evoked in Henry Wimbush a certain enthusiasm. Under the grey bowler his face worked and glowed as he spoke. The thought of these vanished privies moved him profoundly. He ceased to speak; the light gradually died out of his face, and it became once more the replica of the

grave, polite hat which shaded it. There was a long silence; the same gently melancholy thoughts seemed to possess the mind of each of them. Permanence, transience — Sir Ferdinando and his privies were gone, Crome still stood. How brightly the sun shone and how inevitable was death! The ways of God were strange; the ways of man were stranger still...

“It does one’s heart good,” exclaimed Mr. Scogan at last, “to hear of these fantastic English aristocrats. To have a theory about privies and to build an immense and splendid house in order to put it into practise — it’s magnificent, beautiful! I like to think of them all: the eccentric milords rolling across Europe in ponderous carriages, bound on extraordinary errands. One is going to Venice to buy La Bianchi’s larynx; he won’t get it till she’s dead, of course, but no matter; he’s prepared to wait; he has a collection, pickled in glass bottles, of the throats of famous opera singers. And the instruments of renowned virtuosi — he goes in for them too; he will try to bribe Paganini to part with his little Guarnerio, but he has small hope of success. Paganini won’t sell his fiddle; but perhaps he might sacrifice one of his guitars. Others are bound on crusades — one to die miserably among the savage Greeks, another, in his white top hat, to lead Italians against their oppressors. Others have no business at all; they are just giving their oddity a continental airing. At home they cultivate themselves at leisure and with greater elaboration. Beckford builds towers, Portland digs holes in the ground, Cavendish, the millionaire, lives in a stable, eats nothing but mutton, and amuses himself — oh, solely for his private delectation — by anticipating the electrical discoveries of half a century. Glorious eccentrics! Every age is enlivened by their presence. Some day, my dear Denis,” said Mr Scogan, turning a beady bright regard in his direction— “some day you must become their biographer— ‘The Lives of Queer Men.’ What a subject! I should like to undertake it myself.”

Mr. Scogan paused, looked up once more at the towering house, then murmured the word “Eccentricity,” two or three times.

“Eccentricity...It’s the justification of all aristocracies. It justifies leisured classes and inherited wealth and privilege and endowments and all the other injustices of that sort. If you’re to do anything reasonable in this world, you must have a class of people who are secure, safe from public opinion, safe from poverty, leisured, not compelled to waste their time in the imbecile routines that go by the name of Honest Work. You must have a class of which the members can think and, within the obvious limits, do what they please. You must have a class in which people who have eccentricities can indulge them and in which eccentricity in general will be tolerated and understood. That’s the important thing about an aristocracy. Not only is it eccentric itself — often grandiosely so; it also tolerates and even encourages eccentricity in others. The eccentricities of the artist and the new-fangled thinker don’t inspire it with that fear, loathing, and disgust which the burgesses instinctively feel towards them. It is a sort of Red Indian Reservation planted in the midst of a vast horde of Poor Whites — colonials at that. Within its boundaries wild men disport themselves — often, it must be admitted, a little grossly, a little too flamboyantly; and when kindred spirits are born outside the

pale it offers them some sort of refuge from the hatred which the Poor Whites, en bons bourgeois, lavish on anything that is wild or out of the ordinary. After the social revolution there will be no Reservations; the Redskins will be drowned in the great sea of Poor Whites. What then? Will they suffer you to go on writing villanelles, my good Denis? Will you, unhappy Henry, be allowed to live in this house of the splendid privies, to continue your quiet delving in the mines of futile knowledge? Will Anne..."

"And you," said Anne, interrupting him, "will you be allowed to go on talking?"

"You may rest assured," Mr. Scogan replied, "that I shall not. I shall have some Honest Work to do."

## Chapter XII.

BLIGHT, MILDEW, AND Smut..." Mary was puzzled and distressed. Perhaps her ears had played her false. Perhaps what he had really said was, "Squire, Binyon, and Shanks," or "Childe, Blunden, and Earp," or even "Abercrombie, Drinkwater, and Rabindranath Tagore." Perhaps. But then her ears never did play her false. "Blight, Mildew, and Smut." The impression was distinct and ineffaceable. "Blight, Mildew..." she was forced to the conclusion, reluctantly, that Denis had indeed pronounced those improbable words. He had deliberately repelled her attempts to open a serious discussion. That was horrible. A man who would not talk seriously to a woman just because she was a woman — oh, impossible! Egeria or nothing. Perhaps Gombauld would be more satisfactory. True, his meridional heredity was a little disquieting; but at least he was a serious worker, and it was with his work that she would associate herself. And Denis? After all, what WAS Denis? A dilettante, an amateur...

Gombauld had annexed for his painting-room a little disused granary that stood by itself in a green close beyond the farm-yard. It was a square brick building with a peaked roof and little windows set high up in each of its walls. A ladder of four rungs led up to the door; for the granary was perched above the ground, and out of reach of the rats, on four massive toadstools of grey stone. Within, there lingered a faint smell of dust and cobwebs; and the narrow shaft of sunlight that came slanting in at every hour of the day through one of the little windows was always alive with silvery motes. Here Gombauld worked, with a kind of concentrated ferocity, during six or seven hours of each day. He was pursuing something new, something terrific, if only he could catch it.

During the last eight years, nearly half of which had been spent in the process of winning the war, he had worked his way industriously through cubism. Now he had come out on the other side. He had begun by painting a formalised nature; then, little by little, he had risen from nature into the world of pure form, till in the end he was painting nothing but his own thoughts, externalised in the abstract geometrical forms of the mind's devising. He found the process arduous and exhilarating. And then, quite



suddenly, he grew dissatisfied; he felt himself cramped and confined within intolerably narrow limitations. He was humiliated to find how few and crude and uninteresting were the forms he could invent; the inventions of nature were without number, inconceivably subtle and elaborate. He had done with cubism. He was out on the other side. But the cubist discipline preserved him from falling into excesses of nature worship. He took from nature its rich, subtle, elaborate forms, but his aim was always to work them into a whole that should have the thrilling simplicity and formality of an idea; to combine prodigious realism with prodigious simplification. Memories of Caravaggio's portentous achievements haunted him. Forms of a breathing, living reality emerged from darkness, built themselves up into compositions as luminously simple and single as a mathematical idea. He thought of the "Call of Matthew," of "Peter Crucified," of the "Lute players," of "Magdalen." He had the secret, that astonishing ruffian, he had the secret! And now Gombauld was after it, in hot pursuit. Yes, it would be something terrific, if only he could catch it.

For a long time an idea had been stirring and spreading, yeastily, in his mind. He had made a portfolio full of studies, he had drawn a cartoon; and now the idea was taking shape on canvas. A man fallen from a horse. The huge animal, a gaunt white cart-horse, filled the upper half of the picture with its great body. Its head, lowered towards the ground, was in shadow; the immense bony body was what arrested the eye, the body and the legs, which came down on either side of the picture like the pillars of an arch. On the ground, between the legs of the towering beast, lay the foreshortened figure of a man, the head in the extreme foreground, the arms flung wide to right and left. A white, relentless light poured down from a point in the right foreground. The beast, the fallen man, were sharply illuminated; round them, beyond and behind them, was the night. They were alone in the darkness, a universe in themselves. The horse's body filled the upper part of the picture; the legs, the great hoofs, frozen to stillness in the midst of their trampling, limited it on either side. And beneath lay the man, his foreshortened face at the focal point in the centre, his arms outstretched towards the sides of the picture. Under the arch of the horse's belly, between his legs, the eye looked through into an intense darkness; below, the space was closed in by the figure of the prostrate man. A central gulf of darkness surrounded by luminous forms...

The picture was more than half finished. Gombauld had been at work all the morning on the figure of the man, and now he was taking a rest — the time to smoke a cigarette. Tilting back his chair till it touched the wall, he looked thoughtfully at his canvas. He was pleased, and at the same time he was desolated. In itself, the thing was good; he knew it. But that something he was after, that something that would be so terrific if only he could catch it — had he caught it? Would he ever catch it?

Three little taps — rat, tat, tat! Surprised, Gombauld turned his eyes towards the door. Nobody ever disturbed him while he was at work; it was one of the unwritten laws. "Come in!" he called. The door, which was ajar, swung open, revealing, from the waist upwards, the form of Mary. She had only dared to mount half-way up the ladder.

If he didn't want her, retreat would be easier and more dignified than if she climbed to the top.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Certainly."

She skipped up the remaining two rungs and was over the threshold in an instant. "A letter came for you by the second post," she said. "I thought it might be important, so I brought it out to you." Her eyes, her childish face were luminously candid as she handed him the letter. There had never been a flimsier pretext.

Gombauld looked at the envelope and put it in his pocket unopened. "Luckily," he said, "it isn't at all important. Thanks very much all the same."

There was a silence; Mary felt a little uncomfortable. "May I have a look at what you've been painting?" she had the courage to say at last.

Gombauld had only half smoked his cigarette; in any case he wouldn't begin work again till he had finished. He would give her the five minutes that separated him from the bitter end. "This is the best place to see it from," he said.

Mary looked at the picture for some time without saying anything. Indeed, she didn't know what to say; she was taken aback, she was at a loss. She had expected a cubist masterpiece, and here was a picture of a man and a horse, not only recognisable as such, but even aggressively in drawing. Trompe-l'oeil — there was no other word to describe the delineation of that foreshortened figure under the trampling feet of the horse. What was she to think, what was she to say? Her orientations were gone. One could admire representationalism in the Old Masters. Obviously. But in a modern...? At eighteen she might have done so. But now, after five years of schooling among the best judges, her instinctive reaction to a contemporary piece of representation was contempt — an outburst of laughing disparagement. What could Gombauld be up to? She had felt so safe in admiring his work before. But now — she didn't know what to think. It was very difficult, very difficult.

"There's rather a lot of chiaroscuro, isn't there?" she ventured at last, and inwardly congratulated herself on having found a critical formula so gentle and at the same time so penetrating.

"There is," Gombauld agreed.

Mary was pleased; he accepted her criticism; it was a serious discussion. She put her head on one side and screwed up her eyes. "I think it's awfully fine," she said. "But of course it's a little too...too...trompe-l'oeil for my taste." She looked at Gombauld, who made no response, but continued to smoke, gazing meditatively all the time at his picture. Mary went on gaspingly. "When I was in Paris this spring I saw a lot of Tschuplitski. I admire his work so tremendously. Of course, it's frightfully abstract now — frightfully abstract and frightfully intellectual. He just throws a few oblongs on to his canvas — quite flat, you know, and painted in pure primary colours. But his design is wonderful. He's getting more and more abstract every day. He'd given up the third dimension when I was there and was just thinking of giving up the second. Soon, he says, there'll be just the blank canvas. That's the logical conclusion. Complete

abstraction. Painting's finished; he's finishing it. When he's reached pure abstraction he's going to take up architecture. He says it's more intellectual than painting. Do you agree?" she asked, with a final gasp.

Gombauld dropped his cigarette end and trod on it. "Tschuplitski's finished painting," he said. "I've finished my cigarette. But I'm going on painting." And, advancing towards her, he put his arm round her shoulders and turned her round, away from the picture.

Mary looked up at him; her hair swung back, a soundless bell of gold. Her eyes were serene; she smiled. So the moment had come. His arm was round her. He moved slowly, almost imperceptibly, and she moved with him. It was a peripatetic embracement. "Do you agree with him?" she repeated. The moment might have come, but she would not cease to be intellectual, serious.

"I don't know. I shall have to think about it." Gombauld loosened his embrace, his hand dropped from her shoulder. "Be careful going down the ladder," he added solicitously.

Mary looked round, startled. They were in front of the open door. She remained standing there for a moment in bewilderment. The hand that had rested on her shoulder made itself felt lower down her back; it administered three or four kindly little smacks. Replying automatically to its stimulus, she moved forward.

"Be careful going down the ladder," said Gombauld once more.

She was careful. The door closed behind her and she was alone in the little green close. She walked slowly back through the farmyard; she was pensive.

## Chapter XIII.

HENRY WIMBUSH BROUGHT down with him to dinner a budget of printed sheets loosely bound together in a cardboard portfolio.

"To-day," he said, exhibiting it with a certain solemnity, "to-day I have finished the printing of my 'History of Crome'. I helped to set up the type of the last page this evening."

"The famous History?" cried Anne. The writing and the printing of this Magnum Opus had been going on as long as she could remember. All her childhood long Uncle Henry's History had been a vague and fabulous thing, often heard of and never seen.

"It has taken me nearly thirty years," said Mr. Wimbush. "Twenty-five years of writing and nearly four of printing. And now it's finished — the whole chronicle, from Sir Ferdinando Lapith's birth to the death of my father William Wimbush — more than three centuries and a half: a history of Crome, written at Crome, and printed at Crome by my own press."

"Shall we be allowed to read it now it's finished?" asked Denis.

Mr. Wimbush nodded. "Certainly," he said. "And I hope you will not find it uninteresting," he added modestly. "Our muniment room is particularly rich in ancient records, and I have some genuinely new light to throw on the introduction of the three-pronged fork."

"And the people?" asked Gombauld. "Sir Ferdinando and the rest of them — were they amusing? Were there any crimes or tragedies in the family?"

"Let me see," Henry Wimbush rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I can only think of two suicides, one violent death, four or perhaps five broken hearts, and half a dozen little blots on the scutcheon in the way of misalliances, seductions, natural children, and the like. No, on the whole, it's a placid and uneventful record."

"The Wimbushes and the Lapiths were always an unadventurous, respectable crew," said Priscilla, with a note of scorn in her voice. "If I were to write my family history now! Why, it would be one long continuous blot from beginning to end." She laughed jovially, and helped herself to another glass of wine.

"If I were to write mine," Mr. Scogan remarked, "it wouldn't exist. After the second generation we Scogans are lost in the mists of antiquity."

"After dinner," said Henry Wimbush, a little piqued by his wife's disparaging comment on the masters of Crome, "I'll read you an episode from my History that will make you admit that even the Lapiths, in their own respectable way, had their tragedies and strange adventures."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Priscilla.

"Glad to hear what?" asked Jenny, emerging suddenly from her private interior world like a cuckoo from a clock. She received an explanation, smiled, nodded, cuckooed at last "I see," and popped back, clapping shut the door behind her.

Dinner was eaten; the party had adjourned to the drawing-room.

"Now," said Henry Wimbush, pulling up a chair to the lamp. He put on his round pince-nez, rimmed with tortoise-shell, and began cautiously to turn over the pages of his loose and still fragmentary book. He found his place at last. "Shall I begin?" he asked, looking up.

"Do," said Priscilla, yawning.

In the midst of an attentive silence Mr. Wimbush gave a little preliminary cough and started to read.

"The infant who was destined to become the fourth baronet of the name of Lapith was born in the year 1740. He was a very small baby, weighing not more than three pounds at birth, but from the first he was sturdy and healthy. In honour of his maternal grandfather, Sir Hercules Occam of Bishop's Occam, he was christened Hercules. His mother, like many other mothers, kept a notebook, in which his progress from month to month was recorded. He walked at ten months, and before his second year was out he had learnt to speak a number of words. At three years he weighed but twenty-four pounds, and at six, though he could read and write perfectly and showed a remarkable aptitude for music, he was no larger and heavier than a well-grown child of two. Meanwhile, his mother had borne two other children, a boy and a girl, one of

whom died of croup during infancy, while the other was carried off by smallpox before it reached the age of five. Hercules remained the only surviving child.

“On his twelfth birthday Hercules was still only three feet and two inches in height. His head, which was very handsome and nobly shaped, was too big for his body, but otherwise he was exquisitely proportioned, and, for his size, of great strength and agility. His parents, in the hope of making him grow, consulted all the most eminent physicians of the time. Their various prescriptions were followed to the letter, but in vain. One ordered a very plentiful meat diet; another exercise; a third constructed a little rack, modelled on those employed by the Holy Inquisition, on which young Hercules was stretched, with excruciating torments, for half an hour every morning and evening. In the course of the next three years Hercules gained perhaps two inches. After that his growth stopped completely, and he remained for the rest of his life a pigmy of three feet and four inches. His father, who had built the most extravagant hopes upon his son, planning for him in his imagination a military career equal to that of Marlborough, found himself a disappointed man. ‘I have brought an abortion into the world,’ he would say, and he took so violent a dislike to his son that the boy dared scarcely come into his presence. His temper, which had been serene, was turned by disappointment to moroseness and savagery. He avoided all company (being, as he said, ashamed to show himself, the father of a *lusus naturae*, among normal, healthy human beings), and took to solitary drinking, which carried him very rapidly to his grave; for the year before Hercules came of age his father was taken off by an apoplexy. His mother, whose love for him had increased with the growth of his father’s unkindness, did not long survive, but little more than a year after her husband’s death succumbed, after eating two dozen of oysters, to an attack of typhoid fever.

“Hercules thus found himself at the age of twenty-one alone in the world, and master of a considerable fortune, including the estate and mansion of Crome. The beauty and intelligence of his childhood had survived into his manly age, and, but for his dwarfish stature, he would have taken his place among the handsomest and most accomplished young men of his time. He was well read in the Greek and Latin authors, as well as in all the moderns of any merit who had written in English, French, or Italian. He had a good ear for music, and was no indifferent performer on the violin, which he used to play like a bass viol, seated on a chair with the instrument between his legs. To the music of the harpsichord and clavichord he was extremely partial, but the smallness of his hands made it impossible for him ever to perform upon these instruments. He had a small ivory flute made for him, on which, whenever he was melancholy, he used to play a simple country air or jig, affirming that this rustic music had more power to clear and raise the spirits than the most artificial productions of the masters. From an early age he practised the composition of poetry, but, though conscious of his great powers in this art, he would never publish any specimen of his writing. ‘My stature,’ he would say, ‘is reflected in my verses; if the public were to read them it would not be because I am a poet, but because I am a dwarf.’ Several MS. books of Sir Hercules’s poems survive. A single specimen will suffice to illustrate his qualities as a poet.”

“In ancient days, while yet the world was young,  
 Ere Abram fed his flocks or Homer sung;  
 When blacksmith Tubal tamed creative fire,  
 And Jabal dwelt in tents and Jubal struck the lyre;  
 Flesh grown corrupt brought forth a monstrous birth  
 And obscene giants trod the shrinking earth,  
 Till God, impatient of their sinful brood,  
 Gave rein to wrath and drown’d them in the Flood.  
 Teeming again, repeopled Tellus bore  
 The lubber Hero and the Man of War;  
 Huge towers of Brawn, topp’d with an empty Skull,  
 Witlessly bold, heroically dull.  
 Long ages pass’d and Man grown more refin’d,  
 Slighter in muscle but of vaster Mind,  
 Smiled at his grandsire’s broadsword, bow and bill,  
 And learn’d to wield the Pencil and the Quill.  
 The glowing canvas and the written page  
 Immortaliz’d his name from age to age,  
 His name emblazon’d on Fame’s temple wall;  
 For Art grew great as Humankind grew small.  
 Thus man’s long progress step by step we trace;  
 The Giant dies, the hero takes his place;  
 The Giant vile, the dull heroic Block:  
 At one we shudder and at one we mock.  
 Man last appears. In him the Soul’s pure flame  
 Burns brightlier in a not inord’nate frame.  
 Of old when Heroes fought and Giants swarmed,  
 Men were huge mounds of matter scarce inform’d;  
 Wearied by leavening so vast a mass,  
 The spirit slept and all the mind was crass.  
 The smaller carcase of these later days  
 Is soon inform’d; the Soul unwearied plays  
 And like a Pharos darts abroad her mental rays.  
 But can we think that Providence will stay  
 Man’s footsteps here upon the upward way?  
 Mankind in understanding and in grace  
 Advanc’d so far beyond the Giants’ race?  
 Hence impious thought! Still led by GOD’S own Hand,  
 Mankind proceeds towards the Promised Land.  
 A time will come (prophetic, I descry  
 Remoter dawns along the gloomy sky),  
 When happy mortals of a Golden Age

Will backward turn the dark historic page,  
 And in our vaunted race of Men behold  
 A form as gross, a Mind as dead and cold,  
 As we in Giants see, in warriors of old.  
 A time will come, wherein the soul shall be  
 From all superfluous matter wholly free;  
 When the light body, agile as a fawn's,  
 Shall sport with grace along the velvet lawns.  
 Nature's most delicate and final birth,  
 Mankind perfected shall possess the earth.  
 But ah, not yet! For still the Giants' race,  
 Huge, though diminish'd, tramps the Earth's fair face;  
 Gross and repulsive, yet perversely proud,  
 Men of their imperfections boast aloud.  
 Vain of their bulk, of all they still retain  
 Of giant ugliness absurdly vain;  
 At all that's small they point their stupid scorn  
 And, monsters, think themselves divinely born.  
 Sad is the Fate of those, ah, sad indeed,  
 The rare precursors of the nobler breed!  
 Who come man's golden glory to foretell,  
 But pointing Heav'nwards live themselves in Hell.'

"As soon as he came into the estate, Sir Hercules set about remodelling his household. For though by no means ashamed of his deformity — indeed, if we may judge from the poem quoted above, he regarded himself as being in many ways superior to the ordinary race of man — he found the presence of full-grown men and women embarrassing. Realising, too, that he must abandon all ambitions in the great world, he determined to retire absolutely from it and to create, as it were, at Crome a private world of his own, in which all should be proportionable to himself. Accordingly, he discharged all the old servants of the house and replaced them gradually, as he was able to find suitable successors, by others of dwarfish stature. In the course of a few years he had assembled about himself a numerous household, no member of which was above four feet high and the smallest among them scarcely two feet and six inches. His father's dogs, such as setters, mastiffs, greyhounds, and a pack of beagles, he sold or gave away as too large and too boisterous for his house, replacing them by pugs and King Charles spaniels and whatever other breeds of dog were the smallest. His father's stable was also sold. For his own use, whether riding or driving, he had six black Shetland ponies, with four very choice piebald animals of New Forest breed.

"Having thus settled his household entirely to his own satisfaction, it only remained for him to find some suitable companion with whom to share his paradise. Sir Hercules had a susceptible heart, and had more than once, between the ages of sixteen and twenty, felt what it was to love. But here his deformity had been a source of the most

bitter humiliation, for, having once dared to declare himself to a young lady of his choice, he had been received with laughter. On his persisting, she had picked him up and shaken him like an importunate child, telling him to run away and plague her no more. The story soon got about — indeed, the young lady herself used to tell it as a particularly pleasant anecdote — and the taunts and mockery it occasioned were a source of the most acute distress to Hercules. From the poems written at this period we gather that he meditated taking his own life. In course of time, however, he lived down this humiliation; but never again, though he often fell in love, and that very passionately, did he dare to make any advances to those in whom he was interested. After coming to the estate and finding that he was in a position to create his own world as he desired it, he saw that, if he was to have a wife — which he very much desired, being of an affectionate and, indeed, amorous temper — he must choose her as he had chosen his servants — from among the race of dwarfs. But to find a suitable wife was, he found, a matter of some difficulty; for he would marry none who was not distinguished by beauty and gentle birth. The dwarfish daughter of Lord Bemboro he refused on the ground that besides being a pigmy she was hunchbacked; while another young lady, an orphan belonging to a very good family in Hampshire, was rejected by him because her face, like that of so many dwarfs, was wizened and repulsive. Finally, when he was almost despairing of success, he heard from a reliable source that Count Titimalo, a Venetian nobleman, possessed a daughter of exquisite beauty and great accomplishments, who was by three feet in height. Setting out at once for Venice, he went immediately on his arrival to pay his respects to the count, whom he found living with his wife and five children in a very mean apartment in one of the poorer quarters of the town. Indeed, the count was so far reduced in his circumstances that he was even then negotiating (so it was rumoured) with a travelling company of clowns and acrobats, who had had the misfortune to lose their performing dwarf, for the sale of his diminutive daughter Filomena. Sir Hercules arrived in time to save her from this untoward fate, for he was so much charmed by Filomena's grace and beauty, that at the end of three days' courtship he made her a formal offer of marriage, which was accepted by her no less joyfully than by her father, who perceived in an English son-in-law a rich and unfailing source of revenue. After an unostentatious marriage, at which the English ambassador acted as one of the witnesses, Sir Hercules and his bride returned by sea to England, where they settled down, as it proved, to a life of uneventful happiness.

“Crome and its household of dwarfs delighted Filomena, who felt herself now for the first time to be a free woman living among her equals in a friendly world. She had many tastes in common with her husband, especially that of music. She had a beautiful voice, of a power surprising in one so small, and could touch A in alt without effort. Accompanied by her husband on his fine Cremona fiddle, which he played, as we have noted before, as one plays a bass viol, she would sing all the liveliest and tenderest airs from the operas and cantatas of her native country. Seated together at the harpsichord,



they found that they could with their four hands play all the music written for two hands of ordinary size, a circumstance which gave Sir Hercules unfailing pleasure.

“When they were not making music or reading together, which they often did, both in English and Italian, they spent their time in healthful outdoor exercises, sometimes rowing in a little boat on the lake, but more often riding or driving, occupations in which, because they were entirely new to her, Filomena especially delighted. When she had become a perfectly proficient rider, Filomena and her husband used often to go hunting in the park, at that time very much more extensive than it is now. They hunted not foxes nor hares, but rabbits, using a pack of about thirty black and fawn-coloured pugs, a kind of dog which, when not overfed, can course a rabbit as well as any of the smaller breeds. Four dwarf grooms, dressed in scarlet liveries and mounted on white Exmoor ponies, hunted the pack, while their master and mistress, in green habits, followed either on the black Shetlands or on the piebald New Forest ponies. A picture of the whole hunt — dogs, horses, grooms, and masters — was painted by William Stubbs, whose work Sir Hercules admired so much that he invited him, though a man of ordinary stature, to come and stay at the mansion for the purpose of executing this picture. Stubbs likewise painted a portrait of Sir Hercules and his lady driving in their green enamelled calash drawn by four black Shetlands. Sir Hercules wears a plum-coloured velvet coat and white breeches; Filomena is dressed in flowered muslin and a very large hat with pink feathers. The two figures in their gay carriage stand out sharply against a dark background of trees; but to the left of the picture the trees fall away and disappear, so that the four black ponies are seen against a pale and strangely lurid sky that has the golden-brown colour of thunder-clouds lighted up by the sun.

“In this way four years passed happily by. At the end of that time Filomena found herself great with child. Sir Hercules was overjoyed. ‘If God is good,’ he wrote in his day-book, ‘the name of Lapith will be preserved and our rarer and more delicate race transmitted through the generations until in the fullness of time the world shall recognise the superiority of those beings whom now it uses to make mock of.’ On his wife’s being brought to bed of a son he wrote a poem to the same effect. The child was christened Ferdinando in memory of the builder of the house.

“With the passage of the months a certain sense of disquiet began to invade the minds of Sir Hercules and his lady. For the child was growing with an extraordinary rapidity. At a year he weighed as much as Hercules had weighed when he was three. ‘Ferdinando goes crescendo,’ wrote Filomena in her diary. ‘It seems not natural.’ At eighteen months the baby was almost as tall as their smallest jockey, who was a man of thirty-six. Could it be that Ferdinando was destined to become a man of the normal, gigantic dimensions? It was a thought to which neither of his parents dared yet give open utterance, but in the secrecy of their respective diaries they brooded over it in terror and dismay.

“On his third birthday Ferdinando was taller than his mother and not more than a couple of inches short of his father’s height. ‘To-day for the first time’ wrote Sir

Hercules, 'we discussed the situation. The hideous truth can be concealed no longer: Ferdinando is not one of us. On this, his third birthday, a day when we should have been rejoicing at the health, the strength, and beauty of our child, we wept together over the ruin of our happiness. God give us strength to bear this cross.'

"At the age of eight Ferdinando was so large and so exuberantly healthy that his parents decided, though reluctantly, to send him to school. He was packed off to Eton at the beginning of the next half. A profound peace settled upon the house. Ferdinando returned for the summer holidays larger and stronger than ever. One day he knocked down the butler and broke his arm. 'He is rough, inconsiderate, unamenable to persuasion,' wrote his father. 'The only thing that will teach him manners is corporal chastisement.' Ferdinando, who at this age was already seventeen inches taller than his father, received no corporal chastisement.

"One summer holidays about three years later Ferdinando returned to Crome accompanied by a very large mastiff dog. He had bought it from an old man at Windsor who had found the beast too expensive to feed. It was a savage, unreliable animal; hardly had it entered the house when it attacked one of Sir Hercules's favourite pugs, seizing the creature in its jaws and shaking it till it was nearly dead. Extremely put out by this occurrence, Sir Hercules ordered that the beast should be chained up in the stable-yard. Ferdinando sullenly answered that the dog was his, and he would keep it where he pleased. His father, growing angry, bade him take the animal out of the house at once, on pain of his utmost displeasure. Ferdinando refused to move. His mother at this moment coming into the room, the dog flew at her, knocked her down, and in a twinkling had very severely mauled her arm and shoulder; in another instant it must infallibly have had her by the throat, had not Sir Hercules drawn his sword and stabbed the animal to the heart. Turning on his son, he ordered him to leave the room immediately, as being unfit to remain in the same place with the mother whom he had nearly murdered. So awe-inspiring was the spectacle of Sir Hercules standing with one foot on the carcase of the gigantic dog, his sword drawn and still bloody, so commanding were his voice, his gestures, and the expression of his face that Ferdinando slunk out of the room in terror and behaved himself for all the rest of the vacation in an entirely exemplary fashion. His mother soon recovered from the bites of the mastiff, but the effect on her mind of this adventure was ineradicable; from that time forth she lived always among imaginary terrors.

"The two years which Ferdinando spent on the Continent, making the Grand Tour, were a period of happy repose for his parents. But even now the thought of the future haunted them; nor were they able to solace themselves with all the diversions of their younger days. The Lady Filomena had lost her voice and Sir Hercules was grown too rheumatical to play the violin. He, it is true, still rode after his pugs, but his wife felt herself too old and, since the episode of the mastiff, too nervous for such sports. At most, to please her husband, she would follow the hunt at a distance in a little gig drawn by the safest and oldest of the Shetlands.

“The day fixed for Ferdinando’s return came round. Filomena, sick with vague dreads and presentiments, retired to her chamber and her bed. Sir Hercules received his son alone. A giant in a brown travelling-suit entered the room. ‘Welcome home, my son,’ said Sir Hercules in a voice that trembled a little.

“‘I hope I see you well, sir.’ Ferdinando bent down to shake hands, then straightened himself up again. The top of his father’s head reached to the level of his hip.

“Ferdinando had not come alone. Two friends of his own age accompanied him, and each of the young men had brought a servant. Not for thirty years had Crome been desecrated by the presence of so many members of the common race of men. Sir Hercules was appalled and indignant, but the laws of hospitality had to be obeyed. He received the young gentlemen with grave politeness and sent the servants to the kitchen, with orders that they should be well cared for.

“The old family dining-table was dragged out into the light and dusted (Sir Hercules and his lady were accustomed to dine at a small table twenty inches high). Simon, the aged butler, who could only just look over the edge of the big table, was helped at supper by the three servants brought by Ferdinando and his guests.

“Sir Hercules presided, and with his usual grace supported a conversation on the pleasures of foreign travel, the beauties of art and nature to be met with abroad, the opera at Venice, the singing of the orphans in the churches of the same city, and on other topics of a similar nature. The young men were not particularly attentive to his discourses; they were occupied in watching the efforts of the butler to change the plates and replenish the glasses. They covered their laughter by violent and repeated fits of coughing or choking. Sir Hercules affected not to notice, but changed the subject of the conversation to sport. Upon this one of the young men asked whether it was true, as he had heard, that he used to hunt the rabbit with a pack of pug dogs. Sir Hercules replied that it was, and proceeded to describe the chase in some detail. The young men roared with laughter.

“When supper was over, Sir Hercules climbed down from his chair and, giving as his excuse that he must see how his lady did, bade them good-night. The sound of laughter followed him up the stairs. Filomena was not asleep; she had been lying on her bed listening to the sound of enormous laughter and the tread of strangely heavy feet on the stairs and along the corridors. Sir Hercules drew a chair to her bedside and sat there for a long time in silence, holding his wife’s hand and sometimes gently squeezing it. At about ten o’clock they were startled by a violent noise. There was a breaking of glass, a stamping of feet, with an outburst of shouts and laughter. The uproar continuing for several minutes, Sir Hercules rose to his feet and, in spite of his wife’s entreaties, prepared to go and see what was happening. There was no light on the staircase, and Sir Hercules groped his way down cautiously, lowering himself from stair to stair and standing for a moment on each tread before adventuring on a new step. The noise was louder here; the shouting articulated itself into recognisable words and phrases. A line of light was visible under the dining-room door. Sir Hercules tiptoed across the hall towards it. Just as he approached the door there was another

terrific crash of breaking glass and jangled metal. What could they be doing? Standing on tiptoe he managed to look through the keyhole. In the middle of the ravaged table old Simon, the butler, so primed with drink that he could scarcely keep his balance, was dancing a jig. His feet crunched and tinkled among the broken glass, and his shoes were wet with spilt wine. The three young men sat round, thumping the table with their hands or with the empty wine bottles, shouting and laughing encouragement. The three servants leaning against the wall laughed too. Ferdinando suddenly threw a handful of walnuts at the dancer's head, which so dazed and surprised the little man that he staggered and fell down on his back, upsetting a decanter and several glasses. They raised him up, gave him some brandy to drink, thumped him on the back. The old man smiled and hiccuped. 'To-morrow,' said Ferdinando, 'we'll have a concerted ballet of the whole household.' 'With father Hercules wearing his club and lion-skin,' added one of his companions, and all three roared with laughter.

"Sir Hercules would look and listen no further. He crossed the hall once more and began to climb the stairs, lifting his knees painfully high at each degree. This was the end; there was no place for him now in the world, no place for him and Ferdinando together.

"His wife was still awake; to her questioning glance he answered, 'They are making mock of old Simon. To-morrow it will be our turn.' They were silent for a time.

"At last Filomena said, 'I do not want to see to-morrow.'

"'It is better not,' said Sir Hercules. Going into his closet he wrote in his day-book a full and particular account of all the events of the evening. While he was still engaged in this task he rang for a servant and ordered hot water and a bath to be made ready for him at eleven o'clock. When he had finished writing he went into his wife's room, and preparing a dose of opium twenty times as strong as that which she was accustomed to take when she could not sleep, he brought it to her, saying, 'Here is your sleeping-draught.'

"Filomena took the glass and lay for a little time, but did not drink immediately. The tears came into her eyes. 'Do you remember the songs we used to sing, sitting out there sulla terrazza in the summer-time?' She began singing softly in her ghost of a cracked voice a few bars from Stradella's 'Amor amor, non dormir piu.' 'And you playing on the violin, it seems such a short time ago, and yet so long, long, long. Addio, amore, a rivederti.' She drank off the draught and, lying back on the pillow, closed her eyes. Sir Hercules kissed her hand and tiptoed away, as though he were afraid of waking her. He returned to his closet, and having recorded his wife's last words to him, he poured into his bath the water that had been brought up in accordance with his orders. The water being too hot for him to get into the bath at once, he took down from the shelf his copy of Suetonius. He wished to read how Seneca had died. He opened the book at random. 'But dwarfs,' he read, 'he held in abhorrence as being *lusus naturae* and of evil omen.' He winced as though he had been struck. This same Augustus, he remembered, had exhibited in the amphitheatre a young man called Lucius, of good family, who was not quite two feet in height and weighed seventeen pounds, but had a

stentorian voice. He turned over the pages. Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero: it was a tale of growing horror. 'Seneca his preceptor, he forced to kill himself.' And there was Petronius, who had called his friends about him at the last, bidding them talk to him, not of the consolations of philosophy, but of love and gallantry, while the life was ebbing away through his opened veins. Dipping his pen once more in the ink he wrote on the last page of his diary: 'He died a Roman death.' Then, putting the toes of one foot into the water and finding that it was not too hot, he threw off his dressing-gown and, taking a razor in his hand, sat down in the bath. With one deep cut he severed the artery in his left wrist, then lay back and composed his mind to meditation. The blood oozed out, floating through the water in dissolving wreaths and spirals. In a little while the whole bath was tinged with pink. The colour deepened; Sir Hercules felt himself mastered by an invincible drowsiness; he was sinking from vague dream to dream. Soon he was sound asleep. There was not much blood in his small body."

## Chapter XIV.

FOR THEIR AFTER-LUNCHEON coffee the party generally adjourned to the library. Its windows looked east, and at this hour of the day it was the coolest place in the whole house. It was a large room, fitted, during the eighteenth century, with white painted shelves of an elegant design. In the middle of one wall a door, ingeniously upholstered with rows of dummy books, gave access to a deep cupboard, where, among a pile of letter-files and old newspapers, the mummy-case of an Egyptian lady, brought back by the second Sir Ferdinando on his return from the Grand Tour, mouldered in the darkness. From ten yards away and at a first glance, one might almost have mistaken this secret door for a section of shelving filled with genuine books. Coffee-cup in hand, Mr. Scogan was standing in front of the dummy book-shelf. Between the sips he discoursed.

"The bottom shelf," he was saying, "is taken up by an Encyclopaedia in fourteen volumes. Useful, but a little dull, as is also Caprimulge's 'Dictionary of the Finnish Language'. The 'Biographical Dictionary' looks more promising. 'Biography of Men who were Born Great', 'Biography of Men who Achieved Greatness', 'Biography of Men who had Greatness Thrust upon Them', and 'Biography of Men who were Never Great at All'. Then there are ten volumes of 'Thom's Works and Wanderings', while the 'Wild Goose Chase, a Novel', by an anonymous author, fills no less than six. But what's this, what's this?" Mr. Scogan stood on tiptoe and peered up. "Seven volumes of the 'Tales of Knockespotch'. The 'Tales of Knockespotch'," he repeated. "Ah, my dear Henry," he said, turning round, "these are your best books. I would willingly give all the rest of your library for them."

The happy possessor of a multitude of first editions, Mr. Wimbush could afford to smile indulgently.

"Is it possible," Mr. Scogan went on, "that they possess nothing more than a back and a title?" He opened the cupboard door and peeped inside, as though he hoped to find the rest of the books behind it. "Phooh!" he said, and shut the door again. "It smells of dust and mildew. How symbolical! One comes to the great masterpieces of the past, expecting some miraculous illumination, and one finds, on opening them, only darkness and dust and a faint smell of decay. After all, what is reading but a vice, like drink or venery or any other form of excessive self-indulgence? One reads to tickle and amuse one's mind; one reads, above all, to prevent oneself thinking. Still — the 'Tales of Knockespotch'..."

He paused, and thoughtfully drummed with his fingers on the backs of the non-existent, unattainable books.

"But I disagree with you about reading," said Mary. "About serious reading, I mean."

"Quite right, Mary, quite right," Mr. Scogan answered. "I had forgotten there were any serious people in the room."

"I like the idea of the Biographies," said Denis. "There's room for us all within the scheme; it's comprehensive."

"Yes, the Biographies are good, the Biographies are excellent," Mr Scogan agreed. "I imagine them written in a very elegant Regency style — Brighton Pavilion in words — perhaps by the great Dr. Lempriere himself. You know his classical dictionary? Ah!" Mr. Scogan raised his hand and let it limply fall again in a gesture which implied that words failed him. "Read his biography of Helen; read how Jupiter, disguised as a swan, was 'enabled to avail himself of his situation' vis-a-vis to Leda. And to think that he may have, must have written these biographies of the Great! What a work, Henry! And, owing to the idiotic arrangement of your library, it can't be read."

"I prefer the 'Wild Goose Chase'," said Anne. "A novel in six volumes — it must be restful."

"Restful," Mr. Scogan repeated. "You've hit on the right word. A 'Wild Goose Chase' is sound, but a bit old-fashioned — pictures of clerical life in the fifties, you know; specimens of the landed gentry; peasants for pathos and comedy; and in the background, always the picturesque beauties of nature soberly described. All very good and solid, but, like certain puddings, just a little dull. Personally, I like much better the notion of 'Thom's Works and Wanderings'. The eccentric Mr. Thom of Thom's Hill. Old Tom Thom, as his intimates used to call him. He spent ten years in Thibet organising the clarified butter industry on modern European lines, and was able to retire at thirty-six with a handsome fortune. The rest of his life he devoted to travel and ratiocination; here is the result." Mr. Scogan tapped the dummy books. "And now we come to the 'Tales of Knockespotch'. What a masterpiece and what a great man! Knockespotch knew how to write fiction. Ah, Denis, if you could only read Knockespotch you wouldn't be writing a novel about the wearisome development of a young man's character, you wouldn't be describing in endless, fastidious detail, cultured life in Chelsea and Bloomsbury and Hampstead. You would be trying to write a readable book. But then, alas! owing to the peculiar arrangement of our host's library, you never will read Knockespotch."

"Nobody could regret the fact more than I do," said Denis.

"It was Knockespotch," Mr. Scogan continued, "the great Knockespotch, who delivered us from the dreary tyranny of the realistic novel. My life, Knockespotch said, is not so long that I can afford to spend precious hours writing or reading descriptions of middle-class interiors. He said again, 'I am tired of seeing the human mind bogged in a social plenum; I prefer to paint it in a vacuum, freely and sportively bombinating.'"

"I say," said Gombauld, "Knockespotch was a little obscure sometimes, wasn't he?"

"He was," Mr. Scogan replied, "and with intention. It made him seem even profounder than he actually was. But it was only in his aphorisms that he was so dark and oracular. In his Tales he was always luminous. Oh, those Tales — those Tales! How shall I describe them? Fabulous characters shoot across his pages like gaily dressed performers on the trapeze. There are extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations. Intelligences and emotions, relieved of all the imbecile preoccupations of civilised life, move in intricate and subtle dances, crossing and recrossing, advancing, retreating, impinging. An immense erudition and an immense fancy go hand in hand. All the ideas of the present and of the past, on every possible subject, bob up among the Tales, smile gravely or grimace a caricature of themselves, then disappear to make place for something new. The verbal surface of his writing is rich and fantastically diversified. The wit is incessant. The..."

"But couldn't you give us a specimen," Denis broke in — "a concrete example?"

"Alas!" Mr. Scogan replied, "Knockespotch's great book is like the sword Excalibur. It remains struck fast in this door, awaiting the coming of a writer with genius enough to draw it forth. I am not even a writer, I am not so much as qualified to attempt the task. The extraction of Knockespotch from his wooden prison I leave, my dear Denis, to you."

"Thank you," said Denis.

## Chapter XV.

IN THE TIME of the amiable Brantome," Mr. Scogan was saying, "every debutante at the French Court was invited to dine at the King's table, where she was served with wine in a handsome silver cup of Italian workmanship. It was no ordinary cup, this goblet of the debutantes; for, inside, it had been most curiously and ingeniously engraved with a series of very lively amorous scenes. With each draught that the young lady swallowed these engravings became increasingly visible, and the Court looked on with interest, every time she put her nose in the cup, to see whether she blushed at what the ebbing wine revealed. If the debutante blushed, they laughed at her for her innocence; if she did not, she was laughed at for being too knowing."

"Do you propose," asked Anne, "that the custom should be revived at Buckingham Palace?"

"I do not," said Mr. Scogan. "I merely quoted the anecdote as an illustration of the customs, so genially frank, of the sixteenth century. I might have quoted other anecdotes to show that the customs of the seventeenth and eighteenth, of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, and indeed of every other century, from the time of Hammurabi onward, were equally genial and equally frank. The only century in which customs were not characterised by the same cheerful openness was the nineteenth, of blessed memory. It was the astonishing exception. And yet, with what one must suppose was a deliberate disregard of history, it looked upon its horribly pregnant silences as normal and natural and right; the frankness of the previous fifteen or twenty thousand years was considered abnormal and perverse. It was a curious phenomenon."

"I entirely agree." Mary panted with excitement in her effort to bring out what she had to say. "Havelock Ellis says..."

Mr. Scogan, like a policeman arresting the flow of traffic, held up his hand. "He does; I know. And that brings me to my next point: the nature of the reaction."

"Havelock Ellis..."

"The reaction, when it came — and we may say roughly that it set in a little before the beginning of this century — the reaction was to openness, but not to the same openness as had reigned in the earlier ages. It was to a scientific openness, not to the jovial frankness of the past, that we returned. The whole question of Amour became a terribly serious one. Earnest young men wrote in the public prints that from this time forth it would be impossible ever again to make a joke of any sexual matter. Professors wrote thick books in which sex was sterilised and dissected. It has become customary for serious young women, like Mary, to discuss, with philosophic calm, matters of which the merest hint would have sufficed to throw the youth of the sixties into a delirium of amorous excitement. It is all very estimable, no doubt. But still" — Mr. Scogan sighed. — "I for one should like to see, mingled with this scientific ardour, a little more of the jovial spirit of Rabelais and Chaucer."

"I entirely disagree with you," said Mary. "Sex isn't a laughing matter; it's serious."

"Perhaps," answered Mr. Scogan, "perhaps I'm an obscene old man. For I must confess that I cannot always regard it as wholly serious."

"But I tell you..." began Mary furiously. Her face had flushed with excitement. Her cheeks were the cheeks of a great ripe peach.

"Indeed," Mr. Scogan continued, "it seems to me one of few permanently and everlastingly amusing subjects that exist. Amour is the one human activity of any importance in which laughter and pleasure preponderate, if ever so slightly, over misery and pain."

"I entirely disagree," said Mary. There was a silence.

Anne looked at her watch. "Nearly a quarter to eight," she said. "I wonder when Ivor will turn up." She got up from her deck-chair and, leaning her elbows on the balustrade of the terrace, looked out over the valley and towards the farther hills. Under the level evening light the architecture of the land revealed itself. The deep shadows, the bright contrasting lights gave the hills a new solidity. Irregularities of the surface, unsuspected before, were picked out with light and shade. The grass, the corn, the foliage of trees



were stippled with intricate shadows. The surface of things had taken on a marvellous enrichment.

“Look!” said Anne suddenly, and pointed. On the opposite side of the valley, at the crest of the ridge, a cloud of dust flushed by the sunlight to rosy gold was moving rapidly along the sky-line. “It’s Ivor. One can tell by the speed.”

The dust cloud descended into the valley and was lost. A horn with the voice of a sea-lion made itself heard, approaching. A minute later Ivor came leaping round the corner of the house. His hair waved in the wind of his own speed; he laughed as he saw them.

“Anne, darling,” he cried, and embraced her, embraced Mary, very nearly embraced Mr. Scogan. “Well, here I am. I’ve come with incredulous speed.” Ivor’s vocabulary was rich, but a little erratic. “I’m not late for dinner, am I?” He hoisted himself up on to the balustrade, and sat there, kicking his heels. With one arm he embraced a large stone flower-pot, leaning his head sideways against its hard and lichenous flanks in an attitude of trustful affection. He had brown, wavy hair, and his eyes were of a very brilliant, pale, improbable blue. His head was narrow, his face thin and rather long, his nose aquiline. In old age — though it was difficult to imagine Ivor old — he might grow to have an Iron Ducal grimness. But now, at twenty-six, it was not the structure of his face that impressed one; it was its expression. That was charming and vivacious, and his smile was an irradiation. He was forever moving, restlessly and rapidly, but with an engaging gracefulness. His frail and slender body seemed to be fed by a spring of inexhaustible energy.

“No, you’re not late.”

“You’re in time to answer a question,” said Mr. Scogan. “We were arguing whether Amour were a serious matter or no. What do you think? Is it serious?”

“Serious?” echoed Ivor. “Most certainly.”

“I told you so,” cried Mary triumphantly.

“But in what sense serious?” Mr. Scogan asked.

“I mean as an occupation. One can go on with it without ever getting bored.”

“I see,” said Mr. Scogan. “Perfectly.”

“One can occupy oneself with it,” Ivor continued, “always and everywhere. Women are always wonderfully the same. Shapes vary a little, that’s all. In Spain” — with his free hand he described a series of ample curves — “one can’t pass them on the stairs. In England” — he put the tip of his forefinger against the tip of his thumb and, lowering his hand, drew out this circle into an imaginary cylinder — “In England they’re tubular. But their sentiments are always the same. At least, I’ve always found it so.”

“I’m delighted to hear it,” said Mr. Scogan.

## Chapter XVI.

THE LADIES HAD left the room and the port was circulating. Mr. Scogan filled his glass, passed on the decanter, and, leaning back in his chair, looked about him for a moment in silence. The conversation rippled idly round him, but he disregarded it; he was smiling at some private joke. Gombauld noticed his smile.

“What’s amusing you?” he asked.

“I was just looking at you all, sitting round this table,” said Mr. Scogan.

“Are we as comic as all that?”

“Not at all,” Mr. Scogan answered politely. “I was merely amused by my own speculations.”

“And what were they?”

“The idlest, the most academic of speculations. I was looking at you one by one and trying to imagine which of the first six Caesars you would each resemble, if you were given the opportunity of behaving like a Caesar. The Caesars are one of my touchstones,” Mr. Scogan explained. “They are characters functioning, so to speak, in the void. They are human beings developed to their logical conclusions. Hence their unequalled value as a touchstone, a standard. When I meet someone for the first time, I ask myself this question: Given the Caesarean environment, which of the Caesars would this person resemble — Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero? I take each trait of character, each mental and emotional bias, each little oddity, and magnify them a thousand times. The resulting image gives me his Caesarean formula.”

“And which of the Caesars do you resemble?” asked Gombauld.

“I am potentially all of them,” Mr. Scogan replied, “all — with the possible exception of Claudius, who was much too stupid to be a development of anything in my character. The seeds of Julius’s courage and compelling energy, of Augustus’s prudence, of the libidinousness and cruelty of Tiberius, of Caligula’s folly, of Nero’s artistic genius and enormous vanity, are all within me. Given the opportunities, I might have been something fabulous. But circumstances were against me. I was born and brought up in a country rectory; I passed my youth doing a great deal of utterly senseless hard work for a very little money. The result is that now, in middle age, I am the poor thing that I am. But perhaps it is as well. Perhaps, too, it’s as well that Denis hasn’t been permitted to flower into a little Nero, and that Ivor remains only potentially a Caligula. Yes, it’s better so, no doubt. But it would have been more amusing, as a spectacle, if they had had the chance to develop, untrammelled, the full horror of their potentialities. It would have been pleasant and interesting to watch their tics and foibles and little vices swelling and burgeoning and blossoming into enormous and fantastic flowers of cruelty and pride and lewdness and avarice. The Caesarean environment makes the Caesar, as the special food and the queenly cell make the queen bee. We differ from the bees in so far that, given the proper food, they can be sure of making a queen every time. With us there is no such certainty; out of every ten men placed in the

Caesarean environment one will be temperamentally good, or intelligent, or great. The rest will blossom into Caesars; he will not. Seventy and eighty years ago simple-minded people, reading of the exploits of the Bourbons in South Italy, cried out in amazement: To think that such things should be happening in the nineteenth century! And a few years since we too were astonished to find that in our still more astonishing twentieth century, unhappy blackamoors on the Congo and the Amazon were being treated as English serfs were treated in the time of Stephen. To-day we are no longer surprised at these things. The Black and Tans harry Ireland, the Poles maltreat the Silesians, the bold Fascisti slaughter their poorer countrymen: we take it all for granted. Since the war we wonder at nothing. We have created a Caesarean environment and a host of little Caesars has sprung up. What could be more natural?"

Mr. Scogan drank off what was left of his port and refilled the glass.

"At this very moment," he went on, "the most frightful horrors are taking place in every corner of the world. People are being crushed, slashed, disembowelled, mangled; their dead bodies rot and their eyes decay with the rest. Screams of pain and fear go pulsing through the air at the rate of eleven hundred feet per second. After travelling for three seconds they are perfectly inaudible. These are distressing facts; but do we enjoy life any the less because of them? Most certainly we do not. We feel sympathy, no doubt; we represent to ourselves imaginatively the sufferings of nations and individuals and we deplore them. But, after all, what are sympathy and imagination? Precious little, unless the person for whom we feel sympathy happens to be closely involved in our affections; and even then they don't go very far. And a good thing too; for if one had an imagination vivid enough and a sympathy sufficiently sensitive really to comprehend and to feel the sufferings of other people, one would never have a moment's peace of mind. A really sympathetic race would not so much as know the meaning of happiness. But luckily, as I've already said, we aren't a sympathetic race. At the beginning of the war I used to think I really suffered, through imagination and sympathy, with those who physically suffered. But after a month or two I had to admit that, honestly, I didn't. And yet I think I have a more vivid imagination than most. One is always alone in suffering; the fact is depressing when one happens to be the sufferer, but it makes pleasure possible for the rest of the world."

There was a pause. Henry Wimbush pushed back his chair.

"I think perhaps we ought to go and join the ladies," he said.

"So do I," said Ivor, jumping up with alacrity. He turned to Mr. Scogan. "Fortunately," he said, "we can share our pleasures. We are not always condemned to be happy alone."

## Chapter XVII.

IVOR BROUGHT HIS hands down with a bang on to the final chord of his rhapsody. There was just a hint in that triumphant harmony that the seventh had been struck along with the octave by the thumb of the left hand; but the general effect of splendid noise emerged clearly enough. Small details matter little so long as the general effect is good. And, besides, that hint of the seventh was decidedly modern. He turned round in his seat and tossed the hair back out of his eyes.

"There," he said. "That's the best I can do for you, I'm afraid."

Murmurs of applause and gratitude were heard, and Mary, her large china eyes fixed on the performer, cried out aloud, "Wonderful!" and gasped for new breath as though she were suffocating.

Nature and fortune had vied with one another in heaping on Ivor Lombard all their choicest gifts. He had wealth and he was perfectly independent. He was good looking, possessed an irresistible charm of manner, and was the hero of more amorous successes than he could well remember. His accomplishments were extraordinary for their number and variety. He had a beautiful untrained tenor voice; he could improvise, with a startling brilliance, rapidly and loudly, on the piano. He was a good amateur medium and telepathist, and had a considerable first-hand knowledge of the next world. He could write rhymed verses with an extraordinary rapidity. For painting symbolical pictures he had a dashing style, and if the drawing was sometimes a little weak, the colour was always pyrotechnical. He excelled in amateur theatricals and, when occasion offered, he could cook with genius. He resembled Shakespeare in knowing little Latin and less Greek. For a mind like his, education seemed supererogatory. Training would only have destroyed his natural aptitudes.

"Let's go out into the garden," Ivor suggested. "It's a wonderful night."

"Thank you," said Mr. Scogan, "but I for one prefer these still more wonderful arm-chairs." His pipe had begun to bubble oozily every time he pulled at it. He was perfectly happy.

Henry Wimbush was also happy. He looked for a moment over his pince-nez in Ivor's direction and then, without saying anything, returned to the grimy little sixteenth-century account books which were now his favourite reading. He knew more about Sir Ferdinando's household expenses than about his own.

The outdoor party, enrolled under Ivor's banner, consisted of Anne, Mary, Denis, and, rather unexpectedly, Jenny. Outside it was warm and dark; there was no moon. They walked up and down the terrace, and Ivor sang a Neapolitan song: "Stretti, stretti" — close, close — with something about the little Spanish girl to follow. The atmosphere began to palpitate. Ivor put his arm round Anne's waist, dropped his head sideways onto her shoulder, and in that position walked on, singing as he walked. It seemed the easiest, the most natural, thing in the world. Denis wondered why he had never done it. He hated Ivor.

“Let’s go down to the pool,” said Ivor. He disengaged his embrace and turned round to shepherd his little flock. They made their way along the side of the house to the entrance of the yew-tree walk that led down to the lower garden. Between the blank precipitous wall of the house and the tall yew trees the path was a chasm of impenetrable gloom. Somewhere there were steps down to the right, a gap in the yew hedge. Denis, who headed the party, groped his way cautiously; in this darkness, one had an irrational fear of yawning precipices, of horrible spiked obstructions. Suddenly from behind him he heard a shrill, startled, “Oh!” and then a sharp, dry concussion that might have been the sound of a slap. After that, Jenny’s voice was heard pronouncing, “I am going back to the house.” Her tone was decided, and even as she pronounced the words she was melting away into the darkness. The incident, whatever it had been, was closed. Denis resumed his forward groping. From somewhere behind Ivor began to sing again, softly:

“Phillis plus avare que tendre  
Ne gagnant rien à refuser,  
Un jour exigea à Silvandre  
Trente moutons pour un baiser.”

The melody drooped and climbed again with a kind of easy languor; the warm darkness seemed to pulse like blood about them.

“Le lendemain, nouvelle affaire:  
Pour le berger le troc fut bon...”

“Here are the steps,” cried Denis. He guided his companions over the danger, and in a moment they had the turf of the yew-tree walk under their feet. It was lighter here, or at least it was just perceptibly less dark; for the yew walk was wider than the path that had led them under the lea of the house. Looking up, they could see between the high black hedges a strip of sky and a few stars.

“Car il obtint de la bergere...”

Went on Ivor, and then interrupted himself to shout, “I’m going to run down,” and he was off, full speed, down the invisible slope, singing unevenly as he went:

“Trente baisers pour un mouton.”

The others followed. Denis shambled in the rear, vainly exhorting everyone to caution: the slope was steep, one might break one’s neck. What was wrong with these people, he wondered? They had become like young kittens after a dose of cat-nip. He himself felt a certain kittenishness sporting within him; but it was, like all his emotions, rather a theoretical feeling; it did not overmasteringly seek to express itself in a practical demonstration of kittenishness.

“Be careful,” he shouted once more, and hardly were the words out of his mouth when, thump! there was the sound of a heavy fall in front of him, followed by the long “F-f-f-f” of a breath indrawn with pain and afterwards by a very sincere, “Oo-ooh!” Denis was almost pleased; he had told them so, the idiots, and they wouldn’t listen. He trotted down the slope towards the unseen sufferer.

Mary came down the hill like a runaway steam-engine. It was tremendously exciting, this blind rush through the dark; she felt she would never stop. But the ground grew level beneath her feet, her speed insensibly slackened, and suddenly she was caught by an extended arm and brought to an abrupt halt.

"Well," said Ivor as he tightened his embrace, "you're caught now, Anne."

She made an effort to release herself. "It's not Anne. It's Mary."

Ivor burst into a peal of amused laughter. "So it is!" he exclaimed. "I seem to be making nothing but floaters this evening. I've already made one with Jenny." He laughed again, and there was something so jolly about his laughter that Mary could not help laughing too. He did not remove his encircling arm, and somehow it was all so amusing and natural that Mary made no further attempt to escape from it. They walked along by the side of the pool, interlaced. Mary was too short for him to be able, with any comfort, to lay his head on her shoulder. He rubbed his cheek, caressed and caressing, against the thick, sleek mass of her hair. In a little while he began to sing again; the night trembled amorously to the sound of his voice. When he had finished he kissed her. Anne or Mary: Mary or Anne. It didn't seem to make much difference which it was. There were differences in detail, of course; but the general effect was the same; and, after all, the general effect was the important thing.

Denis made his way down the hill.

"Any damage done?" he called out.

"Is that you, Denis? I've hurt my ankle so — and my knee, and my hand. I'm all in pieces."

"My poor Anne," he said. "But then," he couldn't help adding, "it was silly to start running downhill in the dark."

"Ass!" she retorted in a tone of tearful irritation; "of course it was."

He sat down beside her on the grass, and found himself breathing the faint, delicious atmosphere of perfume that she carried always with her.

"Light a match," she commanded. "I want to look at my wounds."

He felt in his pockets for the match-box. The light spurted and then grew steady. Magically, a little universe had been created, a world of colours and forms — Anne's face, the shimmering orange of her dress, her white, bare arms, a patch of green turf — and round about a darkness that had become solid and utterly blind. Anne held out her hands; both were green and earthy with her fall, and the left exhibited two or three red abrasions.

"Not so bad," she said. But Denis was terribly distressed, and his emotion was intensified when, looking up at her face, he saw that the trace of tears, involuntary tears of pain, lingered on her eyelashes. He pulled out his handkerchief and began to wipe away the dirt from the wounded hand. The match went out; it was not worth while to light another. Anne allowed herself to be attended to, meekly and gratefully. "Thank you," she said, when he had finished cleaning and bandaging her hand; and there was something in her tone that made him feel that she had lost her superiority over him, that she was younger than he, had become, suddenly, almost a child. He

felt tremendously large and protective. The feeling was so strong that instinctively he put his arm about her. She drew closer, leaned against him, and so they sat in silence. Then, from below, soft but wonderfully clear through the still darkness, they heard the sound of Ivor's singing. He was going on with his half-finished song:

"Le lendemain Phillis plus tendre,  
Ne voulant déplaire au berger,  
Fut trop heureuse de lui rendre  
Trente moutons pour un baiser."

There was a rather prolonged pause. It was as though time were being allowed for the giving and receiving of a few of those thirty kisses. Then the voice sang on:

"Le lendemain Phillis peu sage  
Aurait donne moutons et chien  
Pour un baiser que le volage  
À Lisette donnait pour rien."

The last note died away into an uninterrupted silence.

"Are you better?" Denis whispered. "Are you comfortable like this?"

She nodded a Yes to both questions.

"Trente moutons pour un baiser." The sheep, the woolly mutton — baa, baa, baa...? Or the shepherd? Yes, decidedly, he felt himself to be the shepherd now. He was the master, the protector. A wave of courage swelled through him, warm as wine. He turned his head, and began to kiss her face, at first rather randomly, then, with more precision, on the mouth.

Anne averted her head; he kissed the ear, the smooth nape that this movement presented him. "No," she protested; "no, Denis."

"Why not?"

"It spoils our friendship, and that was so jolly."

"Bosh!" said Denis.

She tried to explain. "Can't you see," she said, "it isn't...it isn't our stunt at all." It was true. Somehow she had never thought of Denis in the light of a man who might make love; she had never so much as conceived the possibilities of an amorous relationship with him. He was so absurdly young, so...so...she couldn't find the adjective, but she knew what she meant.

"Why isn't it our stunt?" asked Denis. "And, by the way, that's a horrible and inappropriate expression."

"Because it isn't."

"But if I say it is?"

"It makes no difference. I say it isn't."

"I shall make you say it is."

"All right, Denis. But you must do it another time. I must go in and get my ankle into hot water. It's beginning to swell."

Reasons of health could not be gainsaid. Denis got up reluctantly, and helped his companion to her feet. She took a cautious step. "Ooh!" She halted and leaned heavily on his arm.

"I'll carry you," Denis offered. He had never tried to carry a woman, but on the cinema it always looked an easy piece of heroism.

"You couldn't," said Anne.

"Of course I can." He felt larger and more protective than ever. "Put your arms round my neck," he ordered. She did so and, stooping, he picked her up under the knees and lifted her from the ground. Good heavens, what a weight! He took five staggering steps up the slope, then almost lost his equilibrium, and had to deposit his burden suddenly, with something of a bump.

Anne was shaking with laughter. "I said you couldn't, my poor Denis."

"I can," said Denis, without conviction. "I'll try again."

"It's perfectly sweet of you to offer, but I'd rather walk, thanks." She laid her hand on his shoulder and, thus supported, began to limp slowly up the hill.

"My poor Denis!" she repeated, and laughed again. Humiliated, he was silent. It seemed incredible that, only two minutes ago, he should have been holding her in his embrace, kissing her. Incredible. She was helpless then, a child. Now she had regained all her superiority; she was once more the far-off being, desired and unassailable. Why had he been such a fool as to suggest that carrying stunt? He reached the house in a state of the profoundest depression.

He helped Anne upstairs, left her in the hands of a maid, and came down again to the drawing-room. He was surprised to find them all sitting just where he had left them. He had expected that, somehow, everything would be quite different — it seemed such a prodigious time since he went away. All silent and all damned, he reflected, as he looked at them. Mr. Scogan's pipe still wheezed; that was the only sound. Henry Wimbush was still deep in his account books; he had just made the discovery that Sir Ferdinando was in the habit of eating oysters the whole summer through, regardless of the absence of the justifying R. Gombauld, in horn-rimmed spectacles, was reading. Jenny was mysteriously scribbling in her red notebook. And, seated in her favourite arm-chair at the corner of the hearth, Priscilla was looking through a pile of drawings. One by one she held them out at arm's length and, throwing back her mountainous orange head, looked long and attentively through half-closed eyelids. She wore a pale sea-green dress; on the slope of her mauve-powdered décolletage diamonds twinkled. An immensely long cigarette-holder projected at an angle from her face. Diamonds were embedded in her high-piled coiffure; they glittered every time she moved. It was a batch of Ivor's drawings — sketches of Spirit Life, made in the course of tranced tours through the other world. On the back of each sheet descriptive titles were written: "Portrait of an Angel, 15th March '20;" "Astral Beings at Play, 3rd December '19;" "A Party of Souls on their Way to a Higher Sphere, 21st May '21." Before examining the drawing on the obverse of each sheet, she turned it over to read the title. Try as she could — and she tried hard — Priscilla had never seen a vision or succeeded in



establishing any communication with the Spirit World. She had to be content with the reported experiences of others.

"What have you done with the rest of your party?" she asked, looking up as Denis entered the room.

He explained. Anne had gone to bed, Ivor and Mary were still in the garden. He selected a book and a comfortable chair, and tried, as far as the disturbed state of his mind would permit him, to compose himself for an evening's reading. The lamplight was utterly serene; there was no movement save the stir of Priscilla among her papers. All silent and all damned, Denis repeated to himself, all silent and all damned...

It was nearly an hour later when Ivor and Mary made their appearance.

"We waited to see the moon rise," said Ivor.

"It was gibbous, you know," Mary explained, very technical and scientific.

"It was so beautiful down in the garden! The trees, the scent of the flowers, the stars..." Ivor waved his arms. "And when the moon came up, it was really too much. It made me burst into tears." He sat down at the piano and opened the lid.

"There were a great many meteorites," said Mary to anyone who would listen. "The earth must just be coming into the summer shower of them. In July and August..."

But Ivor had already begun to strike the keys. He played the garden, the stars, the scent of flowers, the rising moon. He even put in a nightingale that was not there. Mary looked on and listened with parted lips. The others pursued their occupations, without appearing to be seriously disturbed. On this very July day, exactly three hundred and fifty years ago, Sir Ferdinando had eaten seven dozen oysters. The discovery of this fact gave Henry Wimbush a peculiar pleasure. He had a natural piety which made him delight in the celebration of memorial feasts. The three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the seven dozen oysters...He wished he had known before dinner; he would have ordered champagne.

On her way to bed Mary paid a call. The light was out in Anne's room, but she was not yet asleep.

"Why didn't you come down to the garden with us?" Mary asked.

"I fell down and twisted my ankle. Denis helped me home."

Mary was full of sympathy. Inwardly, too, she was relieved to find Anne's non-appearance so simply accounted for. She had been vaguely suspicious, down there in the garden — suspicious of what, she hardly knew; but there had seemed to be something a little louche in the way she had suddenly found herself alone with Ivor. Not that she minded, of course; far from it. But she didn't like the idea that perhaps she was the victim of a put-up job.

"I do hope you'll be better to-morrow," she said, and she commiserated with Anne on all she had missed — the garden, the stars, the scent of flowers, the meteorites through whose summer shower the earth was now passing, the rising moon and its gibbosity. And then they had had such interesting conversation. What about? About almost everything. Nature, art, science, poetry, the stars, spiritualism, the relations of the sexes, music, religion. Ivor, she thought, had an interesting mind.

The two young ladies parted affectionately.

## Chapter XVIII.

THE NEAREST ROMAN Catholic church was upwards of twenty miles away. Ivor, who was punctilious in his devotions, came down early to breakfast and had his car at the door, ready to start, by a quarter to ten. It was a smart, expensive-looking machine, enamelled a pure lemon yellow and upholstered in emerald green leather. There were two seats — three if you squeezed tightly enough — and their occupants were protected from wind, dust, and weather by a glazed sedan that rose, an elegant eighteenth-century hump, from the midst of the body of the car.

Mary had never been to a Roman Catholic service, thought it would be an interesting experience, and, when the car moved off through the great gates of the courtyard, she was occupying the spare seat in the sedan. The sea-lion horn roared, faintlier, faintlier, and they were gone.

In the parish church of Crome Mr. Bodiham preached on 1 Kings vi. 18: "And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops" — a sermon of immediately local interest. For the past two years the problem of the War Memorial had exercised the minds of all those in Crome who had enough leisure, or mental energy, or party spirit to think of such things. Henry Wimbush was all for a library — a library of local literature, stocked with county histories, old maps of the district, monographs on the local antiquities, dialect dictionaries, handbooks of the local geology and natural history. He liked to think of the villagers, inspired by such reading, making up parties of a Sunday afternoon to look for fossils and flint arrow-heads. The villagers themselves favoured the idea of a memorial reservoir and water supply. But the busiest and most articulate party followed Mr. Bodiham in demanding something religious in character — a second lich-gate, for example, a stained-glass window, a monument of marble, or, if possible, all three. So far, however, nothing had been done, partly because the memorial committee had never been able to agree, partly for the more cogent reason that too little money had been subscribed to carry out any of the proposed schemes. Every three or four months Mr. Bodiham preached a sermon on the subject. His last had been delivered in March; it was high time that his congregation had a fresh reminder.

"And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops."

Mr. Bodiham touched lightly on Solomon's temple. From thence he passed to temples and churches in general. What were the characteristics of these buildings dedicated to God? Obviously, the fact of their, from a human point of view, complete uselessness. They were unpractical buildings "carved with knops." Solomon might have built a library — indeed, what could be more to the taste of the world's wisest man? He might have dug a reservoir — what more useful in a parched city like Jerusalem? He did neither; he built a house all carved with knops, useless and unpractical. Why? Because

he was dedicating the work to God. There had been much talk in Crome about the proposed War Memorial. A War Memorial was, in its very nature, a work dedicated to God. It was a token of thankfulness that the first stage in the culminating world-war had been crowned by the triumph of righteousness; it was at the same time a visibly embodied supplication that God might not long delay the Advent which alone could bring the final peace. A library, a reservoir? Mr. Bodiham scornfully and indignantly condemned the idea. These were works dedicated to man, not to God. As a War Memorial they were totally unsuitable. A lich-gate had been suggested. This was an object which answered perfectly to the definition of a War Memorial: a useless work dedicated to God and carved with knops. One lich-gate, it was true, already existed. But nothing would be easier than to make a second entrance into the churchyard; and a second entrance would need a second gate. Other suggestions had been made. Stained-glass windows, a monument of marble. Both these were admirable, especially the latter. It was high time that the War Memorial was erected. It might soon be too late. At any moment, like a thief in the night, God might come. Meanwhile a difficulty stood in the way. Funds were inadequate. All should subscribe according to their means. Those who had lost relations in the war might reasonably be expected to subscribe a sum equal to that which they would have had to pay in funeral expenses if the relative had died while at home. Further delay was disastrous. The War Memorial must be built at once. He appealed to the patriotism and the Christian sentiments of all his hearers.

Henry Wimbush walked home thinking of the books he would present to the War Memorial Library, if ever it came into existence. He took the path through the fields; it was pleasanter than the road. At the first stile a group of village boys, loutish young fellows all dressed in the hideous ill-fitting black which makes a funeral of every English Sunday and holiday, were assembled, drearily guffawing as they smoked their cigarettes. They made way for Henry Wimbush, touching their caps as he passed. He returned their salute; his bowler and face were one in their unruffled gravity.

In Sir Ferdinando's time, he reflected, in the time of his son, Sir Julius, these young men would have had their Sunday diversions even at Crome, remote and rustic Crome. There would have been archery, skittles, dancing — social amusements in which they would have partaken as members of a conscious community. Now they had nothing, nothing except Mr. Bodiham's forbidding Boys' Club and the rare dances and concerts organised by himself. Boredom or the urban pleasures of the county metropolis were the alternatives that presented themselves to these poor youths. Country pleasures were no more; they had been stamped out by the Puritans.

In Manningham's Diary for 1600 there was a queer passage, he remembered, a very queer passage. Certain magistrates in Berkshire, Puritan magistrates, had had wind of a scandal. One moonlit summer night they had ridden out with their posse and there, among the hills, they had come upon a company of men and women, dancing, stark naked, among the sheepcotes. The magistrates and their men had ridden their horses into the crowd. How self-conscious the poor people must suddenly have felt, how helpless without their clothes against armed and booted horsemen! The dancers were

arrested, whipped, gaoled, set in the stocks; the moonlight dance is never danced again. What old, earthy, Panic rite came to extinction here? he wondered. Who knows? — perhaps their ancestors had danced like this in the moonlight ages before Adam and Eve were so much as thought of. He liked to think so. And now it was no more. These weary young men, if they wanted to dance, would have to bicycle six miles to the town. The country was desolate, without life of its own, without indigenous pleasures. The pious magistrates had snuffed out for ever a little happy flame that had burned from the beginning of time.

“And as on Tullia’s tomb one lamp burned clear,  
Unchanged for fifteen hundred year...”

He repeated the lines to himself, and was desolated to think of all the murdered past.

## Chapter XIX.

HENRY WIMBUSH’S LONG cigar burned aromatically. The “History of Crome” lay on his knee; slowly he turned over the pages.

“I can’t decide what episode to read you to-night,” he said thoughtfully. “Sir Ferdinando’s voyages are not without interest. Then, of course, there’s his son, Sir Julius. It was he who suffered from the delusion that his perspiration engendered flies; it drove him finally to suicide. Or there’s Sir Cyprian.” He turned the pages more rapidly. “Or Sir Henry. Or Sir George...No, I’m inclined to think I won’t read about any of these.”

“But you must read something,” insisted Mr. Scogan, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

“I think I shall read about my grandfather,” said Henry Wimbush, “and the events that led up to his marriage with the eldest daughter of the last Sir Ferdinando.”

“Good,” said Mr. Scogan. “We are listening.”

“Before I begin reading,” said Henry Wimbush, looking up from the book and taking off the pince-nez which he had just fitted to his nose— “before I begin, I must say a few preliminary words about Sir Ferdinando, the last of the Lapiths. At the death of the virtuous and unfortunate Sir Hercules, Ferdinando found himself in possession of the family fortune, not a little increased by his father’s temperance and thrift; he applied himself forthwith to the task of spending it, which he did in an ample and jovial fashion. By the time he was forty he had eaten and, above all, drunk and loved away about half his capital, and would infallibly have soon got rid of the rest in the same manner, if he had not had the good fortune to become so madly enamoured of the Rector’s daughter as to make a proposal of marriage. The young lady accepted him, and in less than a year had become the absolute mistress of Crome and her husband. An extraordinary reformation made itself apparent in Sir Ferdinando’s character. He grew regular and economical in his habits; he even became temperate, rarely drinking

more than a bottle and a half of port at a sitting. The waning fortune of the Lapiths began once more to wax, and that in despite of the hard times (for Sir Ferdinando married in 1809 in the height of the Napoleonic Wars). A prosperous and dignified old age, cheered by the spectacle of his children's growth and happiness — for Lady Lapith had already borne him three daughters, and there seemed no good reason why she should not bear many more of them, and sons as well — a patriarchal decline into the family vault, seemed now to be Sir Ferdinando's enviable destiny. But Providence willed otherwise. To Napoleon, cause already of such infinite mischief, was due, though perhaps indirectly, the untimely and violent death which put a period to this reformed existence.

"Sir Ferdinando, who was above all things a patriot, had adopted, from the earliest days of the conflict with the French, his own peculiar method of celebrating our victories. When the happy news reached London, it was his custom to purchase immediately a large store of liquor and, taking a place on whichever of the outgoing coaches he happened to light on first, to drive through the country proclaiming the good news to all he met on the road and dispensing it, along with the liquor, at every stopping-place to all who cared to listen or drink. Thus, after the Nile, he had driven as far as Edinburgh; and later, when the coaches, wreathed with laurel for triumph, with cypress for mourning, were setting out with the news of Nelson's victory and death, he sat through all a chilly October night on the box of the Norwich 'Meteor' with a nautical keg of rum on his knees and two cases of old brandy under the seat. This genial custom was one of the many habits which he abandoned on his marriage. The victories in the Peninsula, the retreat from Moscow, Leipzig, and the abdication of the tyrant all went uncelebrated. It so happened, however, that in the summer of 1815 Sir Ferdinando was staying for a few weeks in the capital. There had been a succession of anxious, doubtful days; then came the glorious news of Waterloo. It was too much for Sir Ferdinando; his joyous youth awoke again within him. He hurried to his wine merchant and bought a dozen bottles of 1760 brandy. The Bath coach was on the point of starting; he bribed his way on to the box and, seated in glory beside the driver, proclaimed aloud the downfall of the Corsican bandit and passed about the warm liquid joy. They clattered through Uxbridge, Slough, Maidenhead. Sleeping Reading was awakened by the great news. At Didcot one of the ostlers was so much overcome by patriotic emotions and the 1760 brandy that he found it impossible to do up the buckles of the harness. The night began to grow chilly, and Sir Ferdinando found that it was not enough to take a nip at every stage: to keep up his vital warmth he was compelled to drink between the stages as well. They were approaching Swindon. The coach was travelling at a dizzy speed — six miles in the last half-hour — when, without having manifested the slightest premonitory symptom of unsteadiness, Sir Ferdinando suddenly toppled sideways off his seat and fell, head foremost, into the road. An unpleasant jolt awakened the slumbering passengers. The coach was brought to a standstill; the guard ran back with a light. He found Sir Ferdinando still alive, but unconscious; blood was oozing from his mouth. The back wheels of the coach had passed over his body, breaking most of

his ribs and both arms. His skull was fractured in two places. They picked him up, but he was dead before they reached the next stage. So perished Sir Ferdinando, a victim to his own patriotism. Lady Lapith did not marry again, but determined to devote the rest of her life to the well-being of her three children — Georgiana, now five years old, and Emmeline and Caroline, twins of two.”

Henry Wimbush paused, and once more put on his pince-nez. “So much by way of introduction,” he said. “Now I can begin to read about my grandfather.”

“One moment,” said Mr. Scogan, “till I’ve refilled my pipe.”

Mr. Wimbush waited. Seated apart in a corner of the room, Ivor was showing Mary his sketches of Spirit Life. They spoke together in whispers.

Mr. Scogan had lighted his pipe again. “Fire away,” he said.

Henry Wimbush fired away.

“It was in the spring of 1833 that my grandfather, George Wimbush, first made the acquaintance of the ‘three lovely Lapiths,’ as they were always called. He was then a young man of twenty-two, with curly yellow hair and a smooth pink face that was the mirror of his youthful and ingenuous mind. He had been educated at Harrow and Christ Church, he enjoyed hunting and all other field sports, and, though his circumstances were comfortable to the verge of affluence, his pleasures were temperate and innocent. His father, an East Indian merchant, had destined him for a political career, and had gone to considerable expense in acquiring a pleasant little Cornish borough as a twenty-first birthday gift for his son. He was justly indignant when, on the very eve of George’s majority, the Reform Bill of 1832 swept the borough out of existence. The inauguration of George’s political career had to be postponed. At the time he got to know the lovely Lapiths he was waiting; he was not at all impatient.

“The lovely Lapiths did not fail to impress him. Georgiana, the eldest, with her black ringlets, her flashing eyes, her noble aquiline profile, her swan-like neck, and sloping shoulders, was orientally dazzling; and the twins, with their delicately turned-up noses, their blue eyes, and chestnut hair, were an identical pair of ravishingly English charmers.

“Their conversation at this first meeting proved, however, to be so forbidding that, but for the invincible attraction exercised by their beauty, George would never have had the courage to follow up the acquaintance. The twins, looking up their noses at him with an air of languid superiority, asked him what he thought of the latest French poetry and whether he liked the ‘Indiana’ of George Sand. But what was almost worse was the question with which Georgiana opened her conversation with him. ‘In music,’ she asked, leaning forward and fixing him with her large dark eyes, ‘are you a classicist or a transcendentalist?’ George did not lose his presence of mind. He had enough appreciation of music to know that he hated anything classical, and so, with a promptitude which did him credit, he replied, ‘I am a transcendentalist.’ Georgiana smiled bewitchingly. ‘I am glad,’ she said; ‘so am I. You went to hear Paganini last week, of course. “The prayer of Moses” — ah!’ She closed her eyes. ‘Do you know anything more transcendental than that?’ ‘No,’ said George, ‘I don’t.’ He hesitated,

was about to go on speaking, and then decided that after all it would be wiser not to say — what was in fact true — that he had enjoyed above all Paganini's Farmyard Imitations. The man had made his fiddle bray like an ass, cluck like a hen, grunt, squeal, bark, neigh, quack, bellow, and growl; that last item, in George's estimation, had almost compensated for the tediousness of the rest of the concert. He smiled with pleasure at the thought of it. Yes, decidedly, he was no classicist in music; he was a thoroughgoing transcendentalist.

"George followed up this first introduction by paying a call on the young ladies and their mother, who occupied, during the season, a small but elegant house in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square. Lady Lapith made a few discreet inquiries, and having found that George's financial position, character, and family were all passably good, she asked him to dine. She hoped and expected that her daughters would all marry into the peerage; but, being a prudent woman, she knew it was advisable to prepare for all contingencies. George Wimbush, she thought, would make an excellent second string for one of the twins.

"At this first dinner, George's partner was Emmeline. They talked of Nature. Emmeline protested that to her high mountains were a feeling and the hum of human cities torture. George agreed that the country was very agreeable, but held that London during the season also had its charms. He noticed with surprise and a certain solicitous distress that Miss Emmeline's appetite was poor, that it didn't, in fact, exist. Two spoonfuls of soup, a morsel of fish, no bird, no meat, and three grapes — that was her whole dinner. He looked from time to time at her two sisters; Georgiana and Caroline seemed to be quite as abstemious. They waved away whatever was offered them with an expression of delicate disgust, shutting their eyes and averting their faces from the proffered dish, as though the lemon sole, the duck, the loin of veal, the trifle, were objects revolting to the sight and smell. George, who thought the dinner capital, ventured to comment on the sisters' lack of appetite.

"'Pray, don't talk to me of eating,' said Emmeline, drooping like a sensitive plant. 'We find it so coarse, so unspiritual, my sisters and I. One can't think of one's soul while one is eating.'

"George agreed; one couldn't. 'But one must live,' he said.

"'Alas!' Emmeline sighed. 'One must. Death is very beautiful, don't you think?' She broke a corner off a piece of toast and began to nibble at it languidly. 'But since, as you say, one must live...' She made a little gesture of resignation. 'Luckily a very little suffices to keep one alive.' She put down her corner of toast half eaten.

"George regarded her with some surprise. She was pale, but she looked extraordinarily healthy, he thought; so did her sisters. Perhaps if you were really spiritual you needed less food. He, clearly, was not spiritual.

"After this he saw them frequently. They all liked him, from Lady Lapith downwards. True, he was not very romantic or poetical; but he was such a pleasant, unpretentious, kind-hearted young man, that one couldn't help liking him. For his part, he thought them wonderful, wonderful, especially Georgiana. He enveloped them all in a warm,

protective affection. For they needed protection; they were altogether too frail, too spiritual for this world. They never ate, they were always pale, they often complained of fever, they talked much and lovingly of death, they frequently swooned. Georgiana was the most ethereal of all; of the three she ate least, swooned most often, talked most of death, and was the palest — with a pallor that was so startling as to appear positively artificial. At any moment, it seemed, she might loose her precarious hold on this material world and become all spirit. To George the thought was a continual agony. If she were to die...

"She contrived, however, to live through the season, and that in spite of the numerous balls, routs, and other parties of pleasure which, in company with the rest of the lovely trio, she never failed to attend. In the middle of July the whole household moved down to the country. George was invited to spend the month of August at Crome.

"The house-party was distinguished; in the list of visitors figured the names of two marriageable young men of title. George had hoped that country air, repose, and natural surroundings might have restored to the three sisters their appetites and the roses of their cheeks. He was mistaken. For dinner, the first evening, Georgiana ate only an olive, two or three salted almonds, and half a peach. She was as pale as ever. During the meal she spoke of love.

"‘True love,’ she said, ‘being infinite and eternal, can only be consummated in eternity. Indiana and Sir Rodolphe celebrated the mystic wedding of their souls by jumping into Niagara. Love is incompatible with life. The wish of two people who truly love one another is not to live together but to die together.’

"‘Come, come, my dear,’ said Lady Lapith, stout and practical. ‘What would become of the next generation, pray, if all the world acted on your principles?’

"‘Mamma!...’ Georgiana protested, and dropped her eyes.

"‘In my young days,’ Lady Lapith went on, ‘I should have been laughed out of countenance if I’d said a thing like that. But then in my young days souls weren’t as fashionable as they are now and we didn’t think death was at all poetical. It was just unpleasant.’

"‘Mamma!...’ Emmeline and Caroline implored in unison.

"‘In my young days—’ Lady Lapith was launched into her subject; nothing, it seemed, could stop her now. ‘In my young days, if you didn’t eat, people told you you needed a dose of rhubarb. Nowadays...’

"There was a cry; Georgiana had swooned sideways on to Lord Timpany’s shoulder. It was a desperate expedient; but it was successful. Lady Lapith was stopped.

"The days passed in an uneventful round of pleasures. Of all the gay party George alone was unhappy. Lord Timpany was paying his court to Georgiana, and it was clear that he was not unfavourably received. George looked on, and his soul was a hell of jealousy and despair. The boisterous company of the young men became intolerable to him; he shrank from them, seeking gloom and solitude. One morning, having broken away from them on some vague pretext, he returned to the house alone. The young men were bathing in the pool below; their cries and laughter floated up to him, making



the quiet house seem lonelier and more silent. The lovely sisters and their mamma still kept their chambers; they did not customarily make their appearance till luncheon, so that the male guests had the morning to themselves. George sat down in the hall and abandoned himself to thought.

“At any moment she might die; at any moment she might become Lady Timpany. It was terrible, terrible. If she died, then he would die too; he would go to seek her beyond the grave. If she became Lady Timpany...ah, then! The solution of the problem would not be so simple. If she became Lady Timpany: it was a horrible thought. But then suppose she were in love with Timpany — though it seemed incredible that anyone could be in love with Timpany — suppose her life depended on Timpany, suppose she couldn’t live without him? He was fumbling his way along this clueless labyrinth of suppositions when the clock struck twelve. On the last stroke, like an automaton released by the turning clockwork, a little maid, holding a large covered tray, popped out of the door that led from the kitchen regions into the hall. From his deep arm-chair George watched her (himself, it was evident, unobserved) with an idle curiosity. She pattered across the room and came to a halt in front of what seemed a blank expanse of panelling. She reached out her hand and, to George’s extreme astonishment, a little door swung open, revealing the foot of a winding staircase. Turning sideways in order to get her tray through the narrow opening, the little maid darted in with a rapid crab-like motion. The door closed behind her with a click. A minute later it opened again and the maid, without her tray, hurried back across the hall and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. George tried to recompose his thoughts, but an invincible curiosity drew his mind towards the hidden door, the staircase, the little maid. It was in vain he told himself that the matter was none of his business, that to explore the secrets of that surprising door, that mysterious staircase within, would be a piece of unforgivable rudeness and indiscretion. It was in vain; for five minutes he struggled heroically with his curiosity, but at the end of that time he found himself standing in front of the innocent sheet of panelling through which the little maid had disappeared. A glance sufficed to show him the position of the secret door — secret, he perceived, only to those who looked with a careless eye. It was just an ordinary door let in flush with the panelling. No latch nor handle betrayed its position, but an unobtrusive catch sunk in the wood invited the thumb. George was astonished that he had not noticed it before; now he had seen it, it was so obvious, almost as obvious as the cupboard door in the library with its lines of imitation shelves and its dummy books. He pulled back the catch and peeped inside. The staircase, of which the degrees were made not of stone but of blocks of ancient oak, wound up and out of sight. A slit-like window admitted the daylight; he was at the foot of the central tower, and the little window looked out over the terrace; they were still shouting and splashing in the pool below.

“George closed the door and went back to his seat. But his curiosity was not satisfied. Indeed, this partial satisfaction had but whetted its appetite. Where did the staircase lead? What was the errand of the little maid? It was no business of his, he kept repeating — no business of his. He tried to read, but his attention wandered. A quarter-past

twelve sounded on the harmonious clock. Suddenly determined, George rose, crossed the room, opened the hidden door, and began to ascend the stairs. He passed the first window, corkscrewed round, and came to another. He paused for a moment to look out; his heart beat uncomfortably, as though he were affronting some unknown danger. What he was doing, he told himself, was extremely ungentlemanly, horribly underbred. He tiptoed onward and upward. One turn more, then half a turn, and a door confronted him. He halted before it, listened; he could hear no sound. Putting his eye to the keyhole, he saw nothing but a stretch of white sunlit wall. Emboldened, he turned the handle and stepped across the threshold. There he halted, petrified by what he saw, mutely gaping.

“In the middle of a pleasantly sunny little room— ‘it is now Priscilla’s boudoir,’ Mr. Wimbush remarked parenthetically — stood a small circular table of mahogany. Crystal, porcelain, and silver, — all the shining apparatus of an elegant meal — were mirrored in its polished depths. The carcase of a cold chicken, a bowl of fruit, a great ham, deeply gashed to its heart of tenderest white and pink, the brown cannon ball of a cold plum-pudding, a slender Hock bottle, and a decanter of claret jostled one another for a place on this festive board. And round the table sat the three sisters, the three lovely Lapiths — eating!

“At George’s sudden entrance they had all looked towards the door, and now they sat, petrified by the same astonishment which kept George fixed and staring. Georgiana, who sat immediately facing the door, gazed at him with dark, enormous eyes. Between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand she was holding a drumstick of the dismembered chicken; her little finger, elegantly crooked, stood apart from the rest of her hand. Her mouth was open, but the drumstick had never reached its destination; it remained, suspended, frozen, in mid-air. The other two sisters had turned round to look at the intruder. Caroline still grasped her knife and fork; Emmeline’s fingers were round the stem of her claret glass. For what seemed a very long time, George and the three sisters stared at one another in silence. They were a group of statues. Then suddenly there was movement. Georgiana dropped her chicken bone, Caroline’s knife and fork clattered on her plate. The movement propagated itself, grew more decisive; Emmeline sprang to her feet, uttering a cry. The wave of panic reached George; he turned and, mumbling something unintelligible as he went, rushed out of the room and down the winding stairs. He came to a standstill in the hall, and there, all by himself in the quiet house, he began to laugh.

“At luncheon it was noticed that the sisters ate a little more than usual. Georgiana toyed with some French beans and a spoonful of calves’-foot jelly. ‘I feel a little stronger to-day,’ she said to Lord Timpany, when he congratulated her on this increase of appetite; ‘a little more material,’ she added, with a nervous laugh. Looking up, she caught George’s eye; a blush suffused her cheeks and she looked hastily away.

“In the garden that afternoon they found themselves for a moment alone.

“You won’t tell anyone, George? Promise you won’t tell anyone,” she implored. “It would make us look so ridiculous. And besides, eating IS unspiritual, isn’t it? Say you won’t tell anyone.”

“‘I will,’ said George brutally. ‘I’ll tell everyone, unless...’

“‘It’s blackmail.’

“‘I don’t care,’ said George. ‘I’ll give you twenty-four hours to decide.’

“Lady Lapith was disappointed, of course; she had hoped for better things — for Timpany and a coronet. But George, after all, wasn’t so bad. They were married at the New Year.

“My poor grandfather!” Mr. Wimbush added, as he closed his book and put away his pince-nez. “Whenever I read in the papers about oppressed nationalities, I think of him.” He relighted his cigar. “It was a maternal government, highly centralised, and there were no representative institutions.”

Henry Wimbush ceased speaking. In the silence that ensued Ivor’s whispered commentary on the spirit sketches once more became audible. Priscilla, who had been dozing, suddenly woke up.

“What?” she said in the startled tones of one newly returned to consciousness; “what?”

Jenny caught the words. She looked up, smiled, nodded reassuringly. “It’s about a ham,” she said.

“What’s about a ham?”

“What Henry has been reading.” She closed the red notebook lying on her knees and slipped a rubber band round it. “I’m going to bed,” she announced, and got up.

“So am I,” said Anne, yawning. But she lacked the energy to rise from her arm-chair.

The night was hot and oppressive. Round the open windows the curtains hung unmoving. Ivor, fanning himself with the portrait of an Astral Being, looked out into the darkness and drew a breath.

“The air’s like wool,” he declared.

“It will get cooler after midnight,” said Henry Wimbush, and cautiously added, “perhaps.”

“I shan’t sleep, I know.”

Priscilla turned her head in his direction; the monumental coiffure nodded exorbitantly at her slightest movement. “You must make an effort,” she said. “When I can’t sleep, I concentrate my will: I say, ‘I will sleep, I am asleep!’ And pop! off I go. That’s the power of thought.”

“But does it work on stuffy nights?” Ivor inquired. “I simply cannot sleep on a stuffy night.”

“Nor can I,” said Mary, “except out of doors.”

“Out of doors! What a wonderful idea!” In the end they decided to sleep on the towers — Mary on the western tower, Ivor on the eastern. There was a flat expanse of leads on each of the towers, and you could get a mattress through the trap doors that opened on to them. Under the stars, under the gibbous moon, assuredly they would

sleep. The mattresses were hauled up, sheets and blankets were spread, and an hour later the two insomniasts, each on his separate tower, were crying their good-nights across the dividing gulf.

On Mary the sleep-compelling charm of the open air did not work with its expected magic. Even through the mattress one could not fail to be aware that the leads were extremely hard. Then there were noises: the owls screeched tirelessly, and once, roused by some unknown terror, all the geese of the farmyard burst into a sudden frenzy of cackling. The stars and the gibbous moon demanded to be looked at, and when one meteorite had streaked across the sky, you could not help waiting, open-eyed and alert, for the next. Time passed; the moon climbed higher and higher in the sky. Mary felt less sleepy than she had when she first came out. She sat up and looked over the parapet. Had Ivor been able to sleep? she wondered. And as though in answer to her mental question, from behind the chimney-stack at the farther end of the roof a white form noiselessly emerged — a form that, in the moonlight, was recognisably Ivor's. Spreading his arms to right and left, like a tight-rope dancer, he began to walk forward along the roof-tree of the house. He swayed terrifyingly as he advanced. Mary looked on speechlessly; perhaps he was walking in his sleep! Suppose he were to wake up suddenly, now! If she spoke or moved it might mean his death. She dared look no more, but sank back on her pillows. She listened intently. For what seemed an immensely long time there was no sound. Then there was a patter of feet on the tiles, followed by a scrabbling noise and a whispered "Damn!" And suddenly Ivor's head and shoulders appeared above the parapet. One leg followed, then the other. He was on the leads. Mary pretended to wake up with a start.

"Oh!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

"I couldn't sleep," he explained, "so I came along to see if you couldn't. One gets bored by oneself on a tower. Don't you find it so?"

It was light before five. Long, narrow clouds barred the east, their edges bright with orange fire. The sky was pale and watery. With the mournful scream of a soul in pain, a monstrous peacock, flying heavily up from below, alighted on the parapet of the tower. Ivor and Mary started broad awake.

"Catch him!" cried Ivor, jumping up. "We'll have a feather." The frightened peacock ran up and down the parapet in an absurd distress, curtsying and bobbing and clucking; his long tail swung ponderously back and forth as he turned and turned again. Then with a flap and swish he launched himself upon the air and sailed magnificently earthward, with a recovered dignity. But he had left a trophy. Ivor had his feather, a long-lashed eye of purple and green, of blue and gold. He handed it to his companion.

"An angel's feather," he said.

Mary looked at it for a moment, gravely and intently. Her purple pyjamas clothed her with an ampleness that hid the lines of her body; she looked like some large, comfortable, unjointed toy, a sort of Teddy-bear — but a Teddy bear with an angel's head, pink cheeks, and hair like a bell of gold. An angel's face, the feather of an angel's wing...Somehow the whole atmosphere of this sunrise was rather angelic.

"It's extraordinary to think of sexual selection," she said at last, looking up from her contemplation of the miraculous feather.

"Extraordinary!" Ivor echoed. "I select you, you select me. What luck!"

He put his arm round her shoulders and they stood looking eastward. The first sunlight had begun to warm and colour the pale light of the dawn. Mauve pyjamas and white pyjamas; they were a young and charming couple. The rising sun touched their faces. It was all extremely symbolic; but then, if you choose to think so, nothing in this world is not symbolical. Profound and beautiful truth!

"I must be getting back to my tower," said Ivor at last.

"Already?"

"I'm afraid so. The varletry will soon be up and about."

"Ivor..." There was a prolonged and silent farewell.

"And now," said Ivor, "I repeat my tight-rope stunt."

Mary threw her arms round his neck. "You mustn't, Ivor. It's dangerous. Please."

He had to yield at last to her entreaties. "All right," he said, "I'll go down through the house and up at the other end."

He vanished through the trap door into the darkness that still lurked within the shuttered house. A minute later he had reappeared on the farther tower; he waved his hand, and then sank down, out of sight, behind the parapet. From below, in the house, came the thin wasp-like buzzing of an alarm-clock. He had gone back just in time.

## Chapter XX.

IVOR WAS GONE. Lounging behind the wind-screen in his yellow sedan he was whirling across rural England. Social and amorous engagements of the most urgent character called him from hall to baronial hall, from castle to castle, from Elizabethan manor-house to Georgian mansion, over the whole expanse of the kingdom. To-day in Somerset, to-morrow in Warwickshire, on Saturday in the West riding, by Tuesday morning in Argyll — Ivor never rested. The whole summer through, from the beginning of July till the end of September, he devoted himself to his engagements; he was a martyr to them. In the autumn he went back to London for a holiday. Crome had been a little incident, an evanescent bubble on the stream of his life; it belonged already to the past. By tea-time he would be at Goble, and there would be Zenobia's welcoming smile. And on Thursday morning — but that was a long, long way ahead. He would think of Thursday morning when Thursday morning arrived. Meanwhile there was Goble, meanwhile Zenobia.

In the visitor's book at Crome Ivor had left, according to his invariable custom in these cases, a poem. He had improvised it magisterially in the ten minutes preceding his departure. Denis and Mr. Scogan strolled back together from the gates of the courtyard, whence they had bidden their last farewells; on the writing-table in the hall

they found the visitor's book, open, and Ivor's composition scarcely dry. Mr. Scogan read it aloud:

"The magic of those immemorial kings,  
Who webbed enchantment on the bowls of night.  
Sleeps in the soul of all created things;  
In the blue sea, th' Acroceraunian height,  
In the eyed butterfly's auricular wings  
And orgied visions of the anchorite;  
In all that singing flies and flying sings,  
In rain, in pain, in delicate delight.  
But much more magic, much more cogent spells  
Weave here their wizardries about my soul.  
Crome calls me like the voice of vesperal bells,  
Haunts like a ghostly-peopled necropole.  
Fate tears me hence. Hard fate! since far from Crome  
My soul must weep, remembering its Home."

"Very nice and tasteful and tactful," said Mr. Scogan, when he had finished. "I am only troubled by the butterfly's auricular wings. You have a first-hand knowledge of the workings of a poet's mind, Denis; perhaps you can explain."

"What could be simpler," said Denis. "It's a beautiful word, and Ivor wanted to say that the wings were golden."

"You make it luminously clear."

"One suffers so much," Denis went on, "from the fact that beautiful words don't always mean what they ought to mean. Recently, for example, I had a whole poem ruined, just because the word 'carminative' didn't mean what it ought to have meant. Carminative — it's admirable, isn't it?"

"Admirable," Mr. Scogan agreed. "And what does it mean?"

"It's a word I've treasured from my earliest infancy," said Denis, "treasured and loved. They used to give me cinnamon when I had a cold — quite useless, but not disagreeable. One poured it drop by drop out of narrow bottles, a golden liquor, fierce and fiery. On the label was a list of its virtues, and among other things it was described as being in the highest degree carminative. I adored the word. 'Isn't it carminative?' I used to say to myself when I'd taken my dose. It seemed so wonderfully to describe that sensation of internal warmth, that glow, that — what shall I call it? — physical self-satisfaction which followed the drinking of cinnamon. Later, when I discovered alcohol, 'carminative' described for me that similar, but nobler, more spiritual glow which wine evokes not only in the body but in the soul as well. The carminative virtues of burgundy, of rum, of old brandy, of Lacryma Christi, of Marsala, of Aleatico, of stout, of gin, of champagne, of claret, of the raw new wine of this year's Tuscan vintage — I compared them, I classified them. Marsala is rosily, downily carminative; gin pricks and refreshes while it warms. I had a whole table of carmination values. And

now” — Denis spread out his hands, palms upwards, despairingly — “now I know what carminative really means.”

“Well, what DOES it mean?” asked Mr. Scogan, a little impatiently.

“Carminative,” said Denis, lingering lovingly over the syllables, “carminative. I imagined vaguely that it had something to do with carmen-carminis, still more vaguely with caro-carnis, and its derivations, like carnival and carnation. Carminative — there was the idea of singing and the idea of flesh, rose-coloured and warm, with a suggestion of the jollities of mi-Careme and the masked holidays of Venice. Carminative — the warmth, the glow, the interior ripeness were all in the word. Instead of which...”

“Do come to the point, my dear Denis,” protested Mr. Scogan. “Do come to the point.”

“Well, I wrote a poem the other day,” said Denis; “I wrote a poem about the effects of love.”

“Others have done the same before you,” said Mr. Scogan. “There is no need to be ashamed.”

“I was putting forward the notion,” Denis went on, “that the effects of love were often similar to the effects of wine, that Eros could intoxicate as well as Bacchus. Love, for example, is essentially carminative. It gives one the sense of warmth, the glow.

‘And passion carminative as wine...’

was what I wrote. Not only was the line elegantly sonorous; it was also, I flattered myself, very aptly compendiously expressive. Everything was in the word carminative — a detailed, exact foreground, an immense, indefinite hinterland of suggestion.

‘And passion carminative as wine...’

I was not ill-pleased. And then suddenly it occurred to me that I had never actually looked up the word in a dictionary. Carminative had grown up with me from the days of the cinnamon bottle. It had always been taken for granted. Carminative: for me the word was as rich in content as some tremendous, elaborate work of art; it was a complete landscape with figures.

‘And passion carminative as wine...’

It was the first time I had ever committed the word to writing, and all at once I felt I would like lexicographical authority for it. A small English-German dictionary was all I had at hand. I turned up C, ca, car, carm. There it was: ‘Carminative: windtreibend.’ Windtreibend!” he repeated. Mr. Scogan laughed. Denis shook his head. “Ah,” he said, “for me it was no laughing matter. For me it marked the end of a chapter, the death of something young and precious. There were the years — years of childhood and innocence — when I had believed that carminative meant — well, carminative. And now, before me lies the rest of my life — a day, perhaps, ten years, half a century, when I shall know that carminative means windtreibend.

‘Plus ne suis ce que j’ai été

Et ne le saurai jamais être.’

It is a realisation that makes one rather melancholy.”

“Carminative,” said Mr. Scogan thoughtfully.

“Carminative,” Denis repeated, and they were silent for a time. “Words,” said Denis at last, “words — I wonder if you can realise how much I love them. You are too much preoccupied with mere things and ideas and people to understand the full beauty of words. Your mind is not a literary mind. The spectacle of Mr. Gladstone finding thirty-four rhymes to the name ‘Margot’ seems to you rather pathetic than anything else. Mallarmé’s envelopes with their versified addresses leave you cold, unless they leave you pitiful; you can’t see that

‘Apte à ne point te cabrer, hue!

Poste et j’ajouterais, dia!

Si tu ne fuis onze-bis Rue

Balzac, chez cet Hérédia,’

is a little miracle.”

“You’re right,” said Mr. Scogan. “I can’t.”

“You don’t feel it to be magical?”

“No.”

“That’s the test for the literary mind,” said Denis; “the feeling of magic, the sense that words have power. The technical, verbal part of literature is simply a development of magic. Words are man’s first and most grandiose invention. With language he created a whole new universe; what wonder if he loved words and attributed power to them! With fitted, harmonious words the magicians summoned rabbits out of empty hats and spirits from the elements. Their descendants, the literary men, still go on with the process, morticing their verbal formulas together, and, before the power of the finished spell, trembling with delight and awe. Rabbits out of empty hats? No, their spells are more subtly powerful, for they evoke emotions out of empty minds. Formulated by their art the most insipid statements become enormously significant. For example, I proffer the constatation, ‘Black ladders lack bladders.’ A self-evident truth, one on which it would not have been worth while to insist, had I chosen to formulate it in such words as ‘Black fire-escapes have no bladders,’ or, ‘Les échelles noires manquent de vessie.’ But since I put it as I do, ‘Black ladders lack bladders,’ it becomes, for all its self-evidence, significant, unforgettable, moving. The creation by word-power of something out of nothing — what is that but magic? And, I may add, what is that but literature? Half the world’s greatest poetry is simply ‘Les échelles noires manquent de vessie,’ translated into magic significance as, ‘Black ladders lack bladders.’ And you can’t appreciate words. I’m sorry for you.”

“A mental carminative,” said Mr. Scogan reflectively. “That’s what you need.”

## Chapter XXI.

PERCHED ON ITS four stone mushrooms, the little granary stood two or three feet above the grass of the green close. Beneath it there was a perpetual shade and a



damp growth of long, luxuriant grasses. Here, in the shadow, in the green dampness, a family of white ducks had sought shelter from the afternoon sun. Some stood, preening themselves, some reposed with their long bellies pressed to the ground, as though the cool grass were water. Little social noises burst fitfully forth, and from time to time some pointed tail would execute a brilliant Lisztian tremolo. Suddenly their jovial repose was shattered. A prodigious thump shook the wooden flooring above their heads; the whole granary trembled, little fragments of dirt and crumbled wood rained down among them. With a loud, continuous quacking the ducks rushed out from beneath this nameless menace, and did not stay their flight till they were safely in the farmyard.

"Don't lose your temper," Anne was saying. "Listen! You've frightened the ducks. Poor dears! no wonder." She was sitting sideways in a low, wooden chair. Her right elbow rested on the back of the chair and she supported her cheek on her hand. Her long, slender body drooped into curves of a lazy grace. She was smiling, and she looked at Gombauld through half-closed eyes.

"Damn you!" Gombauld repeated, and stamped his foot again. He glared at her round the half-finished portrait on the easel.

"Poor ducks!" Anne repeated. The sound of their quacking was faint in the distance; it was inaudible.

"Can't you see you make me lose my time?" he asked. "I can't work with you dangling about distractingly like this."

"You'd lose less time if you stopped talking and stamping your feet and did a little painting for a change. After all, what am I dangling about for, except to be painted?"

Gombauld made a noise like a growl. "You're awful," he said, with conviction. "Why do you ask me to come and stay here? Why do you tell me you'd like me to paint your portrait?"

"For the simple reasons that I like you — at least, when you're in a good temper — and that I think you're a good painter."

"For the simple reason" — Gombauld mimicked her voice — "that you want me to make love to you and, when I do, to have the amusement of running away."

Anne threw back her head and laughed. "So you think it amuses me to have to evade your advances! So like a man! If you only knew how gross and awful and boring men are when they try to make love and you don't want them to make love! If you could only see yourselves through our eyes!"

Gombauld picked up his palette and brushes and attacked his canvas with the ardour of irritation. "I suppose you'll be saying next that you didn't start the game, that it was I who made the first advances, and that you were the innocent victim who sat still and never did anything that could invite or allure me on."

"So like a man again!" said Anne. "It's always the same old story about the woman tempting the man. The woman lures, fascinates, invites; and man — noble man, innocent man — falls a victim. My poor Gombauld! Surely you're not going to sing that old song again. It's so unintelligent, and I always thought you were a man of sense."

"Thanks," said Gombauld.

"Be a little objective," Anne went on. "Can't you see that you're simply externalising your own emotions? That's what you men are always doing; it's so barbarously naive. You feel one of your loose desires for some woman, and because you desire her strongly you immediately accuse her of luring you on, of deliberately provoking and inviting the desire. You have the mentality of savages. You might just as well say that a plate of strawberries and cream deliberately lures you on to feel greedy. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred women are as passive and innocent as the strawberries and cream."

"Well, all I can say is that this must be the hundredth case," said Gombauld, without looking up.

Anne shrugged her shoulders and gave vent to a sigh. "I'm at a loss to know whether you're more silly or more rude."

After painting for a little time in silence Gombauld began to speak again. "And then there's Denis," he said, renewing the conversation as though it had only just been broken off. "You're playing the same game with him. Why can't you leave that wretched young man in peace?"

Anne flushed with a sudden and uncontrollable anger. "It's perfectly untrue about Denis," she said indignantly. "I never dreamt of playing what you beautifully call the same game with him." Recovering her calm, she added in her ordinary cooing voice and with her exacerbating smile, "You've become very protective towards poor Denis all of a sudden."

"I have," Gombauld replied, with a gravity that was somehow a little too solemn. "I don't like to see a young man..."

"...being whirled along the road to ruin," said Anne, continuing his sentence for him. "I admire your sentiments and, believe me, I share them."

She was curiously irritated at what Gombauld had said about Denis. It happened to be so completely untrue. Gombauld might have some slight ground for his reproaches. But Denis — no, she had never flirted with Denis. Poor boy! He was very sweet. She became somewhat pensive.

Gombauld painted on with fury. The restlessness of an unsatisfied desire, which, before, had distracted his mind, making work impossible, seemed now to have converted itself into a kind of feverish energy. When it was finished, he told himself, the portrait would be diabolic. He was painting her in the pose she had naturally adopted at the first sitting. Seated sideways, her elbow on the back of the chair, her head and shoulders turned at an angle from the rest of her body, towards the front, she had fallen into an attitude of indolent abandonment. He had emphasised the lazy curves of her body; the lines sagged as they crossed the canvas, the grace of the painted figure seemed to be melting into a kind of soft decay. The hand that lay along the knee was as limp as a glove. He was at work on the face now; it had begun to emerge on the canvas, doll-like in its regularity and listlessness. It was Anne's face — but her face as it would be, utterly unilluminated by the inward lights of thought and emotion. It was the lazy, expressionless mask which was sometimes her face. The portrait was terribly like; and

at the same time it was the most malicious of lies. Yes, it would be diabolic when it was finished, Gombauld decided; he wondered what she would think of it.

## Chapter XXII.

FOR THE SAKE of peace and quiet Denis had retired earlier on this same afternoon to his bedroom. He wanted to work, but the hour was a drowsy one, and lunch, so recently eaten, weighed heavily on body and mind. The meridian demon was upon him; he was possessed by that bored and hopeless post-prandial melancholy which the coenobites of old knew and feared under the name of “accidie.” He felt, like Ernest Dowson, “a little weary.” He was in the mood to write something rather exquisite and gentle and quietist in tone; something a little droopy and at the same time — how should he put it? — a little infinite. He thought of Anne, of love hopeless and unattainable. Perhaps that was the ideal kind of love, the hopeless kind — the quiet, theoretical kind of love. In this sad mood of repletion he could well believe it. He began to write. One elegant quatrain had flowed from beneath his pen:

“A brooding love which is at most  
The stealth of moonbeams when they slide,  
Evoking colour’s bloodless ghost,  
O’er some scarce-breathing breast or side...”

when his attention was attracted by a sound from outside. He looked down from his window; there they were, Anne and Gombauld, talking, laughing together. They crossed the courtyard in front, and passed out of sight through the gate in the right-hand wall. That was the way to the green close and the granary; she was going to sit for him again. His pleasantly depressing melancholy was dissipated by a puff of violent emotion; angrily he threw his quatrain into the waste-paper basket and ran downstairs. “The stealth of moonbeams,” indeed!

In the hall he saw Mr. Scogan; the man seemed to be lying in wait. Denis tried to escape, but in vain. Mr. Scogan’s eye glittered like the eye of the Ancient Mariner.

“Not so fast,” he said, stretching out a small saurian hand with pointed nails— “not so fast. I was just going down to the flower garden to take the sun. We’ll go together.”

Denis abandoned himself; Mr. Scogan put on his hat and they went out arm in arm. On the shaven turf of the terrace Henry Wimbush and Mary were playing a solemn game of bowls. They descended by the yew-tree walk. It was here, thought Denis, here that Anne had fallen, here that he had kissed her, here — and he blushed with retrospective shame at the memory — here that he had tried to carry her and failed. Life was awful!

“Sanity!” said Mr. Scogan, suddenly breaking a long silence. “Sanity — that’s what’s wrong with me and that’s what will be wrong with you, my dear Denis, when you’re old enough to be sane or insane. In a sane world I should be a great man; as things

are, in this curious establishment, I am nothing at all; to all intents and purposes I don't exist. I am just *Vox et praeterea nihil*."

Denis made no response; he was thinking of other things. "After all," he said to himself— "after all, Gombauld is better looking than I, more entertaining, more confident; and, besides, he's already somebody and I'm still only potential..."

"Everything that ever gets done in this world is done by madmen," Mr. Scogan went on. Denis tried not to listen, but the tireless insistence of Mr. Scogan's discourse gradually compelled his attention. "Men such as I am, such as you may possibly become, have never achieved anything. We're too sane; we're merely reasonable. We lack the human touch, the compelling enthusiastic mania. People are quite ready to listen to the philosophers for a little amusement, just as they would listen to a fiddler or a mountebank. But as to acting on the advice of the men of reason — never. Wherever the choice has had to be made between the man of reason and the madman, the world has unhesitatingly followed the madman. For the madman appeals to what is fundamental, to passion and the instincts; the philosophers to what is superficial and supererogatory — reason."

They entered the garden; at the head of one of the alleys stood a green wooden bench, embayed in the midst of a fragrant continent of lavender bushes. It was here, though the place was shadeless and one breathed hot, dry perfume instead of air — it was here that Mr. Scogan elected to sit. He thrived on untempered sunlight.

"Consider, for example, the case of Luther and Erasmus." He took out his pipe and began to fill it as he talked. "There was Erasmus, a man of reason if ever there was one. People listened to him at first — a new virtuoso performing on that elegant and resourceful instrument, the intellect; they even admired and venerated him. But did he move them to behave as he wanted them to behave — reasonably, decently, or at least a little less porkishly than usual? He did not. And then Luther appears, violent, passionate, a madman insanely convinced about matters in which there can be no conviction. He shouted, and men rushed to follow him. Erasmus was no longer listened to; he was reviled for his reasonableness. Luther was serious, Luther was reality — like the Great War. Erasmus was only reason and decency; he lacked the power, being a sage, to move men to action. Europe followed Luther and embarked on a century and a half of war and bloody persecution. It's a melancholy story." Mr. Scogan lighted a match. In the intense light the flame was all but invisible. The smell of burning tobacco began to mingle with the sweetly acrid smell of the lavender.

"If you want to get men to act reasonably, you must set about persuading them in a maniacal manner. The very sane precepts of the founders of religions are only made infectious by means of enthusiasms which to a sane man must appear deplorable. It is humiliating to find how impotent unadulterated sanity is. Sanity, for example, informs us that the only way in which we can preserve civilisation is by behaving decently and intelligently. Sanity appeals and argues; our rulers persevere in their customary porkishness, while we acquiesce and obey. The only hope is a maniacal crusade; I am ready, when it comes, to beat a tambourine with the loudest, but at the same time I

shall feel a little ashamed of myself. However” — Mr. Scogan shrugged his shoulders and, pipe in hand, made a gesture of resignation— “It’s futile to complain that things are as they are. The fact remains that sanity unassisted is useless. What we want, then, is a sane and reasonable exploitation of the forces of insanity. We sane men will have the power yet.” Mr. Scogan’s eyes shone with a more than ordinary brightness, and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, he gave vent to his loud, dry, and somehow rather fiendish laugh.

“But I don’t want power,” said Denis. He was sitting in limp discomfort at one end of the bench, shading his eyes from the intolerable light. Mr. Scogan, bolt upright at the other end, laughed again.

“Everybody wants power,” he said. “Power in some form or other. The sort of power you hanker for is literary power. Some people want power to persecute other human beings; you expend your lust for power in persecuting words, twisting them, moulding them, torturing them to obey you. But I divagate.”

“Do you?” asked Denis faintly.

“Yes,” Mr. Scogan continued, unheeding, “the time will come. We men of intelligence will learn to harness the insanities to the service of reason. We can’t leave the world any longer to the direction of chance. We can’t allow dangerous maniacs like Luther, mad about dogma, like Napoleon, mad about himself, to go on casually appearing and turning everything upside down. In the past it didn’t so much matter; but our modern machine is too delicate. A few more knocks like the Great War, another Luther or two, and the whole concern will go to pieces. In future, the men of reason must see that the madness of the world’s maniacs is canalised into proper channels, is made to do useful work, like a mountain torrent driving a dynamo...”

“Making electricity to light a Swiss hotel,” said Denis. “You ought to complete the simile.”

Mr. Scogan waved away the interruption. “There’s only one thing to be done,” he said. “The men of intelligence must combine, must conspire, and seize power from the imbeciles and maniacs who now direct us. They must found the Rational State.”

The heat that was slowly paralysing all Denis’s mental and bodily faculties, seemed to bring to Mr. Scogan additional vitality. He talked with an ever-increasing energy, his hands moved in sharp, quick, precise gestures, his eyes shone. Hard, dry, and continuous, his voice went on sounding and sounding in Denis’s ears with the insistence of a mechanical noise.

“In the Rational State,” he heard Mr. Scogan saying, “human beings will be separated out into distinct species, not according to the colour of their eyes or the shape of their skulls, but according to the qualities of their mind and temperament. Examining psychologists, trained to what would now seem an almost superhuman clairvoyance, will test each child that is born and assign it to its proper species. Duly labelled and docketed, the child will be given the education suitable to members of its species, and will be set, in adult life, to perform those functions which human beings of his variety are capable of performing.”

“How many species will there be?” asked Denis.

“A great many, no doubt,” Mr. Scogan answered; “the classification will be subtle and elaborate. But it is not in the power of a prophet to go into details, nor is it his business. I will do more than indicate the three main species into which the subjects of the Rational State will be divided.”

He paused, cleared his throat, and coughed once or twice, evoking in Denis’s mind the vision of a table with a glass and water-bottle, and, lying across one corner, a long white pointer for the lantern pictures.

“The three main species,” Mr. Scogan went on, “will be these: the Directing Intelligences, the Men of Faith, and the Herd. Among the Intelligences will be found all those capable of thought, those who know how to attain a certain degree of freedom — and, alas, how limited, even among the most intelligent, that freedom is! — from the mental bondage of their time. A select body of Intelligences, drawn from among those who have turned their attention to the problems of practical life, will be the governors of the Rational State. They will employ as their instruments of power the second great species of humanity — the men of Faith, the Madmen, as I have been calling them, who believe in things unreasonably, with passion, and are ready to die for their beliefs and their desires. These wild men, with their fearful potentialities for good or for mischief, will no longer be allowed to react casually to a casual environment. There will be no more Caesar Borgias, no more Luthers and Mohammeds, no more Joanna Southcotts, no more Comstocks. The old-fashioned Man of Faith and Desire, that haphazard creature of brute circumstance, who might drive men to tears and repentance, or who might equally well set them on to cutting one another’s throats, will be replaced by a new sort of madman, still externally the same, still bubbling with a seemingly spontaneous enthusiasm, but, ah, how very different from the madman of the past! For the new Man of Faith will be expending his passion, his desire, and his enthusiasm in the propagation of some reasonable idea. He will be, all unawares, the tool of some superior intelligence.”

Mr. Scogan chuckled maliciously; it was as though he were taking a revenge, in the name of reason, on enthusiasts. “From their earliest years, as soon, that is, as the examining psychologists have assigned them their place in the classified scheme, the Men of Faith will have had their special education under the eye of the Intelligences. Moulded by a long process of suggestion, they will go out into the world, preaching and practising with a generous mania the coldly reasonable projects of the Directors from above. When these projects are accomplished, or when the ideas that were useful a decade ago have ceased to be useful, the Intelligences will inspire a new generation of madmen with a new eternal truth. The principal function of the Men of Faith will be to move and direct the Multitude, that third great species consisting of those countless millions who lack intelligence and are without valuable enthusiasm. When any particular effort is required of the Herd, when it is thought necessary, for the sake of solidarity, that humanity shall be kindled and united by some single enthusiastic desire or idea, the Men of Faith, primed with some simple and satisfying creed, will be sent out

on a mission of evangelisation. At ordinary times, when the high spiritual temperature of a Crusade would be unhealthy, the Men of Faith will be quietly and earnestly busy with the great work of education. In the upbringing of the Herd, humanity's almost boundless suggestibility will be scientifically exploited. Systematically, from earliest infancy, its members will be assured that there is no happiness to be found except in work and obedience; they will be made to believe that they are happy, that they are tremendously important beings, and that everything they do is noble and significant. For the lower species the earth will be restored to the centre of the universe and man to pre-eminence on the earth. Oh, I envy the lot of the commonality in the Rational State! Working their eight hours a day, obeying their betters, convinced of their own grandeur and significance and immortality, they will be marvellously happy, happier than any race of men has ever been. They will go through life in a rosy state of intoxication, from which they will never awake. The Men of Faith will play the cup-bearers at this lifelong bacchanal, filling and ever filling again with the warm liquor that the Intelligences, in sad and sober privacy behind the scenes, will brew for the intoxication of their subjects."

"And what will be my place in the Rational State?" Denis drowsily inquired from under his shading hand.

Mr. Scogan looked at him for a moment in silence. "It's difficult to see where you would fit in," he said at last. "You couldn't do manual work; you're too independent and unsuggestible to belong to the larger Herd; you have none of the characteristics required in a Man of Faith. As for the Directing Intelligences, they will have to be marvellously clear and merciless and penetrating." He paused and shook his head. "No, I can see no place for you; only the lethal chamber."

Deeply hurt, Denis emitted the imitation of a loud Homeric laugh. "I'm getting sunstroke here," he said, and got up.

Mr. Scogan followed his example, and they walked slowly away down the narrow path, brushing the blue lavender flowers in their passage. Denis pulled a sprig of lavender and sniffed at it; then some dark leaves of rosemary that smelt like incense in a cavernous church. They passed a bed of opium poppies, dispetaled now; the round, ripe seedheads were brown and dry — like Polynesian trophies, Denis thought; severed heads stuck on poles. He liked the fancy enough to impart it to Mr. Scogan.

"Like Polynesian trophies..." Uttered aloud, the fancy seemed less charming and significant than it did when it first occurred to him.

There was a silence, and in a growing wave of sound the whirl of the reaping machines swelled up from the fields beyond the garden and then receded into a remoter hum.

"It is satisfactory to think," said Mr. Scogan, as they strolled slowly onward, "that a multitude of people are toiling in the harvest fields in order that we may talk of Polynesia. Like every other good thing in this world, leisure and culture have to be paid for. Fortunately, however, it is not the leisured and the cultured who have to pay. Let us be duly thankful for that, my dear Denis — duly thankful," he repeated, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

Denis was not listening. He had suddenly remembered Anne. She was with Gombauld — alone with him in his studio. It was an intolerable thought.

“Shall we go and pay a call on Gombauld?” he suggested carelessly. “It would be amusing to see what he’s doing now.”

He laughed inwardly to think how furious Gombauld would be when he saw them arriving.

## Chapter XXIII.

GOMBAULD WAS BY no means so furious at their apparition as Denis had hoped and expected he would be. Indeed, he was rather pleased than annoyed when the two faces, one brown and pointed, the other round and pale, appeared in the frame of the open door. The energy born of his restless irritation was dying within him, returning to its emotional elements. A moment more and he would have been losing his temper again — and Anne would be keeping hers, infuriatingly. Yes, he was positively glad to see them.

“Come in, come in,” he called out hospitably.

Followed by Mr. Scogan, Denis climbed the little ladder and stepped over the threshold. He looked suspiciously from Gombauld to his sitter, and could learn nothing from the expression of their faces except that they both seemed pleased to see the visitors. Were they really glad, or were they cunningly simulating gladness? He wondered.

Mr. Scogan, meanwhile, was looking at the portrait.

“Excellent,” he said approvingly, “excellent. Almost too true to character, if that is possible; yes, positively too true. But I’m surprised to find you putting in all this psychology business.” He pointed to the face, and with his extended finger followed the slack curves of the painted figure. “I thought you were one of the fellows who went in exclusively for balanced masses and impinging planes.”

Gombauld laughed. “This is a little infidelity,” he said.

“I’m sorry,” said Mr. Scogan. “I for one, without ever having had the slightest appreciation of painting, have always taken particular pleasure in Cubismus. I like to see pictures from which nature has been completely banished, pictures which are exclusively the product of the human mind. They give me the same pleasure as I derive from a good piece of reasoning or a mathematical problem or an achievement of engineering. Nature, or anything that reminds me of nature, disturbs me; it is too large, too complicated, above all too utterly pointless and incomprehensible. I am at home with the works of man; if I choose to set my mind to it, I can understand anything that any man has made or thought. That is why I always travel by Tube, never by bus if I can possibly help it. For, travelling by bus, one can’t avoid seeing, even in London, a few stray works of God — the sky, for example, an occasional tree, the flowers in the window-boxes. But travel by Tube and you see nothing but the works



of man — iron riveted into geometrical forms, straight lines of concrete, patterned expanses of tiles. All is human and the product of friendly and comprehensible minds. All philosophies and all religions — what are they but spiritual Tubes bored through the universe! Through these narrow tunnels, where all is recognisably human, one travels comfortable and secure, contriving to forget that all round and below and above them stretches the blind mass of earth, endless and unexplored. Yes, give me the Tube and Cubismus every time; give me ideas, so snug and neat and simple and well made. And preserve me from nature, preserve me from all that's inhumanly large and complicated and obscure. I haven't the courage, and, above all, I haven't the time to start wandering in that labyrinth."

While Mr. Scogan was discoursing, Denis had crossed over to the farther side of the little square chamber, where Anne was sitting, still in her graceful, lazy pose, on the low chair.

"Well?" he demanded, looking at her almost fiercely. What was he asking of her? He hardly knew himself.

Anne looked up at him, and for answer echoed his "Well?" in another, a laughing key.

Denis had nothing more, at the moment, to say. Two or three canvases stood in the corner behind Anne's chair, their faces turned to the wall. He pulled them out and began to look at the paintings.

"May I see too?" Anne requested.

He stood them in a row against the wall. Anne had to turn round in her chair to look at them. There was the big canvas of the man fallen from the horse, there was a painting of flowers, there was a small landscape. His hands on the back of the chair, Denis leaned over her. From behind the easel at the other side of the room Mr. Scogan was talking away. For a long time they looked at the pictures, saying nothing; or, rather, Anne looked at the pictures, while Denis, for the most part, looked at Anne.

"I like the man and the horse; don't you?" she said at last, looking up with an inquiring smile.

Denis nodded, and then in a queer, strangled voice, as though it had cost him a great effort to utter the words, he said, "I love you."

It was a remark which Anne had heard a good many times before and mostly heard with equanimity. But on this occasion — perhaps because they had come so unexpectedly, perhaps for some other reason — the words provoked in her a certain surprised commotion.

"My poor Denis," she managed to say, with a laugh; but she was blushing as she spoke.

## Chapter XXIV.

IT WAS NOON. Denis, descending from his chamber, where he had been making an unsuccessful effort to write something about nothing in particular, found the drawing-room deserted. He was about to go out into the garden when his eye fell on a familiar but mysterious object — the large red notebook in which he had so often seen Jenny quietly and busily scribbling. She had left it lying on the window-seat. The temptation was great. He picked up the book and slipped off the elastic band that kept it discreetly closed.

“Private. Not to be opened,” was written in capital letters on the cover. He raised his eyebrows. It was the sort of thing one wrote in one’s Latin Grammar while one was still at one’s preparatory school.

“Black is the raven, black is the rook,  
But blacker the thief who steals this book!”

It was curiously childish, he thought, and he smiled to himself. He opened the book. What he saw made him wince as though he had been struck.

Denis was his own severest critic; so, at least, he had always believed. He liked to think of himself as a merciless vivisector probing into the palpitating entrails of his own soul; he was Brown Dog to himself. His weaknesses, his absurdities — no one knew them better than he did. Indeed, in a vague way he imagined that nobody beside himself was aware of them at all. It seemed, somehow, inconceivable that he should appear to other people as they appeared to him; inconceivable that they ever spoke of him among themselves in that same freely critical and, to be quite honest, mildly malicious tone in which he was accustomed to talk of them. In his own eyes he had defects, but to see them was a privilege reserved to him alone. For the rest of the world he was surely an image of flawless crystal. It was almost axiomatic.

On opening the red notebook that crystal image of himself crashed to the ground, and was irreparably shattered. He was not his own severest critic after all. The discovery was a painful one.

The fruit of Jenny’s unobtrusive scribbling lay before him. A caricature of himself, reading (the book was upside-down). In the background a dancing couple, recognisable as Gombauld and Anne. Beneath, the legend: “Fable of the Wallflower and the Sour Grapes.” Fascinated and horrified, Denis pored over the drawing. It was masterful. A mute, inglorious Rouveyre appeared in every one of those cruelly clear lines. The expression of the face, an assumed aloofness and superiority tempered by a feeble envy; the attitude of the body and limbs, an attitude of studious and scholarly dignity, given away by the fidgety pose of the turned-in feet — these things were terrible. And, more terrible still, was the likeness, was the magisterial certainty with which his physical peculiarities were all recorded and subtly exaggerated.

Denis looked deeper into the book. There were caricatures of other people: of Priscilla and Mr. Barbecue-Smith; of Henry Wimbush, of Anne and Gombauld; of

Mr. Scogan, whom Jenny had represented in a light that was more than slightly sinister, that was, indeed, diabolic; of Mary and Ivor. He scarcely glanced at them. A fearful desire to know the worst about himself possessed him. He turned over the leaves, lingering at nothing that was not his own image. Seven full pages were devoted to him.

“Private. Not to be opened.” He had disobeyed the injunction; he had only got what he deserved. Thoughtfully he closed the book, and slid the rubber band once more into its place. Sadder and wiser, he went out on to the terrace. And so this, he reflected, this was how Jenny employed the leisure hours in her ivory tower apart. And he had thought her a simple-minded, uncritical creature! It was he, it seemed, who was the fool. He felt no resentment towards Jenny. No, the distressing thing wasn’t Jenny herself; it was what she and the phenomenon of her red book represented, what they stood for and concretely symbolised. They represented all the vast conscious world of men outside himself; they symbolised something that in his studious solitariness he was apt not to believe in. He could stand at Piccadilly Circus, could watch the crowds shuffle past, and still imagine himself the one fully conscious, intelligent, individual being among all those thousands. It seemed, somehow, impossible that other people should be in their way as elaborate and complete as he in his. Impossible; and yet, periodically he would make some painful discovery about the external world and the horrible reality of its consciousness and its intelligence. The red notebook was one of these discoveries, a footprint in the sand. It put beyond a doubt the fact that the outer world really existed.

Sitting on the balustrade of the terrace, he ruminated this unpleasant truth for some time. Still chewing on it, he strolled pensively down towards the swimming-pool. A peacock and his hen trailed their shabby finery across the turf of the lower lawn. Odious birds! Their necks, thick and greedily fleshy at the roots, tapered up to the cruel inanity of their brainless heads, their flat eyes and piercing beaks. The fabulists were right, he reflected, when they took beasts to illustrate their tractates of human morality. Animals resemble men with all the truthfulness of a caricature. (Oh, the red notebook!) He threw a piece of stick at the slowly pacing birds. They rushed towards it, thinking it was something to eat.

He walked on. The profound shade of a giant ilex tree engulfed him. Like a great wooden octopus, it spread its long arms abroad.

“Under the spreading ilex tree...”

He tried to remember who the poem was by, but couldn’t.

“The smith, a brawny man is he,  
With arms like rubber bands.”

Just like his; he would have to try and do his Muller exercises more regularly.

He emerged once more into the sunshine. The pool lay before him, reflecting in its bronze mirror the blue and various green of the summer day. Looking at it, he thought of Anne’s bare arms and seal-sleek bathing-dress, her moving knees and feet.

“And little Luce with the white legs,

And bouncing Barbary..."

Oh, these rags and tags of other people's making! Would he ever be able to call his brain his own? Was there, indeed, anything in it that was truly his own, or was it simply an education?

He walked slowly round the water's edge. In an embayed recess among the surrounding yew trees, leaning her back against the pedestal of a pleasantly comic version of the Medici Venus, executed by some nameless mason of the seicento, he saw Mary pensively sitting.

"Hullo!" he said, for he was passing so close to her that he had to say something.

Mary looked up. "Hullo!" she answered in a melancholy, uninterested tone.

In this alcove hewed out of the dark trees, the atmosphere seemed to Denis agreeably elegiac. He sat down beside her under the shadow of the pudic goddess. There was a prolonged silence.

At breakfast that morning Mary had found on her plate a picture postcard of Gobley Great Park. A stately Georgian pile, with a facade sixteen windows wide; parterres in the foreground; huge, smooth lawns receding out of the picture to right and left. Ten years more of the hard times and Gobley, with all its peers, will be deserted and decaying. Fifty years, and the countryside will know the old landmarks no more. They will have vanished as the monasteries vanished before them. At the moment, however, Mary's mind was not moved by these considerations.

On the back of the postcard, next to the address, was written, in Ivor's bold, large hand, a single quatrain.

"Hail, maid of moonlight! Bride of the sun, farewell!

Like bright plumes moulted in an angel's flight,

There sleep within my heart's most mystic cell

Memories of morning, memories of the night."

There followed a postscript of three lines: "Would you mind asking one of the housemaids to forward the packet of safety-razor blades I left in the drawer of my washstand. Thanks. — Ivor."

Seated under the Venus's immemorial gesture, Mary considered life and love. The abolition of her repressions, so far from bringing the expected peace of mind, had brought nothing but disquiet, a new and hitherto unexperienced misery. Ivor, Ivor...She couldn't do without him now. It was evident, on the other hand, from the poem on the back of the picture postcard, that Ivor could very well do without her. He was at Gobley now, so was Zenobia. Mary knew Zenobia. She thought of the last verse of the song he had sung that night in the garden.

"Le lendemain, Phillis peu sage

Aurait donne moutons et chien

Pour un baiser que le volage

A Lisette donnait pour rien."

Mary shed tears at the memory; she had never been so unhappy in all her life before.

It was Denis who first broke the silence. "The individual," he began in a soft and sadly philosophical tone, "is not a self-supporting universe. There are times when he comes into contact with other individuals, when he is forced to take cognisance of the existence of other universes besides himself."

He had contrived this highly abstract generalisation as a preliminary to a personal confidence. It was the first gambit in a conversation that was to lead up to Jenny's caricatures.

"True," said Mary; and, generalising for herself, she added, "When one individual comes into intimate contact with another, she — or he, of course, as the case may be — must almost inevitably receive or inflict suffering."

"One is apt," Denis went on, "to be so spellbound by the spectacle of one's own personality that one forgets that the spectacle presents itself to other people as well as to oneself."

Mary was not listening. "The difficulty," she said, "makes itself acutely felt in matters of sex. If one individual seeks intimate contact with another individual in the natural way, she is certain to receive or inflict suffering. If on the other hand, she avoids contacts, she risks the equally grave sufferings that follow on unnatural repressions. As you see, it's a dilemma."

"When I think of my own case," said Denis, making a more decided move in the desired direction, "I am amazed how ignorant I am of other people's mentality in general, and above all and in particular, of their opinions about myself. Our minds are sealed books only occasionally opened to the outside world." He made a gesture that was faintly suggestive of the drawing off of a rubber band.

"It's an awful problem," said Mary thoughtfully. "One has to have had personal experience to realise quite how awful it is."

"Exactly." Denis nodded. "One has to have had first-hand experience." He leaned towards her and slightly lowered his voice. "This very morning, for example..." he began, but his confidences were cut short. The deep voice of the gong, tempered by distance to a pleasant booming, floated down from the house. It was lunch-time. Mechanically Mary rose to her feet, and Denis, a little hurt that she should exhibit such a desperate anxiety for her food and so slight an interest in his spiritual experiences, followed her. They made their way up to the house without speaking.

## Chapter XXV.

"I HOPE YOU all realise," said Henry Wimbush during dinner, "that next Monday is Bank Holiday, and that you will all be expected to help in the Fair."

"Heavens!" cried Anne. "The Fair — I had forgotten all about it. What a nightmare! Couldn't you put a stop to it, Uncle Henry?"

Mr. Wimbush sighed and shook his head. "Alas," he said, "I fear I cannot. I should have liked to put an end to it years ago; but the claims of Charity are strong."

"It's not charity we want," Anne murmured rebelliously; "it's justice."

"Besides," Mr. Wimbush went on, "the Fair has become an institution. Let me see, it must be twenty-two years since we started it. It was a modest affair then. Now..." he made a sweeping movement with his hand and was silent.

It spoke highly for Mr. Wimbush's public spirit that he still continued to tolerate the Fair. Beginning as a sort of glorified church bazaar, Crome's yearly Charity Fair had grown into a noisy thing of merry-go-rounds, cocoanut shies, and miscellaneous side shows — a real genuine fair on the grand scale. It was the local St. Bartholomew, and the people of all the neighbouring villages, with even a contingent from the county town, flocked into the park for their Bank Holiday amusement. The local hospital profited handsomely, and it was this fact alone which prevented Mr. Wimbush, to whom the Fair was a cause of recurrent and never-diminishing agony, from putting a stop to the nuisance which yearly desecrated his park and garden.

"I've made all the arrangements already," Henry Wimbush went on. "Some of the larger marquees will be put up to-morrow. The swings and the merry-go-round arrive on Sunday."

"So there's no escape," said Anne, turning to the rest of the party. "You'll all have to do something. As a special favour you're allowed to choose your slavery. My job is the tea tent, as usual, Aunt Priscilla..."

"My dear," said Mrs. Wimbush, interrupting her, "I have more important things to think about than the Fair. But you need have no doubt that I shall do my best when Monday comes to encourage the villagers."

"That's splendid," said Anne. "Aunt Priscilla will encourage the villagers. What will you do, Mary?"

"I won't do anything where I have to stand by and watch other people eat."

"Then you'll look after the children's sports."

"All right," Mary agreed. "I'll look after the children's sports."

"And Mr. Scogan?"

Mr. Scogan reflected. "May I be allowed to tell fortunes?" he asked at last. "I think I should be good at telling fortunes."

"But you can't tell fortunes in that costume!"

"Can't I?" Mr. Scogan surveyed himself.

"You'll have to be dressed up. Do you still persist?"

"I'm ready to suffer all indignities."

"Good!" said Anne; and turning to Gombauld, "You must be our lightning artist," she said. "'Your portrait for a shilling in five minutes.'"

"It's a pity I'm not Ivor," said Gombauld, with a laugh. "I could throw in a picture of their Auras for an extra sixpence."

Mary flushed. "Nothing is to be gained," she said severely, "by speaking with levity of serious subjects. And, after all, whatever your personal views may be, psychical research is a perfectly serious subject."

"And what about Denis?"

Denis made a deprecating gesture. "I have no accomplishments," he said, "I'll just be one of those men who wear a thing in their buttonholes and go about telling people which is the way to tea and not to walk on the grass."

"No, no," said Anne. "That won't do. You must do something more than that."

"But what? All the good jobs are taken, and I can do nothing but lisp in numbers."

"Well, then, you must lisp," concluded Anne. "You must write a poem for the occasion — an 'Ode on Bank Holiday.' We'll print it on Uncle Henry's press and sell it at twopence a copy."

"Sixpence," Denis protested. "It'll be worth sixpence."

Anne shook her head. "Twopence," she repeated firmly. "Nobody will pay more than twopence."

"And now there's Jenny," said Mr Wimbush. "Jenny," he said, raising his voice, "what will you do?"

Denis thought of suggesting that she might draw caricatures at sixpence an execution, but decided it would be wiser to go on feigning ignorance of her talent. His mind reverted to the red notebook. Could it really be true that he looked like that?

"What will I do," Jenny echoed, "what will I do?" She frowned thoughtfully for a moment; then her face brightened and she smiled. "When I was young," she said, "I learnt to play the drums."

"The drums?"

Jenny nodded, and, in proof of her assertion, agitated her knife and fork, like a pair of drumsticks, over her plate. "If there's any opportunity of playing the drums..." she began.

"But of course," said Anne, "there's any amount of opportunity. We'll put you down definitely for the drums. That's the lot," she added.

"And a very good lot too," said Gombauld. "I look forward to my Bank Holiday. It ought to be gay."

"It ought indeed," Mr Scogan assented. "But you may rest assured that it won't be. No holiday is ever anything but a disappointment."

"Come, come," protested Gombauld. "My holiday at Crome isn't being a disappointment."

"Isn't it?" Anne turned an ingenuous mask towards him.

"No, it isn't," he answered.

"I'm delighted to hear it."

"It's in the very nature of things," Mr. Scogan went on; "our holidays can't help being disappointments. Reflect for a moment. What is a holiday? The ideal, the Platonic Holiday of Holidays is surely a complete and absolute change. You agree with me in my definition?" Mr. Scogan glanced from face to face round the table; his sharp nose

moved in a series of rapid jerks through all the points of the compass. There was no sign of dissent; he continued: "A complete and absolute change; very well. But isn't a complete and absolute change precisely the thing we can never have — never, in the very nature of things?" Mr. Scogan once more looked rapidly about him. "Of course it is. As ourselves, as specimens of *Homo Sapiens*, as members of a society, how can we hope to have anything like an absolute change? We are tied down by the frightful limitation of our human faculties, by the notions which society imposes on us through our fatal suggestibility, by our own personalities. For us, a complete holiday is out of the question. Some of us struggle manfully to take one, but we never succeed, if I may be allowed to express myself metaphorically, we never succeed in getting farther than Southend."

"You're depressing," said Anne.

"I mean to be," Mr. Scogan replied, and, expanding the fingers of his right hand, he went on: "Look at me, for example. What sort of a holiday can I take? In endowing me with passions and faculties Nature has been horribly niggardly. The full range of human potentialities is in any case distressingly limited; my range is a limitation within a limitation. Out of the ten octaves that make up the human instrument, I can compass perhaps two. Thus, while I may have a certain amount of intelligence, I have no aesthetic sense; while I possess the mathematical faculty, I am wholly without the religious emotions; while I am naturally addicted to venery, I have little ambition and am not at all avaricious. Education has further limited my scope. Having been brought up in society, I am impregnated with its laws; not only should I be afraid of taking a holiday from them, I should also feel it painful to try to do so. In a word, I have a conscience as well as a fear of gaol. Yes, I know it by experience. How often have I tried to take holidays, to get away from myself, my own boring nature, my insufferable mental surroundings!" Mr. Scogan sighed. "But always without success," he added, "always without success. In my youth I was always striving — how hard! — to feel religiously and aesthetically. Here, said I to myself, are two tremendously important and exciting emotions. Life would be richer, warmer, brighter, altogether more amusing, if I could feel them. I try to feel them. I read the works of the mystics. They seemed to me nothing but the most deplorable claptrap — as indeed they always must to anyone who does not feel the same emotion as the authors felt when they were writing. For it is the emotion that matters. The written work is simply an attempt to express emotion, which is in itself inexpressible, in terms of intellect and logic. The mystic objectifies a rich feeling in the pit of the stomach into a cosmology. For other mystics that cosmology is a symbol of the rich feeling. For the unreligious it is a symbol of nothing, and so appears merely grotesque. A melancholy fact! But I divagate." Mr. Scogan checked himself. "So much for the religious emotion. As for the aesthetic — I was at even greater pains to cultivate that. I have looked at all the right works of art in every part of Europe. There was a time when, I venture to believe, I knew more about Taddeo da Poggibonsi, more about the cryptic Amico di Taddeo, even than Henry does. To-day, I am happy to say, I have forgotten most of the knowledge I then



so laboriously acquired; but without vanity I can assert that it was prodigious. I don't pretend, of course, to know anything about nigger sculpture or the later seventeenth century in Italy; but about all the periods that were fashionable before 1900 I am, or was, omniscient. Yes, I repeat it, omniscient. But did that fact make me any more appreciative of art in general? It did not. Confronted by a picture, of which I could tell you all the known and presumed history — the date when it was painted, the character of the painter, the influences that had gone to make it what it was — I felt none of that strange excitement and exaltation which is, as I am informed by those who do feel it, the true aesthetic emotion. I felt nothing but a certain interest in the subject of the picture; or more often, when the subject was hackneyed and religious, I felt nothing but a great weariness of spirit. Nevertheless, I must have gone on looking at pictures for ten years before I would honestly admit to myself that they merely bored me. Since then I have given up all attempts to take a holiday. I go on cultivating my old stale daily self in the resigned spirit with which a bank clerk performs from ten till six his daily task. A holiday, indeed! I'm sorry for you, Gombauld, if you still look forward to having a holiday."

Gombauld shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said, "my standards aren't as elevated as yours. But personally I found the war quite as thorough a holiday from all the ordinary decencies and sanities, all the common emotions and preoccupations, as I ever want to have."

"Yes," Mr. Scogan thoughtfully agreed. "Yes, the war was certainly something of a holiday. It was a step beyond Southend; it was Weston-super-Mare; it was almost Ilfracombe."

## Chapter XXVI.

A LITTLE CANVAS village of tents and booths had sprung up, just beyond the boundaries of the garden, in the green expanse of the park. A crowd thronged its streets, the men dressed mostly in black — holiday best, funeral best — the women in pale muslins. Here and there tricolour bunting hung inert. In the midst of the canvas town, scarlet and gold and crystal, the merry-go-round glittered in the sun. The balloon-man walked among the crowd, and above his head, like a huge, inverted bunch of many-coloured grapes, the balloons strained upwards. With a scythe-like motion the boat-swings reaped the air, and from the funnel of the engine which worked the roundabout rose a thin, scarcely wavering column of black smoke.

Denis had climbed to the top of one of Sir Ferdinando's towers, and there, standing on the sun-baked leads, his elbows resting on the parapet, he surveyed the scene. The steam-organ sent up prodigious music. The clashing of automatic cymbals beat out with inexorable precision the rhythm of piercingly sounded melodies. The harmonies were like a musical shattering of glass and brass. Far down in the bass the Last Trump

was hugely blowing, and with such persistence, such resonance, that its alternate tonic and dominant detached themselves from the rest of the music and made a tune of their own, a loud, monotonous see-saw.

Denis leaned over the gulf of swirling noise. If he threw himself over the parapet, the noise would surely buoy him up, keep him suspended, bobbing, as a fountain balances a ball on its breaking crest. Another fancy came to him, this time in metrical form.

“My soul is a thin white sheet of parchment stretched  
Over a bubbling cauldron.”

Bad, bad. But he liked the idea of something thin and distended being blown up from underneath.

“My soul is a thin tent of gut...”  
or better —

“My soul is a pale, tenuous membrane...”

That was pleasing: a thin, tenuous membrane. It had the right anatomical quality. Tight blown, quivering in the blast of noisy life. It was time for him to descend from the serene empyrean of words into the actual vortex. He went down slowly. “My soul is a thin, tenuous membrane...”

On the terrace stood a knot of distinguished visitors. There was old Lord Moleyn, like a caricature of an English milord in a French comic paper: a long man, with a long nose and long, drooping moustaches and long teeth of old ivory, and lower down, absurdly, a short covert coat, and below that long, long legs cased in pearl-grey trousers — legs that bent unsteadily at the knee and gave a kind of sideways wobble as he walked. Beside him, short and thick-set, stood Mr. Callamay, the venerable conservative statesman, with a face like a Roman bust, and short white hair. Young girls didn’t much like going for motor drives alone with Mr. Callamay; and of old Lord Moleyn one wondered why he wasn’t living in gilded exile on the island of Capri among the other distinguished persons who, for one reason or another, find it impossible to live in England. They were talking to Anne, laughing, the one profoundly, the other hootingly.

A black silk balloon towing a black-and-white striped parachute proved to be old Mrs. Budge from the big house on the other side of the valley. She stood low on the ground, and the spikes of her black-and-white sunshade menaced the eyes of Priscilla Wimbush, who towered over her — a massive figure dressed in purple and topped with a queenly toque on which the nodding black plumes recalled the splendours of a first-class Parisian funeral.

Denis peeped at them discreetly from the window of the morning-room. His eyes were suddenly become innocent, childlike, unprejudiced. They seemed, these people, inconceivably fantastic. And yet they really existed, they functioned by themselves, they were conscious, they had minds. Moreover, he was like them. Could one believe it? But the evidence of the red notebook was conclusive.

It would have been polite to go and say, “How d’you do?” But at the moment Denis did not want to talk, could not have talked. His soul was a tenuous, tremulous,

pale membrane. He would keep its sensibility intact and virgin as long as he could. Cautiously he crept out by a side door and made his way down towards the park. His soul fluttered as he approached the noise and movement of the fair. He paused for a moment on the brink, then stepped in and was engulfed.

Hundreds of people, each with his own private face and all of them real, separate, alive: the thought was disquieting. He paid twopence and saw the Tatooed Woman; twopence more, the Largest Rat in the World. From the home of the Rat he emerged just in time to see a hydrogen-filled balloon break loose for home. A child howled up after it; but calmly, a perfect sphere of flushed opal, it mounted, mounted. Denis followed it with his eyes until it became lost in the blinding sunlight. If he could but send his soul to follow it!...

He sighed, stuck his steward's rosette in his buttonhole, and started to push his way, aimlessly but officially, through the crowd.

## Chapter XXVII.

MR. SCOGAN HAD been accommodated in a little canvas hut. Dressed in a black skirt and a red bodice, with a yellow-and-red bandana handkerchief tied round his black wig, he looked — sharp-nosed, brown, and wrinkled — like the Bohemian Hag of Frith's Derby Day. A placard pinned to the curtain of the doorway announced the presence within the tent of "Sesostris, the Sorceress of Ecbatana." Seated at a table, Mr. Scogan received his clients in mysterious silence, indicating with a movement of the finger that they were to sit down opposite him and to extend their hands for his inspection. He then examined the palm that was presented him, using a magnifying glass and a pair of horn spectacles. He had a terrifying way of shaking his head, frowning and clicking with his tongue as he looked at the lines. Sometimes he would whisper, as though to himself, "Terrible, terrible!" or "God preserve us!" sketching out the sign of the cross as he uttered the words. The clients who came in laughing grew suddenly grave; they began to take the witch seriously. She was a formidable-looking woman; could it be, was it possible, that there was something in this sort of thing after all? After all, they thought, as the hag shook her head over their hands, after all...And they waited, with an uncomfortably beating heart, for the oracle to speak. After a long and silent inspection, Mr. Scogan would suddenly look up and ask, in a hoarse whisper, some horrifying question, such as, "Have you ever been hit on the head with a hammer by a young man with red hair?" When the answer was in the negative, which it could hardly fail to be, Mr. Scogan would nod several times, saying, "I was afraid so. Everything is still to come, still to come, though it can't be very far off now." Sometimes, after a long examination, he would just whisper, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," and refuse to divulge any details of a future too appalling to be envisaged without despair. Sesostris had a success of horror. People stood in a queue

outside the witch's booth waiting for the privilege of hearing sentence pronounced upon them.

Denis, in the course of his round, looked with curiosity at this crowd of suppliants before the shrine of the oracle. He had a great desire to see how Mr. Scogan played his part. The canvas booth was a rickety, ill-made structure. Between its walls and its sagging roof were long gaping chinks and crannies. Denis went to the tea-tent and borrowed a wooden bench and a small Union Jack. With these he hurried back to the booth of Sesostris. Setting down the bench at the back of the booth, he climbed up, and with a great air of busy efficiency began to tie the Union Jack to the top of one of the tent-poles. Through the crannies in the canvas he could see almost the whole of the interior of the tent. Mr. Scogan's bandana-covered head was just below him; his terrifying whispers came clearly up. Denis looked and listened while the witch prophesied financial losses, death by apoplexy, destruction by air-raids in the next war.

"Is there going to be another war?" asked the old lady to whom he had predicted this end.

"Very soon," said Mr. Scogan, with an air of quiet confidence.

The old lady was succeeded by a girl dressed in white muslin, garnished with pink ribbons. She was wearing a broad hat, so that Denis could not see her face; but from her figure and the roundness of her bare arms he judged her young and pleasing. Mr. Scogan looked at her hand, then whispered, "You are still virtuous."

The young lady giggled and exclaimed, "Oh, lor'!"

"But you will not remain so for long," added Mr. Scogan sepulchrally. The young lady giggled again. "Destiny, which interests itself in small things no less than in great, has announced the fact upon your hand." Mr. Scogan took up the magnifying-glass and began once more to examine the white palm. "Very interesting," he said, as though to himself—"very interesting. It's as clear as day." He was silent.

"What's clear?" asked the girl.

"I don't think I ought to tell you." Mr. Scogan shook his head; the pendulous brass ear-rings which he had screwed on to his ears tinkled.

"Please, please!" she implored.

The witch seemed to ignore her remark. "Afterwards, it's not at all clear. The fates don't say whether you will settle down to married life and have four children or whether you will try to go on the cinema and have none. They are only specific about this one rather crucial incident."

"What is it? What is it? Oh, do tell me!"

The white muslin figure leant eagerly forward.

Mr. Scogan sighed. "Very well," he said, "if you must know, you must know. But if anything untoward happens you must blame your own curiosity. Listen. Listen." He lifted up a sharp, claw-nailed forefinger. "This is what the fates have written. Next Sunday afternoon at six o'clock you will be sitting on the second stile on the footpath that leads from the church to the lower road. At that moment a man will appear walking along the footpath." Mr. Scogan looked at her hand again as though to refresh

his memory of the details of the scene. "A man," he repeated— "a small man with a sharp nose, not exactly good looking nor precisely young, but fascinating." He lingered hissing over the word. "He will ask you, 'Can you tell me the way to Paradise?' and you will answer, 'Yes, I'll show you,' and walk with him down towards the little hazel copse. I cannot read what will happen after that." There was a silence.

"Is it really true?" asked white muslin.

The witch gave a shrug of the shoulders. "I merely tell you what I read in your hand. Good afternoon. That will be sixpence. Yes, I have change. Thank you. Good afternoon."

Denis stepped down from the bench; tied insecurely and crookedly to the tentpole, the Union Jack hung limp on the windless air. "If only I could do things like that!" he thought, as he carried the bench back to the tea-tent.

Anne was sitting behind a long table filling thick white cups from an urn. A neat pile of printed sheets lay before her on the table. Denis took one of them and looked at it affectionately. It was his poem. They had printed five hundred copies, and very nice the quarto broadsheets looked.

"Have you sold many?" he asked in a casual tone.

Anne put her head on one side deprecatingly. "Only three so far, I'm afraid. But I'm giving a free copy to everyone who spends more than a shilling on his tea. So in any case it's having a circulation."

Denis made no reply, but walked slowly away. He looked at the broadsheet in his hand and read the lines to himself relishingly as he walked along:

"This day of roundabouts and swings,  
Struck weights, shied cocoa-nuts, tossed rings,  
Switchbacks, Aunt Sallies, and all such small  
High jinks — you call it ferial?  
A holiday? But paper noses  
Sniffed the artificial roses  
Of round Venetian cheeks through half  
Each carnival year, and masks might laugh  
At things the naked face for shame  
Would blush at — laugh and think no blame.  
A holiday? But Galba showed  
Elephants on an airy road;  
Jumbo trod the tightrope then,  
And in the circus armed men  
Stabbed home for sport and died to break  
Those dull imperatives that make  
A prison of every working day,  
Where all must drudge and all obey.  
Sing Holiday! You do not know  
How to be free. The Russian snow

Flowered with bright blood whose roses spread  
 Petals of fading, fading red  
 That died into the snow again,  
 Into the virgin snow; and men  
 From all ancient bonds were freed.  
 Old law, old custom, and old creed,  
 Old right and wrong there bled to death;  
 The frozen air received their breath,  
 A little smoke that died away;  
 And round about them where they lay  
 The snow bloomed roses. Blood was there  
 A red gay flower and only fair.  
 Sing Holiday! Beneath the Tree  
 Of Innocence and Liberty,  
 Paper Nose and Red Cockade  
 Dance within the magic shade  
 That makes them drunken, merry, and strong  
 To laugh and sing their ferial song:  
 'Free, free...!'  
 But Echo answers  
 Faintly to the laughing dancers,  
 'Free' — and faintly laughs, and still,  
 Within the hollows of the hill,  
 Faintlier laughs and whispers, 'Free,'  
 Fadingly, diminishingly:  
 'Free,' and laughter faints away...  
 Sing Holiday! Sing Holiday!"

He folded the sheet carefully and put it in his pocket. The thing had its merits. Oh, decidedly, decidedly! But how unpleasant the crowd smelt! He lit a cigarette. The smell of cows was preferable. He passed through the gate in the park wall into the garden. The swimming-pool was a centre of noise and activity.

"Second Heat in the Young Ladies' Championship." It was the polite voice of Henry Wimbush. A crowd of sleek, seal-like figures in black bathing-dresses surrounded him. His grey bowler hat, smooth, round, and motionless in the midst of a moving sea, was an island of aristocratic calm.

Holding his tortoise-shell-rimmed pince-nez an inch or two in front of his eyes, he read out names from a list.

"Miss Dolly Miles, Miss Rebecca Balister, Miss Doris Gabell..."

Five young persons ranged themselves on the brink. From their seats of honour at the other end of the pool, old Lord Moleyn and Mr. Callamay looked on with eager interest.

Henry Wimbush raised his hand. There was an expectant silence. "When I say 'Go,' go. Go!" he said. There was an almost simultaneous splash.

Denis pushed his way through the spectators. Somebody plucked him by the sleeve; he looked down. It was old Mrs. Budge.

"Delighted to see you again, Mr. Stone," she said in her rich, husky voice. She panted a little as she spoke, like a short-winded lap-dog. It was Mrs. Budge who, having read in the "Daily Mirror" that the Government needed peach stones — what they needed them for she never knew — had made the collection of peach stones her peculiar "bit" of war work. She had thirty-six peach trees in her walled garden, as well as four hot-houses in which trees could be forced, so that she was able to eat peaches practically the whole year round. In 1916 she ate 4200 peaches, and sent the stones to the Government. In 1917 the military authorities called up three of her gardeners, and what with this and the fact that it was a bad year for wall fruit, she only managed to eat 2900 peaches during that crucial period of the national destinies. In 1918 she did rather better, for between January 1st and the date of the Armistice she ate 3300 peaches. Since the Armistice she had relaxed her efforts; now she did not eat more than two or three peaches a day. Her constitution, she complained, had suffered; but it had suffered for a good cause.

Denis answered her greeting by a vague and polite noise.

"So nice to see the young people enjoying themselves," Mrs. Budge went on. "And the old people too, for that matter. Look at old Lord Moleyn and dear Mr. Callamay. Isn't it delightful to see the way they enjoy themselves?"

Denis looked. He wasn't sure whether it was so very delightful after all. Why didn't they go and watch the sack races? The two old gentlemen were engaged at the moment in congratulating the winner of the race; it seemed an act of supererogatory graciousness; for, after all, she had only won a heat.

"Pretty little thing, isn't she?" said Mrs. Budge huskily, and panted two or three times.

"Yes," Denis nodded agreement. Sixteen, slender, but nubile, he said to himself, and laid up the phrase in his memory as a happy one. Old Mr. Callamay had put on his spectacles to congratulate the victor, and Lord Moleyn, leaning forward over his walking-stick, showed his long ivory teeth, hungrily smiling.

"Capital performance, capital," Mr. Callamay was saying in his deep voice.

The victor wriggled with embarrassment. She stood with her hands behind her back, rubbing one foot nervously on the other. Her wet bathing-dress shone, a torso of black polished marble.

"Very good indeed," said Lord Moleyn. His voice seemed to come from just behind his teeth, a toothy voice. It was as though a dog should suddenly begin to speak. He smiled again, Mr. Callamay readjusted his spectacles.

"When I say 'Go,' go. Go!"

Splash! The third heat had started.

"Do you know, I never could learn to swim," said Mrs. Budge.

"Really?"

"But I used to be able to float."

Denis imagined her floating — up and down, up and down on a great green swell. A blown black bladder; no, that wasn't good, that wasn't good at all. A new winner was being congratulated. She was atrociously stubby and fat. The last one, long and harmoniously, continuously curved from knee to breast, had been an Eve by Cranach; but this, this one was a bad Rubens.

"...go — go — go!" Henry Wimbush's polite level voice once more pronounced the formula. Another batch of young ladies dived in.

Grown a little weary of sustaining a conversation with Mrs. Budge, Denis conveniently remembered that his duties as a steward called him elsewhere. He pushed out through the lines of spectators and made his way along the path left clear behind them. He was thinking again that his soul was a pale, tenuous membrane, when he was startled by hearing a thin, sibilant voice, speaking apparently from just above his head, pronounce the single word "Disgusting!"

He looked up sharply. The path along which he was walking passed under the lee of a wall of clipped yew. Behind the hedge the ground sloped steeply up towards the foot of the terrace and the house; for one standing on the higher ground it was easy to look over the dark barrier. Looking up, Denis saw two heads overtopping the hedge immediately above him. He recognised the iron mask of Mr. Bodiham and the pale, colourless face of his wife. They were looking over his head, over the heads of the spectators, at the swimmers in the pond.

"Disgusting!" Mrs. Bodiham repeated, hissing softly.

The rector turned up his iron mask towards the solid cobalt of the sky. "How long?" he said, as though to himself; "how long?" He lowered his eyes again, and they fell on Denis's upturned curious face. There was an abrupt movement, and Mr. and Mrs. Bodiham popped out of sight behind the hedge.

Denis continued his promenade. He wandered past the merry-go-round, through the thronged streets of the canvas village; the membrane of his soul flapped tumultuously in the noise and laughter. In a roped-off space beyond, Mary was directing the children's sports. Little creatures seethed round about her, making a shrill, tinny clamour; others clustered about the skirts and trousers of their parents. Mary's face was shining in the heat; with an immense output of energy she started a three-legged race. Denis looked on in admiration.

"You're wonderful," he said, coming up behind her and touching her on the arm. "I've never seen such energy."

She turned towards him a face, round, red, and honest as the setting sun; the golden bell of her hair swung silently as she moved her head and quivered to rest.

"Do you know, Denis," she said, in a low, serious voice, gasping a little as she spoke—"do you know that there's a woman here who has had three children in thirty-one months?"

"Really," said Denis, making rapid mental calculations.



“It’s appalling. I’ve been telling her about the Malthusian League. One really ought...”

But a sudden violent renewal of the metallic yelling announced the fact that somebody had won the race. Mary became once more the centre of a dangerous vortex. It was time, Denis thought, to move on; he might be asked to do something if he stayed too long.

He turned back towards the canvas village. The thought of tea was making itself insistent in his mind. Tea, tea, tea. But the tea-tent was horribly thronged. Anne, with an unusual expression of grimness on her flushed face, was furiously working the handle of the urn; the brown liquid spurted incessantly into the proffered cups. Portentous, in the farther corner of the tent, Priscilla, in her royal toque, was encouraging the villagers. In a momentary lull Denis could hear her deep, jovial laughter and her manly voice. Clearly, he told himself, this was no place for one who wanted tea. He stood irresolute at the entrance to the tent. A beautiful thought suddenly came to him; if he went back to the house, went unobtrusively, without being observed, if he tiptoed into the dining-room and noiselessly opened the little doors of the sideboard — ah, then! In the cool recess within he would find bottles and a siphon; a bottle of crystal gin and a quart of soda water, and then for the cups that inebriate as well as cheer...

A minute later he was walking briskly up the shady yew-tree walk. Within the house it was deliciously quiet and cool. Carrying his well-filled tumbler with care, he went into the library. There, the glass on the corner of the table beside him, he settled into a chair with a volume of Sainte-Beuve. There was nothing, he found, like a *Causerie du Lundi* for settling and soothing the troubled spirits. That tenuous membrane of his had been too rudely buffeted by the afternoon’s emotions; it required a rest.

## Chapter XXVIII.

TOWARDS SUNSET THE fair itself became quiescent. It was the hour for the dancing to begin. At one side of the village of tents a space had been roped off. Acetylene lamps, hung round it on posts, cast a piercing white light. In one corner sat the band, and, obedient to its scraping and blowing, two or three hundred dancers trampled across the dry ground, wearing away the grass with their booted feet. Round this patch of all but daylight, alive with motion and noise, the night seemed preternaturally dark. Bars of light reached out into it, and every now and then a lonely figure or a couple of lovers, interlaced, would cross the bright shaft, flashing for a moment into visible existence, to disappear again as quickly and surprisingly as they had come.

Denis stood by the entrance of the enclosure, watching the swaying, shuffling crowd. The slow vortex brought the couples round and round again before him, as though he were passing them in review. There was Priscilla, still wearing her queenly toque, still encouraging the villagers — this time by dancing with one of the tenant farmers.

There was Lord Moleyn, who had stayed on to the disorganised, passoverish meal that took the place of dinner on this festal day; he one-stepped shamblingly, his bent knees more precariously wobbly than ever, with a terrified village beauty. Mr. Scogan trotted round with another. Mary was in the embrace of a young farmer of heroic proportions; she was looking up at him, talking, as Denis could see, very seriously. What about? he wondered. The Malthusian League, perhaps. Seated in the corner among the band, Jenny was performing wonders of virtuosity upon the drums. Her eyes shone, she smiled to herself. A whole subterranean life seemed to be expressing itself in those loud rat-tats, those long rolls and flourishes of drumming. Looking at her, Denis ruefully remembered the red notebook; he wondered what sort of a figure he was cutting now. But the sight of Anne and Gombauld swimming past — Anne with her eyes almost shut and sleeping, as it were, on the sustaining wings of movement and music — dissipated these preoccupations. Male and female created He them...There they were, Anne and Gombauld, and a hundred couples more — all stepping harmoniously together to the old tune of Male and Female created He them. But Denis sat apart; he alone lacked his complementary opposite. They were all coupled but he; all but he...

Somebody touched him on the shoulder and he looked up. It was Henry Wimbush.

"I never showed you our oaken drainpipes," he said. "Some of the ones we dug up are lying quite close to here. Would you like to come and see them?"

Denis got up, and they walked off together into the darkness. The music grew fainter behind them. Some of the higher notes faded out altogether. Jenny's drumming and the steady sawing of the bass throbbed on, tuneless and meaningless in their ears. Henry Wimbush halted.

"Here we are," he said, and, taking an electric torch out of his pocket, he cast a dim beam over two or three blackened sections of tree trunk, scooped out into the semblance of pipes, which were lying forlornly in a little depression in the ground.

"Very interesting," said Denis, with a rather tepid enthusiasm.

They sat down on the grass. A faint white glare, rising from behind a belt of trees, indicated the position of the dancing-floor. The music was nothing but a muffled rhythmic pulse.

"I shall be glad," said Henry Wimbush, "when this function comes at last to an end."

"I can believe it."

"I do not know how it is," Mr. Wimbush continued, "but the spectacle of numbers of my fellow-creatures in a state of agitation moves in me a certain weariness, rather than any gaiety or excitement. The fact is, they don't very much interest me. They're aren't in my line. You follow me? I could never take much interest, for example, in a collection of postage stamps. Primitives or seventeenth-century books — yes. They are my line. But stamps, no. I don't know anything about them; they're not my line. They don't interest me, they give me no emotion. It's rather the same with people, I'm afraid. I'm more at home with these pipes." He jerked his head sideways towards the hollowed logs. "The trouble with the people and events of the present is that you never know anything about them. What do I know of contemporary politics? Nothing.

What do I know of the people I see round about me? Nothing. What they think of me or of anything else in the world, what they will do in five minutes' time, are things I can't guess at. For all I know, you may suddenly jump up and try to murder me in a moment's time."

"Come, come," said Denis.

"True," Mr. Wimbush continued, "the little I know about your past is certainly reassuring. But I know nothing of your present, and neither you nor I know anything of your future. It's appalling; in living people, one is dealing with unknown and unknowable quantities. One can only hope to find out anything about them by a long series of the most disagreeable and boring human contacts, involving a terrible expense of time. It's the same with current events; how can I find out anything about them except by devoting years to the most exhausting first-hand study, involving once more an endless number of the most unpleasant contacts? No, give me the past. It doesn't change; it's all there in black and white, and you can get to know about it comfortably and decorously and, above all, privately — by reading. By reading I know a great deal of Caesar Borgia, of St. Francis, of Dr. Johnson; a few weeks have made me thoroughly acquainted with these interesting characters, and I have been spared the tedious and revolting process of getting to know them by personal contact, which I should have to do if they were living now. How gay and delightful life would be if one could get rid of all the human contacts! Perhaps, in the future, when machines have attained to a state of perfection — for I confess that I am, like Godwin and Shelley, a believer in perfectibility, the perfectibility of machinery — then, perhaps, it will be possible for those who, like myself, desire it, to live in a dignified seclusion, surrounded by the delicate attentions of silent and graceful machines, and entirely secure from any human intrusion. It is a beautiful thought."

"Beautiful," Denis agreed. "But what about the desirable human contacts, like love and friendship?"

The black silhouette against the darkness shook its head. "The pleasures even of these contacts are much exaggerated," said the polite level voice. "It seems to me doubtful whether they are equal to the pleasures of private reading and contemplation. Human contacts have been so highly valued in the past only because reading was not a common accomplishment and because books were scarce and difficult to reproduce. The world, you must remember, is only just becoming literate. As reading becomes more and more habitual and widespread, an ever-increasing number of people will discover that books will give them all the pleasures of social life and none of its intolerable tedium. At present people in search of pleasure naturally tend to congregate in large herds and to make a noise; in future their natural tendency will be to seek solitude and quiet. The proper study of mankind is books."

"I sometimes think that it may be," said Denis; he was wondering if Anne and Gombauld were still dancing together.

"Instead of which," said Mr. Wimbush, with a sigh, "I must go and see if all is well on the dancing-floor." They got up and began to walk slowly towards the white

glare. "If all these people were dead," Henry Wimbush went on, "this festivity would be extremely agreeable. Nothing would be pleasanter than to read in a well-written book of an open-air ball that took place a century ago. How charming! one would say; how pretty and how amusing! But when the ball takes place to-day, when one finds oneself involved in it, then one sees the thing in its true light. It turns out to be merely this." He waved his hand in the direction of the acetylene flares. "In my youth," he went on after a pause, "I found myself, quite fortuitously, involved in a series of the most phantasmagorical amorous intrigues. A novelist could have made his fortune out of them, and even if I were to tell you, in my bald style, the details of these adventures, you would be amazed at the romantic tale. But I assure you, while they were happening — these romantic adventures — they seemed to me no more and no less exciting than any other incident of actual life. To climb by night up a rope-ladder to a second-floor window in an old house in Toledo seemed to me, while I was actually performing this rather dangerous feat, an action as obvious, as much to be taken for granted, as — how shall I put it? — as quotidian as catching the 8.52 from Surbiton to go to business on a Monday morning. Adventures and romance only take on their adventurous and romantic qualities at second-hand. Live them, and they are just a slice of life like the rest. In literature they become as charming as this dismal ball would be if we were celebrating its tercentenary." They had come to the entrance of the enclosure and stood there, blinking in the dazzling light. "Ah, if only we were!" Henry Wimbush added.

Anne and Gombauld were still dancing together.

## Chapter XXIX.

IT WAS AFTER ten o'clock. The dancers had already dispersed and the last lights were being put out. To-morrow the tents would be struck, the dismantled merry-go-round would be packed into waggons and carted away. An expanse of worn grass, a shabby brown patch in the wide green of the park, would be all that remained. Crome Fair was over.

By the edge of the pool two figures lingered.

"No, no, no," Anne was saying in a breathless whisper, leaning backwards, turning her head from side to side in an effort to escape Gombauld's kisses. "No, please. No." Her raised voice had become imperative.

Gombauld relaxed his embrace a little. "Why not?" he said. "I will."

With a sudden effort Anne freed herself. "You won't," she retorted. "You've tried to take the most unfair advantage of me."

"Unfair advantage?" echoed Gombauld in genuine surprise.

"Yes, unfair advantage. You attack me after I've been dancing for two hours, while I'm still reeling drunk with the movement, when I've lost my head, when I've got no

mind left but only a rhythmical body! It's as bad as making love to someone you've drugged or intoxicated."

Gombauld laughed angrily. "Call me a White Slaver and have done with it."

"Luckily," said Anne, "I am now completely sobered, and if you try and kiss me again I shall box your ears. Shall we take a few turns round the pool?" she added. "The night is delicious."

For answer Gombauld made an irritated noise. They paced off slowly, side by side.

"What I like about the painting of Degas..." Anne began in her most detached and conversational tone.

"Oh, damn Degas!" Gombauld was almost shouting.

From where he stood, leaning in an attitude of despair against the parapet of the terrace, Denis had seen them, the two pale figures in a patch of moonlight, far down by the pool's edge. He had seen the beginning of what promised to be an endless passionate embrace, and at the sight he had fled. It was too much; he couldn't stand it. In another moment, he felt, he would have burst into irrepressible tears.

Dashing blindly into the house, he almost ran into Mr. Scogan, who was walking up and down the hall smoking a final pipe.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Scogan, catching him by the arm; dazed and hardly conscious of what he was doing or where he was, Denis stood there for a moment like a somnambulist. "What's the matter?" Mr. Scogan went on. "you look disturbed, distressed, depressed."

Denis shook his head without replying.

"Worried about the cosmos, eh?" Mr. Scogan patted him on the arm. "I know the feeling," he said. "It's a most distressing symptom. 'What's the point of it all? All is vanity. What's the good of continuing to function if one's doomed to be snuffed out at last along with everything else?' Yes, yes. I know exactly how you feel. It's most distressing if one allows oneself to be distressed. But then why allow oneself to be distressed? After all, we all know that there's no ultimate point. But what difference does that make?"

At this point the somnambulist suddenly woke up. "What?" he said, blinking and frowning at his interlocutor. "What?" Then breaking away he dashed up the stairs, two steps at a time.

Mr. Scogan ran to the foot of the stairs and called up after him. "It makes no difference, none whatever. Life is gay all the same, always, under whatever circumstances — under whatever circumstances," he added, raising his voice to a shout. But Denis was already far out of hearing, and even if he had not been, his mind to-night was proof against all the consolations of philosophy. Mr. Scogan replaced his pipe between his teeth and resumed his meditative pacing. "Under any circumstances," he repeated to himself. It was ungrammatical to begin with; was it true? And is life really its own reward? He wondered. When his pipe had burned itself to its stinking conclusion he took a drink of gin and went to bed. In ten minutes he was deeply, innocently asleep.

Denis had mechanically undressed and, clad in those flowered silk pyjamas of which he was so justly proud, was lying face downwards on his bed. Time passed. When at last he looked up, the candle which he had left alight at his bedside had burned down almost to the socket. He looked at his watch; it was nearly half-past one. His head ached, his dry, sleepless eyes felt as though they had been bruised from behind, and the blood was beating within his ears a loud arterial drum. He got up, opened the door, tiptoed noiselessly along the passage, and began to mount the stairs towards the higher floors. Arrived at the servants' quarters under the roof, he hesitated, then turning to the right he opened a little door at the end of the corridor. Within was a pitch-dark cupboard-like boxroom, hot, stuffy, and smelling of dust and old leather. He advanced cautiously into the blackness, groping with his hands. It was from this den that the ladder went up to the leads of the western tower. He found the ladder, and set his feet on the rungs; noiselessly, he lifted the trap-door above his head; the moonlit sky was over him, he breathed the fresh, cool air of the night. In a moment he was standing on the leads, gazing out over the dim, colourless landscape, looking perpendicularly down at the terrace seventy feet below.

Why had he climbed up to this high, desolate place? Was it to look at the moon? Was it to commit suicide? As yet he hardly knew. Death — the tears came into his eyes when he thought of it. His misery assumed a certain solemnity; he was lifted up on the wings of a kind of exaltation. It was a mood in which he might have done almost anything, however foolish. He advanced towards the farther parapet; the drop was sheer there and uninterrupted. A good leap, and perhaps one might clear the narrow terrace and so crash down yet another thirty feet to the sun-baked ground below. He paused at the corner of the tower, looking now down into the shadowy gulf below, now up towards the rare stars and the waning moon. He made a gesture with his hand, muttered something, he could not afterwards remember what; but the fact that he had said it aloud gave the utterance a peculiarly terrible significance. Then he looked down once more into the depths.

"What ARE you doing, Denis?" questioned a voice from somewhere very close behind him.

Denis uttered a cry of frightened surprise, and very nearly went over the parapet in good earnest. His heart was beating terribly, and he was pale when, recovering himself, he turned round in the direction from which the voice had come.

"Are you ill?"

In the profound shadow that slept under the eastern parapet of the tower, he saw something he had not previously noticed — an oblong shape. It was a mattress, and someone was lying on it. Since that first memorable night on the tower, Mary had slept out every evening; it was a sort of manifestation of fidelity.

"It gave me a fright," she went on, "to wake up and see you waving your arms and gibbering there. What on earth were you doing?"

Denis laughed melodramatically. "What, indeed!" he said. If she hadn't woken up as she did, he would be lying in pieces at the bottom of the tower; he was certain of that, now.

"You hadn't got designs on me, I hope?" Mary inquired, jumping too rapidly to conclusions.

"I didn't know you were here," said Denis, laughing more bitterly and artificially than before.

"What IS the matter, Denis?"

He sat down on the edge of the mattress, and for all reply went on laughing in the same frightful and improbable tone.

An hour later he was reposing with his head on Mary's knees, and she, with an affectionate solicitude that was wholly maternal, was running her fingers through his tangled hair. He had told her everything, everything: his hopeless love, his jealousy, his despair, his suicide — as it were providentially averted by her interposition. He had solemnly promised never to think of self-destruction again. And now his soul was floating in a sad serenity. It was embalmed in the sympathy that Mary so generously poured. And it was not only in receiving sympathy that Denis found serenity and even a kind of happiness; it was also in giving it. For if he had told Mary everything about his miseries, Mary, reacting to these confidences, had told him in return everything, or very nearly everything, about her own.

"Poor Mary!" He was very sorry for her. Still, she might have guessed that Ivor wasn't precisely a monument of constancy.

"Well," she concluded, "one must put a good face on it." She wanted to cry, but she wouldn't allow herself to be weak. There was a silence.

"Do you think," asked Denis hesitatingly— "do you really think that she...that Gombauld..."

"I'm sure of it," Mary answered decisively. There was another long pause.

"I don't know what to do about it," he said at last, utterly dejected.

"You'd better go away," advised Mary. "It's the safest thing, and the most sensible."

"But I've arranged to stay here three weeks more."

"You must concoct an excuse."

"I suppose you're right."

"I know I am," said Mary, who was recovering all her firm self-possession. "You can't go on like this, can you?"

"No, I can't go on like this," he echoed.

Immensely practical, Mary invented a plan of action. Startlingly, in the darkness, the church clock struck three.

"You must go to bed at once," she said. "I'd no idea it was so late."

Denis clambered down the ladder, cautiously descended the creaking stairs. His room was dark; the candle had long ago guttered to extinction. He got into bed and fell asleep almost at once.

## Chapter XXX.

DENIS HAD BEEN called, but in spite of the parted curtains he had dropped off again into that drowsy, dozy state when sleep becomes a sensual pleasure almost consciously savoured. In this condition he might have remained for another hour if he had not been disturbed by a violent rapping at the door.

"Come in," he mumbled, without opening his eyes. The latch clicked, a hand seized him by the shoulder and he was rudely shaken.

"Get up, get up!"

His eyelids blinked painfully apart, and he saw Mary standing over him, bright-faced and earnest.

"Get up!" she repeated. "You must go and send the telegram. Don't you remember?"

"O Lord!" He threw off the bed-clothes; his tormentor retired.

Denis dressed as quickly as he could and ran up the road to the village post office. Satisfaction glowed within him as he returned. He had sent a long telegram, which would in a few hours evoke an answer ordering him back to town at once — on urgent business. It was an act performed, a decisive step taken — and he so rarely took decisive steps; he felt pleased with himself. It was with a whetted appetite that he came in to breakfast.

"Good-morning," said Mr. Scogan. "I hope you're better."

"Better?"

"You were rather worried about the cosmos last night."

Denis tried to laugh away the impeachment. "Was I?" he lightly asked.

"I wish," said Mr. Scogan, "that I had nothing worse to prey on my mind. I should be a happy man."

"One is only happy in action," Denis enunciated, thinking of the telegram.

He looked out of the window. Great florid baroque clouds floated high in the blue heaven. A wind stirred among the trees, and their shaken foliage twinkled and glittered like metal in the sun. Everything seemed marvellously beautiful. At the thought that he would soon be leaving all this beauty he felt a momentary pang; but he comforted himself by recollecting how decisively he was acting.

"Action," he repeated aloud, and going over to the sideboard he helped himself to an agreeable mixture of bacon and fish.

Breakfast over, Denis repaired to the terrace, and, sitting there, raised the enormous bulwark of the "Times" against the possible assaults of Mr. Scogan, who showed an unappeased desire to go on talking about the Universe. Secure behind the crackling pages, he meditated. In the light of this brilliant morning the emotions of last night seemed somehow rather remote. And what if he had seen them embracing in the moonlight? Perhaps it didn't mean much after all. And even if it did, why shouldn't he stay? He felt strong enough to stay, strong enough to be aloof, disinterested, a mere friendly acquaintance. And even if he weren't strong enough...



"What time do you think the telegram will arrive?" asked Mary suddenly, thrusting in upon him over the top of the paper.

Denis started guiltily. "I don't know at all," he said.

"I was only wondering," said Mary, "because there's a very good train at 3.27, and it would be nice if you could catch it, wouldn't it?"

"Awfully nice," he agreed weakly. He felt as though he were making arrangements for his own funeral. Train leaves Waterloo 3.27. No flowers...Mary was gone. No, he was blowed if he'd let himself be hurried down to the Necropolis like this. He was blowed. The sight of Mr. Scogan looking out, with a hungry expression, from the drawing-room window made him precipitately hoist the "Times" once more. For a long while he kept it hoisted. Lowering it at last to take another cautious peep at his surroundings, he found himself, with what astonishment! confronted by Anne's faint, amused, malicious smile. She was standing before him, — the woman who was a tree, — the swaying grace of her movement arrested in a pose that seemed itself a movement.

"How long have you been standing there?" he asked, when he had done gaping at her.

"Oh, about half an hour, I suppose," she said airily. "You were so very deep in your paper — head over ears — I didn't like to disturb you."

"You look lovely this morning," Denis exclaimed. It was the first time he had ever had the courage to utter a personal remark of the kind.

Anne held up her hand as though to ward off a blow. "Don't bludgeon me, please." She sat down on the bench beside him. He was a nice boy, she thought, quite charming; and Gombauld's violent insistences were really becoming rather tiresome. "Why don't you wear white trousers?" she asked. "I like you so much in white trousers."

"They're at the wash," Denis replied rather curtly. This white-trouser business was all in the wrong spirit. He was just preparing a scheme to manoeuvre the conversation back to the proper path, when Mr. Scogan suddenly darted out of the house, crossed the terrace with clockwork rapidity, and came to a halt in front of the bench on which they were seated.

"To go on with our interesting conversation about the cosmos," he began, "I become more and more convinced that the various parts of the concern are fundamentally discrete...But would you mind, Denis, moving a shade to your right?" He wedged himself between them on the bench. "And if you would shift a few inches to the left, my dear Anne...Thank you. Discrete, I think, was what I was saying."

"You were," said Anne. Denis was speechless.

They were taking their after luncheon coffee in the library when the telegram arrived. Denis blushed guiltily as he took the orange envelope from the salver and tore it open. "Return at once. Urgent family business." It was too ridiculous. As if he had any family business! Wouldn't it be best just to crumple the thing up and put it in his pocket without saying anything about it? He looked up; Mary's large blue china eyes were fixed upon him, seriously, penetratingly. He blushed more deeply than ever, hesitated in a horrible uncertainty.

"What's your telegram about?" Mary asked significantly.

He lost his head, "I'm afraid," he mumbled, "I'm afraid this means I shall have to go back to town at once." He frowned at the telegram ferociously.

"But that's absurd, impossible," cried Anne. She had been standing by the window talking to Gombauld; but at Denis's words she came swaying across the room towards him.

"It's urgent," he repeated desperately.

"But you've only been here such a short time," Anne protested.

"I know," he said, utterly miserable. Oh, if only she could understand! Women were supposed to have intuition.

"If he must go, he must," put in Mary firmly.

"Yes, I must." He looked at the telegram again for inspiration. "You see, it's urgent family business," he explained.

Priscilla got up from her chair in some excitement. "I had a distinct presentiment of this last night," she said. "A distinct presentiment."

"A mere coincidence, no doubt," said Mary, brushing Mrs. Wimbush out of the conversation. "There's a very good train at 3.27." She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. "You'll have nice time to pack."

"I'll order the motor at once." Henry Wimbush rang the bell. The funeral was well under way. It was awful, awful.

"I am wretched you should be going," said Anne.

Denis turned towards her; she really did look wretched. He abandoned himself hopelessly, fatalistically to his destiny. This was what came of action, of doing something decisive. If only he'd just let things drift! If only...

"I shall miss your conversation," said Mr. Scogan.

Mary looked at the clock again. "I think perhaps you ought to go and pack," she said.

Obediently Denis left the room. Never again, he said to himself, never again would he do anything decisive. Camlet, West Bowlby, Knipswich for Timpany, Spavin Delawarr; and then all the other stations; and then, finally, London. The thought of the journey appalled him. And what on earth was he going to do in London when he got there? He climbed wearily up the stairs. It was time for him to lay himself in his coffin.

The car was at the door — the hearse. The whole party had assembled to see him go. Good-bye, good-bye. Mechanically he tapped the barometer that hung in the porch; the needle stirred perceptibly to the left. A sudden smile lighted up his lugubrious face.

"'It sinks and I am ready to depart,'" he said, quoting Landor with an exquisite aptness. He looked quickly round from face to face. Nobody had noticed. He climbed into the hearse.

**Antic Hay**

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The first edition

My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns  
Shall with their goat-feet dance the Antic Hay  
MARLOWE

# Chapter I

GUMBRIL, THEODORE GUMBRIL Junior, B.A.Oxon., sat in his oaken stall on the north side of the School Chapel and wondered, as he listened through the uneasy silence of half a thousand schoolboys to the First Lesson, pondered, as he looked up at the vast window opposite, all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth-century glass, speculated in his rapid and rambling way about the existence and the nature of God.

Standing in front of the spread brass eagle and fortified in his convictions by the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy (for this first Sunday of term was the Fifth after Easter), the Reverend Pelvey could speak of these things with an enviable certainty. 'Hear, O Israel,' he was booming out over the top of the portentous Book: 'the Lord our God is one Lord.'

One Lord; Mr Pelvey knew; he had studied theology. But if theology and theosophy, then why not theography and theometry, why not theognomy, theotrophy, theotomy, theogamy? Why not theophysics and theo-chemistry? Why not that ingenious toy, the theotrope or wheel of gods? Why not a monumental theodrome?

In the great window opposite, young David stood like a cock, crowing on the dunghill of a tumbled giant. From the middle of Goliath's forehead there issued, like a narwhal's budding horn, a curious excrescence. Was it the embedded pebble? Or perhaps the giant's married life?

'... with all thine heart,' declaimed the Reverend Pelvey, 'and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.'

No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought — that was all right. But God as truth, God as  $2+2=4$  — that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds? And could it be that the Reverend Pelvey, M.A., foghoring away from behind the imperial bird, could it be that he had an answer and a clue? That was hardly believable. Particularly if one knew Mr Pelvey personally. And Gumbril did.

'And these words which I command thee this day,' retorted Mr Pelvey, 'shall be in thine heart.'

Or in the heart, or in the head? Reply, Mr Pelvey, reply. Gumbril jumped between the horns of the dilemma and voted for other organs.

'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'

Diligently unto thy children. ... Gumbril remembered his own childhood; they had not been very diligently taught to him. 'Beetles, black beetles' — his father had a really passionate feeling about the clergy. Mumbo-jumbury was another of his favourite words.

An atheist and an anti-clerical of the strict old school he was. Not that, in any case, he gave himself much time to think about these things; he was too busy being an unsuccessful architect. As for Gumbriel's mother, her diligence had not been dogmatic. She had just been diligently good, that was all. Good; good? It was a word people only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humorousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them, like earwigs? I glory in the name of earwig. Gumbriel made a mental gesture and inwardly declaimed. But good in any case, there was no getting out of that, good she had been. Not nice, not merely *molto simpatica* — how charmingly and effectively these foreign tags assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some other name! — but good. You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her. ... And that feeling, was that less real and valid than two plus two?

The Reverend Pelvey had nothing to reply. He was reading with a holy gusto of 'houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not.'

She had been good and she had died when he was still a boy; died — but he hadn't been told that till much later — of creeping and devouring pain. Malignant disease — oh, caro nome!

'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God,' said Mr Pelvey.

Even when the ulcers are benign; thou shalt fear. He had travelled up from school to see her, just before she died. He hadn't known that she was going to die, but when he entered her room, when he saw her lying so weakly in the bed, he had suddenly begun to cry, uncontrollably. All the fortitude, the laughter even, had been hers. And she had spoken to him. A few words only; but they had contained all the wisdom he needed to live by. She had told him what he was, and what he should try to be, and how to be it. And crying, still crying, he had promised that he would try.

'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,' said Mr Pelvey, 'for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.'

And had he kept his promise, Gumbriel wondered, had he preserved himself alive?

'Here endeth the First Lesson.' Mr Pelvey retreated from the eagle, and the organ presaged the coming *Te Deum*.

Gumbriel hoisted himself to his feet; the folds of his B.A. gown billowed nobly about him as he rose. He sighed and shook his head with the gesture of one who tries to shake off a fly or an importunate thought. When the time came for singing, he sang. On the opposite side of the chapel two boys were grinning and whispering to one another behind their lifted Prayer Books. Gumbriel frowned at them ferociously. The two boys caught his eye and their faces at once took on an expression of sickly piety; they began to sing with unction. They were two ugly, stupid-looking louts, who ought to have been apprenticed years ago to some useful trade. Instead of which they were wasting their own and their teacher's and their more intelligent comrades' time in trying, quite vainly, to acquire an elegant literary education. The minds of dogs, Gumbriel reflected, do not benefit by being treated as though they were the minds of men.

‘O Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us.’

Gumbril shrugged his shoulders and looked round the chapel at the faces of the boys. Lord, indeed, have mercy upon us! He was disturbed to find the sentiment echoed on a somewhat different note in the Second Lesson, which was drawn from the twenty-third chapter of St Luke. ‘Father, forgive them,’ said Mr Pelvey in his unvaryingly juicy voice; ‘for they know not what they do.’ Ah, but suppose one did know what one was doing? suppose one knew only too well? And of course one always did know. One was not a fool.

But this was all nonsense, all nonsense. One must think of something better than this. What a comfort it would be, for example, if one could bring air cushions into chapel! These polished oaken stalls were devilishly hard; they were meant for stout and lusty pedagogues, not for bony starvelings like himself. An air cushion, a delicious pneu.

‘Here endeth,’ boomed Mr Pelvey, closing his book on the back of the German eagle.

As if by magic, Dr Jolly was ready at the organ with the Benedictus. It was positively a relief to stand again; this oak was adamant. But air cushions, alas, would be too bad an example for the boys. Hardy young Spartans! it was an essential part of their education that they should listen to the word of revelation without pneumatic easement. No, air cushions wouldn’t do. The real remedy, it suddenly flashed across his mind, would be trousers with pneumatic seats. For all occasions; not merely for church-going.

The organ blew a thin Puritan-preacher’s note through one of its hundred nostrils. ‘I believe ...’ With a noise like the breaking of a wave, five hundred turned towards the East. The view of David and Goliath was exchanged for a Crucifixion in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty. ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ No, no, Gumbril preferred to look at the grooved stonework rushing smoothly up on either side of the great east window towards the vaulted roof; preferred to reflect, like the dutiful son of an architect he was, that Perpendicular at its best — and its best is its largest — is the finest sort of English Gothic. At its worst and smallest, as in most of the colleges of Oxford, it is mean, petty, and, but for a certain picturesqueness, almost wholly disgusting. He felt like a lecturer: next slide, please. ‘And the life everlasting. Amen.’ Like an oboe, Mr Pelvey intoned: ‘The Lord be with you.’

For prayer, Gumbril reflected, there would be Dunlop knees. Still, in the days when he had made a habit of praying, they hadn’t been necessary. ‘Our Father ...’ The words were the same as they were in the old days; but Mr Pelvey’s method of reciting them made them sound rather different. Her dresses, when he had leaned his forehead against her knee to say those words — those words, good Lord! that Mr Pelvey was oboeing out of existence — were always black in the evenings, and of silk, and smelt of orris root. And when she was dying, she had said to him: ‘Remember the Parable of the Sower, and the seeds that fell in shallow ground.’ No, no. Amen, decidedly. ‘O Lord, show thy mercy upon us,’ chanted oboe Pelvey, and Gumbril trombone responded, profoundly and grotesquely: ‘And grant us thy salvation.’ No, the knees were

obviously less important, except for people like revivalists and housemaids, than the seat. Sedentary are commoner than genuflectory professions. One would introduce little flat rubber bladders between two layers of cloth. At the upper end, hidden when one wore a coat, would be a tube with a valve: like a hollow tail. Blow it up — and there would be perfect comfort even for the boniest, even on rock. How did the Greeks stand marble benches in their theatres?

The moment had now come for the Hymn. This being the first Sunday of the Summer term, they sang that special hymn, written by the Headmaster, with music by Dr Jolly, on purpose to be sung on the first Sundays of terms. The organ quietly sketched out the tune. Simple it was, uplifting and manly.

One, two, three, four; one, two three — 4.

One, two-and three-and four-and; One, two three — 4.

One — 2, three — 4; one — 2 — 3 — 4,

and-one — 2, three — 4; one — 2 — 3 — 4.

One, two-and three, four; One, two three — 4.

Five hundred flawed adolescent voices took it up. For good example's sake, Gumbril opened and closed his mouth; noiselessly, however. It was only at the third verse that he gave rein to his uncertain baritone. He particularly liked the third verse; it marked, in his opinion, the Headmaster's highest poetical achievement.

(f) For slack hands and (dim.) idle minds

(mf) Mischief still the Tempter finds.

(ff) Keep him captive in his lair.

At this point Dr Jolly enriched his tune with a thick accompaniment in the lower registers, artfully designed to symbolize the depth, the gloom and general repulsiveness of the Tempter's home.

(ff) Keep him captive in his lair.

(f) Work will bind him. (dim.) Work is (pp) prayer.

Work, thought Gumbril, work. Lord, how passionately he disliked work! Let Austin have his swink to him reserved! Ah, if only one had work of one's own, proper work, decent work — not forced upon one by the griping of one's belly! Amen! Dr Jolly blew the two sumptuous jets of reverence into the air; Gumbril accompanied them with all his heart. Amen, indeed.

Gumbril sat down again. It might be convenient, he thought, to have the tail so long that one could blow up one's trousers while one actually had them on. In which case, it would have to be coiled round the waist like a belt; or looped up, perhaps, and fastened to a clip on one's braces.

'The nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, part of the thirty-fourth verse.' The Headmaster's loud, harsh voice broke violently out from the pulpit. 'All with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'

Gumbril composed himself as comfortably as he could on his oaken seat. It was going to be one of the Headmaster's real swingeing sermons. Great is Diana. And Venus? Ah, these seats, these seats!



Gumbril did not attend evening chapel. He stayed at home in his lodgings to correct the sixty-three Holiday Task Papers which had fallen to his share. They lay, thick piles of them, on the floor beside his chair: sixty-three answers to ten questions about the Italian Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, of all subjects! It had been one of the Headmaster's caprices. He had called a special masters' meeting at the end of last term to tell them all about the Risorgimento. It was his latest discovery.

'The Risorgimento, gentlemen, is the most important event in modern European history.' And he had banged the table; he had looked defiantly round the room in search of contradictors.

But nobody had contradicted him. Nobody ever did; they all knew better. For the Headmaster was as fierce as he was capricious. He was for ever discovering something new. Two terms ago it had been singeing; after the hair-cut and before the shampoo, there must be singeing.

'The hair, gentlemen, is a tube. If you cut it and leave the end unsealed, the water will get in and rot the tube. Hence the importance of singeing, gentlemen. Singeing seals the tube. I shall address the boys about it after chapel to-morrow morning; and I trust that all house-masters' — and he had glared around him from under his savage eyebrows — 'will see that their boys get themselves regularly singed after cutting.'

For weeks afterwards every boy trailed behind him a faint and nauseating whiff of burning, as though he were fresh from hell. And now it was the Risorgimento. One of these days, Gumbril reflected, it would be birth control, or the decimal system, or rational dress.

He picked up the nearest batch of papers. The printed questions were pinned to the topmost of them.

'Give a brief account of the character and career of Pope Pius IX, with dates wherever possible.'

Gumbril leaned back in his chair and thought of his own character, with dates. 1896: the first serious and conscious and deliberate lie. Did you break that vase, Theodore? No, mother. It lay on his conscience for nearly a month, eating deeper and deeper. Then he had confessed the truth. Or rather he had not confessed; that was too difficult. He led the conversation, very subtly, as he thought, round through the non-malleability of glass, through breakages in general, to this particular broken vase; he practically forced his mother to repeat her question. And then, with a burst of tears, he had answered, yes. It had always been difficult for him to say things directly, point-blank. His mother had told him, when she was dying. ... No, no; not that.

In 1898 or 1899 — oh, these dates! — he had made a pact with his little cousin, Molly, that she should let him see her with no clothes on, if he would do the same by her. She had fulfilled her part of the bargain; but he, overwhelmed at the last moment by a passion of modesty, had broken his promise.

Then, when he was about twelve and still at his preparatory school, in 1902 or 1903 he had done badly in his exams, on purpose; he had been frightened of Sadler, who was in the same form, and wanted to get the prize. Sadler was stronger than he was,

and had a genius for persecution. He had done so badly that his mother was unhappy; and it was impossible for him to explain.

In 1906 he had fallen in love for the first time — ah, much more violently than ever since — with a boy of his own age. Platonic it had been and profound. He had done badly that term, too; not on purpose, but because he had spent so much time helping young Vickers with his work. Vickers was really very stupid. The next term he had ‘come out’ — *Staphylococcus pyogenes* is a lover of growing adolescence — with spots and boils all over his face and neck. Gumbriel’s affection ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He finished that term, he remembered, with a second prize.

But it was time to be thinking seriously of Pio Nono. With a sigh of disgusted weariness, Gumbriel looked at his papers. What had Falarope Major to say of the Pontiff? ‘Pius IX was called Ferretti. He was a liberal before he was a Pope. A kindly man of less than average intelligence, he thought that all difficulties could be settled by a little goodwill, a few reforms and a political amnesty. He wrote several encyclicals and a syllabus.’ Gumbriel admired the phrase about less than average intelligence; Falarope Major should have at least one mark for having learnt it so well by heart. He turned to the next paper. Higgs was of opinion that ‘Pius the Ninth was a good but stupid man, who thought he could settle the Risorgimento with a few reforms and a political armistice.’ Beddoes was severer. ‘Pius IX was a bad man, who said that he was infallible, which showed he had a less than average intelligence.’ Sopwith Minor shared the general opinion about Pio’s intelligence, and displayed a great familiarity with the wrong dates. Clegg-Weller was voluminous and informative. ‘Pius IX was not so clever as his prime minister, Cardinal Antonelli. When he came to the tiara he was a liberal, and Metternich said he had never reckoned on a liberal pope. He then became a conservative. He was kindly, but not intelligent, and he thought Garibaldi and Cavour would be content with a few reforms and an amnesty.’ At the top of Garstang’s paper was written: ‘I have had measles all the holidays, so have been unable to read more than the first thirty pages of the book. Pope Pius IX does not come into these pages, of the contents of which I will proceed to give the following précis.’ And the précis duly followed. Gumbriel would have liked to give him full marks. But the business-like answer of Appleyard called him back to a better sense of his duty. ‘Pius IX became Pope in 1846 and died in 1878. He was a kindly man, but his intelligence was below the ...’

Gumbriel laid the paper down and shut his eyes. No, this was really impossible. Definitely, it couldn’t go on, it could not go on. There were thirteen weeks in the summer term, there would be thirteen in the autumn and eleven or twelve in the spring; and then another summer of thirteen, and so it would go on for ever. For ever. It wouldn’t do. He would go away and live uncomfortably on his three hundred. Or, no, he would go away and he would make money — that was more like it — money on a large scale, easily; he would be free and he would live. For the first time, he would live. Behind his closed eyes, he saw himself living.

Over the plushy floors of some vast and ignoble Ritz slowly he walked, at ease, with confidence: over the plushy floors and there, at the end of a long vista, there was Myra Viveash, waiting, this time, for him; coming forward impatiently to meet him, his abject lover now, not the cool, free, laughing mistress who had lent herself contemptuously once to his pathetic and silent importunity and then, after a day, withdrawn the gift again. Over the plushy floors to dine. Not that he was in love with Myra any longer: but revenge is sweet.

He sat in his own house. The Chinese statues looked out from the niches; the Maillols passionately meditated, slept, and were more than alive. The Goyas hung on the walls, there was a Boucher in the bathroom; and when he entered with his guests, what a Piazzetta exploded above the dining-room mantelpiece! Over the ancient wine they talked together, and he knew everything they knew and more; he gave, he inspired, it was the others who assimilated and were enriched. After dinner there were Mozart quartets; he opened his portfolios and showed his Daumiers, his Tiepolos, his Canaletto sketches, his drawings by Picasso and Lewis, and the purity of his naked Ingres. And later, talking of Odalisques, there were orgies without fatigue or disgust, and the women were pictures and lust in action, art.

Over the empty plains forty horses impelled him towards Mantua: rubadub — adubadub, with the silencer out. Towards the most romantic city in all the world.

When he spoke to women — how easily and insolently he spoke now! — they listened and laughed and looked at him sideways and dropped their eyelids over the admission, the invitation, of their glance. With Phyllis once he had sat, for how long? in a warm and moonless darkness, saying nothing, risking no gesture. And in the end they had parted, reluctantly and still in silence. Phyllis now was with him once again in the summer night; but this time he spoke, now softly, now in the angry breathless whisper of desire, he reached out and took her, and she was naked in his arms. All chance encounters, all plotted opportunities recurred; he knew, now, how to live, how to take advantage of them.

Over the empty plains towards Mantua, towards Mantua, he slid along at ease, free and alone. He explored the horrors of Roman society; visited Athens and Seville. To Unamuno and Papini he conversed familiarly in their own tongues. He understood perfectly and without effort the quantum theory. To his friend Shearwater he gave half a million for physiological research. He visited Schoenberg and persuaded him to write still better music. He exhibited to the politicians the full extent of their stupidity and their wickedness; he set them working for the salvation, not the destruction, of humanity. Once in the past when he had been called upon to make a public speech, he had felt so nervous that he was sick; the thousands who listened to him now bent like wheat under the wind of his eloquence. But it was only by the way and occasionally that he troubled himself to move them. He found it easy now to come to terms with everyone he met, to understand all points of view, to identify himself with even the most unfamiliar spirit. And he knew how everybody lived, and what it was like to be a mill-girl, a dustman, an engine-driver, a Jew, an Anglican bishop, a confidence-

trickster. Accustomed as he was to being swindled and imposed upon without protest, he now knew the art of being brutal. He was just dressing down that insolent porter at the Continental, who had complained that ten francs wasn't enough (and had got, as a matter of historic fact, another five in addition), when his landlady gave a knock, opened the door and said: 'Dinner's ready, Mr Gumbril.'

Feeling a little ashamed at having been interrupted in what was, after all, one of the ignobler and more trivial occupations of his new life, Gumbril went down to his fatty chop and green peas. It was the first meal to be eaten under the new dispensation; he ate it, for all that it was unhappily indistinguishable from the meals of the past, with elation and a certain solemnity, as though he were partaking of a sacrament. He felt buoyant with the thought that at last, at last, he was doing something about life.

When the chop was eaten, he went upstairs and, after filling two suit-cases and a Gladstone bag with the most valued of his possessions, addressed himself to the task of writing to the Headmaster. He might have gone away, of course, without writing. But it would be nobler, more in keeping, he felt, with his new life, to leave a justification behind — or rather not a justification, a denouncement. He picked up his pen and denounced.

## Chapter II

GUMBRIL SENIOR OCCUPIED a tall, narrow-shouldered and rachitic house in a little obscure square not far from Paddington. There were five floors, and a basement with beetles, and nearly a hundred stairs, which shook when any one ran too rudely down them. It was a prematurely old and decaying house in a decaying quarter. The square in which it stood was steadily coming down in the world. The houses, which a few years ago had all been occupied by respectable families, were now split up into squalid little maisonnettes, and from the neighbouring slums, which along with most other unpleasant things the old bourgeois families had been able to ignore, invading bands of children came to sport on the once-sacred pavements.

Mr Gumbril was almost the last survivor of the old inhabitants. He liked his house, and he liked his square. Social decadence had not affected the fourteen plane-trees which adorned its little garden, and the gambols of the dirty children did not disturb the starlings who came, evening by evening in summertime, to roost in their branches.

On fine evenings he used to sit out on his balcony waiting for the coming of the birds. And just at sunset, when the sky was most golden, there would be a twittering overhead, and the black, innumerable flocks of starlings would come sweeping across on the way from their daily haunts to their roosting-places, chosen so capriciously among the tree-planted squares and gardens of the city and so tenaciously retained, year after year, to the exclusion of every other place. Why his fourteen plane-trees should have been chosen, Mr Gumbril could never imagine. There were plenty of larger and more

umbrageous gardens all round; but they remained birdless, while every evening, from the larger flocks, a faithful legion detached itself to settle clamorously among his trees. They sat and chattered till the sun went down and twilight was past, with intervals every now and then of silence that fell suddenly and inexplicably on all the birds at once, lasted through a few seconds of thrilling suspense, to end as suddenly and senselessly in an outburst of the same loud and simultaneous conversation.

The starlings were Mr Gumbriel's most affectionately cherished friends; sitting out on his balcony to watch and listen to them, he had caught at the shut of treacherous evenings many colds and chills on the liver, he had laid up for himself many painful hours of rheumatism. These little accidents did nothing, however, to damp his affection for the birds; and still on every evening that could possibly be called fine, he was always to be seen in the twilight, sitting on the balcony, gazing up, round-spectacled and rapt, at the fourteen plane-trees. The breezes stirred in his grey hair, tossing it up in long, light wisps that fell across his forehead and over his spectacles; and then he would shake his head impatiently, and the bony hand would be freed for a moment from its unceasing combing and clutching of the sparse grey beard to push back the strayed tendrils, to smooth and reduce to order the whole ruffled head. The birds chattered on, the hand went back to its clutching and combing; once more the wind blew, darkness came down, and the gas-lamps round the square lit up the outer leaves of the plane-trees, touched the privet bushes inside the railings with an emerald light; behind them was impenetrable night; instead of shorn grass and bedded geraniums there was mystery, there were endless depths. And the birds at last were silent.

Mr Gumbriel would get up from his iron chair, stretch his arms and his stiff cold legs and go in through the french window to work. The birds were his diversion; when they were silent, it was time to think of serious matters.

To-night, however, he was not working; for always on Sunday evenings his old friend Porteous came to dine and talk. Breaking in unexpectedly at midnight, Gumbriel Junior found them sitting in front of the gas fire in his father's study.

'My dear fellow, what on earth are you doing here?' Gumbriel Senior jumped up excitedly at his son's entrance. The light silky hair floated up with the movement, turned for a moment into a silver aureole, then subsided again. Mr Porteous stayed where he was, calm, solid and undishevelled as a seated pillar-box. He wore a monocle on a black ribbon, a black stock tie that revealed above its double folds a quarter of an inch of stiff white collar, a double-breasted black coat, a pair of pale checked trousers and patent-leather boots with cloth tops. Mr Porteous was very particular about his appearance. Meeting him casually for the first time, one would not have guessed that Mr Porteous was an expert on Late Latin poetry; and he did not mean that you should guess. Thin-limbed, bent and agile in his loose, crumpled clothes, Gumbriel Senior had the air, beside Mr Porteous, of a strangely animated scarecrow.

'What on earth?' the old gentleman repeated his question.

Gumbril Junior shrugged his shoulders. 'I was bored, I decided to cease being a schoolmaster.' He spoke with a fine airy assumption of carelessness. 'How are you, Mr Porteous?'

'Thank you, invariably well.'

'Well, well,' said Gumbril Senior, sitting down again, 'I must say I'm not surprised. I'm only surprised that you stood it, not being a born pedagogue, for as long as you did. What ever induced you to think of turning usher, I can't imagine.' He looked at his son first through his spectacles, then over the top of them; the motives of the boy's conduct revealed themselves to neither vision.

'What else was there for me to do?' asked Gumbril Junior, pulling up a chair towards the fire. 'You gave me a pedagogue's education and washed your hands of me. No opportunities, no openings. I had no alternative. And now you reproach me.'

Mr Gumbril made an impatient gesture. 'You're talking nonsense,' he said. 'The only point of the kind of education you had is this, it gives a young man leisure to find out what he's interested in. You apparently weren't sufficiently interested in anything—'

'I am interested in everything,' interrupted Gumbril Junior.

'Which comes to the same thing,' said his father parenthetically, 'as being interested in nothing.' And he went on from the point at which he had been interrupted. 'You weren't sufficiently interested in anything to want to devote yourself to it. That was why you sought the last refuge of feeble minds with classical educations, you became a schoolmaster.'

'Come, come,' said Mr Porteous. 'I do a little teaching myself; I must stand up for the profession.'

Gumbril Senior let go his beard and brushed back the hair that the wind of his own vehemence had brought tumbling into his eyes. 'I don't denigrate the profession,' he said. 'Not at all. It would be an excellent profession if every one who went into it were as much interested in teaching as you are in your job, Porteous, or I in mine. It's these undecided creatures like Theodore, who ruin it by drifting in. Until all teachers are geniuses and enthusiasts, nobody will learn anything, except what they teach themselves.'

'Still,' said Mr Porteous, 'I wish I hadn't had to learn so much by myself. I wasted a lot of time finding out how to set to work and where to discover what I wanted.'

Gumbril Junior was lighting his pipe. 'I have come to the conclusion,' he said, speaking in little jerks between each suck of the flame into the bowl, 'that most people ... ought never ... to be taught anything at all.' He threw away the match. 'Lord have mercy upon us, they're dogs. What's the use of teaching them anything except to behave well, to work and obey? Facts, theories, the truth about the universe — what good are those to them? Teach them to understand — why, it only confuses them; makes them lose hold of the simple real appearance. Not more than one in a hundred can get any good out of a scientific or literary education.'

'And you're one of the ones?' asked his father.

'That goes without saying,' Gumbril Junior replied.

‘I think you mayn’t be so far wrong,’ said Mr Porteous. ‘When I think of my own children, for example ...’ he sighed, ‘I thought they’d be interested in the things that interested me; they don’t seem to be interested in anything but behaving like little apes — not very anthropoid ones either, for that matter. At my eldest boy’s age I used to sit up most of the night reading Latin texts. He sits up — or rather stands, reels, trots up — dancing and drinking. Do you remember St Bernard? “Vigilet tota nocte luxuriosus non solum patienter” (the ascetic and the scholar only watch patiently); “sed et libenter, ut suam expleat voluptatem.” What the wise man does out of a sense of duty, the fool does for fun. And I’ve tried very hard to make him like Latin.’

‘Well, in any case,’ said Gumbriel Junior, ‘you didn’t try to feed him on history. That’s the real unforgivable sin. And that’s what I’ve been doing, up till this evening — encouraging boys of fifteen and sixteen to specialize in history, hours and hours a week, making them read bad writers’ generalizations about subjects on which only our ignorance allows us to generalize; teaching them to reproduce these generalizations in horrid little “Essays” of their own; rotting their minds, in fact, with a diet of soft vagueness; scandalous it was. If these creatures are to be taught anything, it should be something hard and definite. Latin — that’s excellent. Mathematics, physical science. Let them read history for amusement, certainly. But for Heaven’s sake don’t make it the staple of education!’ Gumbriel Junior spoke with the greatest earnestness, as though he were an inspector of schools, making a report. It was a subject on which, at the moment, he felt very profoundly; he felt profoundly on all subjects while he was talking about them. ‘I wrote a long letter to the Headmaster about the teaching of history this evening,’ he added. ‘It’s most important.’ He shook his head thoughtfully, ‘Most important.’

‘Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus,’ said Mr Porteous, in the words of St Peter Damianus.

‘Very true,’ Gumbriel Senior applauded. ‘And talking about bad times, Theodore, what do you propose to do now, may I ask?’

‘I mean to begin by making some money.’

Gumbriel Senior put his hands on his knees, bent forward and laughed, ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ He had a profound bell-like laugh that was like the croaking of a very large and melodious frog. ‘You won’t,’ he said, and shook his head till the hair fell into his eyes. ‘You won’t,’ and he laughed again.

‘To make money,’ said Mr Porteous, ‘one must be really interested in money.’

‘And he’s not,’ said Gumbriel Senior. ‘None of us are.’

‘When I was still uncommonly hard up,’ Mr Porteous continued, ‘we used to lodge in the same house with a Russian Jew, who was a furrier. That man was interested in money, if you like. It was a passion, an enthusiasm, an ideal. He could have led a comfortable, easy life, and still have made enough to put by something for his old age. But for his high abstract ideal of money he suffered more than Michelangelo ever suffered for his art. He used to work nineteen hours a day, and the other five he slept, lying under his bench, in the dirt, breathing into his lungs the stink and the broken

hairs. He is now very rich indeed and does nothing with his money, doesn't want to do anything, doesn't know what one does do with it. He desires neither power nor pleasure. His desire for lucre is purely disinterested. He reminds me of Browning's "Grammarians". I have a great admiration for him.'

Mr Porteous's own passion had been for the poems of Notker Balbulus and St Bernard. It had taken him nearly twenty years to get himself and his family out of the house where the Russian furrier used to lodge. But Notker was worth it, he used to say; Notker was worth even the weariness and the pallor of a wife who worked beyond her strength, even the shabbiness of ill-dressed and none too well-fed children. He had readjusted his monocle and gone on. But there had been occasions when it needed more than the monocle and the careful, distinguished clothes to keep up his morale. Still, those times were over now; Notker had brought him at last a kind of fame — even, indirectly, a certain small prosperity.

Gumbril Senior turned once more towards his son. 'And how do you propose,' he asked, 'to make this money?'

Gumbril Junior explained. He had thought it all out in the cab on the way from the station. 'It came to me this morning,' he said, 'in chapel, during service.'

'Monstrous,' put in Gumbril Senior, with a genuine indignation, 'monstrous these medieval survivals in schools! Chapel, indeed!'

'It came,' Gumbril Junior went on, 'like an apocalypse, suddenly, like a divine inspiration. A grand and luminous idea came to me — the idea of Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes.'

'And what are Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes?'

'A boon to those whose occupation is sedentary'; Gumbril Junior had already composed his prospectus and his first advertisements: 'a comfort to all travellers, civilization's substitute for steatopygism, indispensable to first-nighters, the concert-goers' friend, the ...'

'Lectulus Dei floridus,' intoned Mr Porteous.

'Gazophylacium Ecclesiæ,

Cithara benesonans Dei,

Cymbalum jubilationis Christi,

Promptuarium mysteriorum fidei, ora pro nobis.

Your Small-Clothes sound to me very like one of my old litanies, Theodore.'

'We want scientific descriptions, not litanies,' said Gumbril Senior. 'What are Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes?'

'Scientifically, then,' said Gumbril Junior, 'my Patent Small-Clothes may be described as trousers with a pneumatic seat, inflateable by means of a tube fitted with a valve; the whole constructed of stout seamless red rubber, enclosed between two layers of cloth.'

'I must say,' said Gumbril Senior in a tone of somewhat grudging approbation, 'I have heard of worse inventions. You are too stout, Porteous, to be able to appreciate the idea. We Gumbrils are all a bony lot.'



‘When I have taken out a patent for my invention,’ his son went on, very business-like and cool, ‘I shall either sell it to some capitalist, or I shall exploit it commercially myself. In either case, I shall make money, which is more, I may say, than you or any other Gumbriel have ever done.’

‘Quite right,’ said Gumbriel Senior, ‘quite right’; and he laughed very cheerfully. ‘And nor will you. You can be grateful to your intolerable Aunt Flo for having left you that three hundred a year. You’ll need it. But if you really want a capitalist,’ he went on, ‘I have exactly the man for you. He’s a man who has a mania for buying Tudor houses and making them more Tudor than they are. I’ve pulled half a dozen of the wretched things to pieces and put them together again differently for him.’

‘He doesn’t sound much good to me,’ said his son.

‘Ah, but that’s only his vice. Only his amusement. His business,’ Gumbriel Senior hesitated.

‘Well, what is his business?’

‘Well, it seems to be everything. Patent medicine, trade newspapers, bankrupt tobacconist’s stock — he’s talked to me about those and heaps more. He seems to flit like a butterfly in search of honey, or rather money.’

‘And he makes it?’

‘Well, he pays my fees and he buys more Tudor houses, and he gives me luncheons at the Ritz. That’s all I know.’

‘Well, there’s no harm in trying.’

‘I’ll write to him,’ said Gumbriel Senior. ‘His name is Boldero. He’ll either laugh at your idea or take it and give you nothing for it. Still,’ he looked at his son over the top of his spectacles, ‘if by any conceivable chance you ever should become rich; if, if, if ...’ And he emphasized the remoteness of the conditional by raising his eyebrows a little higher, by throwing out his hands in a dubious gesture a little farther at every repetition of the word, ‘if — why, then I’ve got exactly the thing for you. Look at this really delightful little idea I had this afternoon.’ He put his hand in his coat pocket and after some sorting and sifting produced a sheet of squared paper on which was roughly drawn the elevation of a house. ‘For any one with eight or ten thousand to spend, this would be — this would be ...’ Gumbriel Senior smoothed his hair and hesitated, searching for something strong enough to say of his little idea. ‘Well, this would be much too good for most of the greasy devils who do have eight or ten thousand to spend.’

He passed the sheet to Gumbriel Junior, who held it out so that both Mr Porteous and himself could look at it. Gumbriel Senior got up from his chair and, standing behind them, leant over to elucidate and explain.

‘You see the idea,’ he said, anxious lest they should fail to understand. ‘A central block of three stories, with low wings of only one, ending in pavilions with a second floor. And the flat roofs of the wings are used as gardens — you see? — protected from the north by a wall. In the east wing there is the kitchen and the garage, with the maids’ rooms in the pavilion at the end. The west is a library, and it has an

arcaded loggia along the front. And instead of a solid superstructure corresponding to the maids' rooms, there's a pergola with brick piers. You see? And in the main block there's a Spanish sort of balcony along the whole length at first-floor level; that gives a good horizontal line. And you get the perpendiculars with coigns and raised panels. And the roof's hidden by a balustrade, and there are balustrades along the open sides of the roof gardens on the wings. All in brick it is. This is the garden front; the entrance front will be admirable too. Do you like it?

Gumbril Junior nodded. 'Very much,' he said.

His father sighed and taking the sketch put it back in his pocket. 'You must hurry up with your ten thousand,' he said. 'And you, Porteous, and you. I've been waiting so long to build your splendid house.'

Laughing, Mr Porteous got up from his chair. 'And long, dear Gumbril,' he said, 'may you continue to wait. For my splendid house won't be built this side of New Jerusalem, and you must go on living a long time yet. A long, long time,' Mr Porteous repeated; and carefully he buttoned up his double-breasted coat, carefully, as though he were adjusting an instrument of precision, he took out and replaced his monocle. Then, very erect and neat, very soldierly and pillar-boxical, he marched towards the door. 'You've kept me very late to-night,' he said. 'Unconscionably late.'

The front door closed heavily behind Mr Porteous's departure. Gumbril Senior came upstairs again into the big room on the first floor smoothing down his hair, which the impetuosity of his ascent had once more disarranged.

'That's a good fellow,' he said of his departed guest, 'a splendid fellow.'

'I always admire the monocle,' said Gumbril Junior irrelevantly. But his father turned the irrelevance into relevance.

'He couldn't have come through without it, I believe. It was a symbol, a proud flag. Poverty's squalid, not fine at all. The monocle made a kind of difference, you understand. I'm always so enormously thankful I had a little money. I couldn't have stuck it without. It needs strength, more strength than I've got.' He clutched his beard close under the chin and remained for a moment pensively silent. 'The advantage of Porteous's line of business,' he went on at last, reflectively, 'is that it can be carried on by oneself, without collaboration. There's no need to appeal to any one outside oneself, or to have any dealings with other people at all, if one doesn't want to. That's so deplorable about architecture. There's no privacy, so to speak; always this horrible jostling with clients and builders and contractors and people, before one can get anything done. It's really revolting. I'm not good at people. Most of them I don't like at all, not at all,' Mr Gumbril repeated with vehemence. 'I don't deal with them very well; it isn't my business. My business is architecture. But I don't often get a chance of practising it. Not properly.'

Gumbril Senior smiled rather sadly. 'Still,' he said, 'I can do something. I have my talent, I have my imagination. They can't take those from me. Come and see what I've been doing lately.'

He led the way out of the room and mounted, two steps at a time, towards a higher floor. He opened the door of what should have been, in a well-ordered house, the Best Bedroom, and slipped into the darkness.

‘Don’t rush in,’ he called back to his son, ‘for God’s sake don’t rush in. You’ll smash something. Wait till I’ve turned on the light. It’s so like these asinine electricians to have hidden the switch behind the door like this.’ Gumbрил Junior heard him fumbling in the darkness; there was suddenly light. He stepped in.

The only furniture in the room consisted of a couple of long trestle tables. On these, on the mantelpiece and all over the floor, were scattered confusedly, like the elements of a jumbled city, a vast collection of architectural models. There were cathedrals, there were town halls, universities, public libraries, there were three or four elegant little sky-scrapers, there were blocks of offices, huge warehouses, factories, and finally dozens of magnificent country mansions, complete with their terraced gardens, their noble flights of steps, their fountains and ornamental waters and grandly bridged canals, their little rococo pavilions and garden houses.

‘Aren’t they beautiful?’ Gumbрил Senior turned enthusiastically towards his son. His long grey hair floated wispily about his head, his spectacles flashed, and behind them his eyes shone with emotion.

‘Beautiful,’ Gumbрил Junior agreed.

‘When you’re really rich,’ said his father, ‘I’ll build you one of these.’ And he pointed to a little village of Chatsworths clustering, at one end of a long table, round the dome of a vaster and austerer St Peter’s. ‘Look at this one, for example.’ He picked his way nimbly across the room, seized the little electric reading-lamp that stood between a railway station and a baptistery on the mantelpiece, and was back again in an instant, trailing behind him a long flex that, as it tautened out, twitched one of the crowning pinnacles off the top of a sky-scraper near the fireplace. ‘Look,’ he repeated, ‘look.’ He switched on the current, and moving the lamp back and forth, up and down in front of the miniature palace. ‘See the beauty of the light and shade,’ he said. ‘There, underneath the great, ponderous cornice, isn’t that fine? And look how splendidly the pilasters carry up the vertical lines. And then the solidity of it, the size, the immense, impending bleakness of it!’ He threw up his arms, he turned his eyes upwards as though standing overwhelmed at the foot of some huge precipitous façade. The lights and shadows vacillated wildly through all the city of palaces and domes as he brandished the lamp in ecstasy above his head.

‘And then,’ he had suddenly stooped down, he was peering and pointing once more into the details of his palace, ‘then there’s the doorway — all florid and rich with carving. How magnificently and surprisingly it flowers out of the bare walls! Like the colossal writing of Darius, like the figures graven in the bald face of the precipice over Behistun — unexpected and beautiful and human, human in the surrounding emptiness.’

Gumbрил Senior brushed back his hair and turned, smiling, to look at his son over the top of his spectacles.

‘Very fine,’ Gumbriel Junior nodded to him. ‘But isn’t the wall a little too blank? You seem to allow very few windows in this vast palazzo.’

‘True,’ his father replied, ‘very true.’ He sighed. ‘I’m afraid this design would hardly do for England. It’s meant for a place where there’s some sun — where you do your best to keep the light out, instead of letting it in, as you have to do here. Windows are the curse of architecture in this country. Your walls have to be like sieves, all holes, it’s heart-breaking. If you wanted me to build you this house, you’d have to live in Barbados or somewhere like that.’

‘There’s nothing I should like better,’ said Gumbriel Junior.

‘Another great advantage of sunny countries,’ Gumbriel Senior pursued, ‘is that one can really live like an aristocrat, in privacy, by oneself. No need to look out on the dirty world or to let the dirty world look in on you. Here’s this great house, for example, looking out on the world through a few dark portholes and a single cavernous doorway. But look inside.’ He held his lamp above the courtyard that was at the heart of the palace. Gumbriel Junior leaned and looked, like his father. ‘All the life looks inwards — into a lovely courtyard, a more than Spanish patio. Look there at the treble tiers of arcades, the vaulted cloisters for your cool peripatetic meditations, the central Triton spouting white water into a marble pool, the mosaic work on the floor and flowering up the walls, brilliant against the white stucco. And there’s the archway that leads out into the gardens. And now you must come and have a look at the garden front.’

He walked round with his lamp to the other side of the table. There was suddenly a crash; the wire had twitched a cathedral from off the table. It lay on the floor in disastrous ruin as though shattered by some appalling cataclysm.

‘Hell and death!’ said Gumbriel Senior in an outburst of Elizabethan fury. He put down the lamp and ran to see how irreparable the disaster had been. ‘They’re so horribly expensive, these models,’ he explained, as he bent over the ruins. Tenderly he picked up the pieces and replaced them on the table. ‘It might have been worse,’ he said at last, brushing the dust off his hands. ‘Though I’m afraid that dome will never be quite the same again.’ Picking up the lamp once more, he held it high above his head and stood looking out, with a melancholy satisfaction, over his creations. ‘And to think,’ he said after a pause, ‘that I’ve been spending these last days designing model cottages for workmen at Bletchley! I’m in luck to have got the job, of course, but really, that a civilized man should have to do jobs like that! It’s too much. In the old days these creatures built their own hovels, and very nice and suitable they were too. The architects busied themselves with architecture — which is the expression of human dignity and greatness, which is man’s protest, not his miserable acquiescence. You can’t do much protesting in a model cottage at seven hundred pounds a time. A little, no doubt, you can protest a little; you can give your cottage decent proportions and avoid sordidness and vulgarity. But that’s all; it’s really a negative process. You can only begin to protest positively and actively when you abandon the petty human scale and build for giants — when you build for the spirit and the imagination of man, not for his little body. Model cottages, indeed!’

Mr Gumbрил snorted with indignation. ‘When I think of Alberti!’ And he thought of Alberti — Alberti, the noblest Roman of them all, the true and only Roman. For the Romans themselves had lived their own actual lives, sordidly and extravagantly in the middle of a vulgar empire. Alberti and his followers in the Renaissance lived the ideal Roman life. They put Plutarch into their architecture. They took the detestable real Cato, the Brutus of history, and made of them Roman heroes to walk as guides and models before them. Before Alberti there were no true Romans, and with Piranesi’s death the race began to wither towards extinction.

‘And when I think of Brunelleschi!’ Gumbрил Senior went on to remember with passion the architect who had suspended on eight thin flying ribs of marble the lightest of all domes and the loveliest.

‘And when of Michelangelo! The grim, enormous apse ... And of Wren and of Palladio, when I think of all these—’ Gumbрил Senior waved his arms and was silent. He could not put into words what he felt when he thought of them.

Gumbрил Junior looked at his watch. ‘Half-past two,’ he said. ‘Time to go to bed.’

## Chapter III

‘MISTER GUMBRIL!’ SURPRISE was mingled with delight. ‘This is indeed a pleasure!’ Delight was now the prevailing emotion expressed by the voice that advanced, as yet without a visible source, from the dark recesses of the shop.

‘The pleasure, Mr Bojanus, is mine.’ Gumbрил closed the shop door behind him.

A very small man, dressed in a frock-coat, popped out from a canyon that opened, a mere black crevice, between two stratified precipices of mid-season suitings, and advancing into the open space before the door bowed with an old-world grace, revealing a nacreous scalp thinly mantled with long, damp creepers of brown hair.

‘And to what, may I ask, do I owe this pleasure, sir?’ Mr Bojanus looked up archly with a sideways cock of his head that tilted the rigid points of his waxed moustache. The fingers of his right hand were thrust into the bosom of his frock-coat and his toes were turned out in the dancing-master’s First Position. ‘A light spring great-coat, is it? Or a new suit? I notice,’ his eye travelled professionally up and down Gumbрил’s long, thin form, ‘I notice that the garments you are wearing at present, Mr Gumbрил, look — how shall I say? — well, a trifle negleejay, as the French would put it, a trifle negleejay.’

Gumbрил looked down at himself. He resented Mr Bojanus’s negleejay, he was pained and wounded by the aspersion. Negleejay? And he had fancied that he really looked rather elegant and distinguished (but, after all, he always looked that, even in rags) — no, that he looked positively neat, like Mr Porteous, positively soldierly in his black jacket and his musical-comedy trousers and his patent-leather shoes. And the black felt hat — didn’t that add just the foreign, the Southern touch which saved the whole

composition from banality? He regarded himself, trying to see his clothes — garments, Mr Bojanus had called them; garments, good Lord! — through the tailor's expert eyes. There were sagging folds about the overloaded pockets, there was a stain on his waistcoat, the knees of his trousers were baggy and puckered like the bare knees of Hélène Fourmont in Rubens's fur-coat portrait at Vienna. Yes, it was all horribly negleejay. He felt depressed; but looking at Mr Bojanus's studied and professional correctness, he was a little comforted. That frock-coat, for example. It was like something in a very modern picture — such a smooth, unwrinkled cylinder about the chest, such a sense of pure and abstract conic-ness in the sleekly rounded skirts! Nothing could have been less negleejay. He was reassured.

'I want you,' he said at last, clearing his throat importantly, 'to make me a pair of trousers to a novel specification of my own. It's a new idea.' And he gave a brief description of Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes.

Mr Bojanus listened with attention.

'I can make them for you,' he said, when the description was finished. 'I can make them for you — if you really wish, Mr Gumbril,' he added.

'Thank you,' said Gumbril.

'And do you intend, may I ask, Mr Gumbril, to wear these ... these garments?'

Guiltily, Gumbril denied himself. 'Only to demonstrate the idea, Mr Bojanus. I am exploiting the invention commercially, you see.'

'Commercially? I see, Mr Gumbril.'

'Perhaps you would like a share,' suggested Gumbril.

Mr Bojanus shook his head. 'It wouldn't do for my cleellantail, I fear, Mr Gumbril. You could 'ardly expect the Best People to wear such things.'

'Couldn't you?'

Mr Bojanus went on shaking his head. 'I know them,' he said, 'I know the Best People. Well.' And he added with an irrelevance that was, perhaps, only apparent, 'Between ourselves, Mr Gumbril, I am a great admirer of Lenin ...'

'So am I,' said Gumbril, 'theoretically. But then I have so little to lose to Lenin. I can afford to admire him. But you, Mr Bojanus, you, the prosperous bourgeois — oh, purely in the economic sense of the word, Mr Bojanus ...'

Mr Bojanus accepted the explanation with one of his old-world bows.

'... you would be among the first to suffer if an English Lenin were to start his activities here.'

'There, Mr Gumbril, if I may be allowed to say so, you are wrong.' Mr Bojanus removed his hand from his bosom and employed it to emphasize the points of his discourse. 'When the revolution comes, Mr Gumbril — the great and necessary revolution, as Alderman Beckford called it — it won't be the owning of a little money that'll get a man into trouble. It'll be his class-habits, Mr Gumbril, his class-speech, his class-education. It'll be Shibboleth all over again, Mr Gumbril; mark my words. The Red Guards will stop people in the street and ask them to say some such word as "towel". If they call it "towel", like you and your friends, Mr Gumbril, why then ...'

Mr Bojanus went through the gestures of pointing a rifle and pulling the trigger; he clicked his tongue against his teeth to symbolize the report. ... 'That'll be the end of them. But if they say "tèaul", like the rest of us, Mr Gumbril, it'll be: "Pass Friend and Long Live the Proletariat." Long live Tèaul.'

'I'm afraid you may be right,' said Gumbril.

'I'm convinced of it,' said Mr Bojanus. 'It's my clients, Mr Gumbril, it's the Best People that the other people resent. It's their confidence, their ease, it's the habit their money and their position give them of ordering people about, it's the way they take their place in the world for granted, it's their prestige, which the other people would like to deny, but can't — it's all that, Mr Gumbril, that's so galling.'

Gumbril nodded. He himself had envied his securer friends their power of ignoring the humanity of those who were not of their class. To do that really well, one must always have lived in a large house full of clockwork servants; one must never have been short of money, never at a restaurant ordered the cheaper thing instead of the more delicious; one must never have regarded a policeman as anything but one's paid defender against the lower orders, never for a moment have doubted one's divine right to do, within the accepted limits, exactly what one liked without a further thought to anything or any one but oneself and one's own enjoyment. Gumbril had been brought up among these blessed beings; but he was not one of them. Alas? or fortunately? He hardly knew which.

'And what good do you expect the revolution to do, Mr Bojanus?' he asked at last.

Mr Bojanus replaced his hand in his bosom. 'None whatever, Mr Gumbril,' he said. 'None whatever.'

'But Liberty,' Gumbril suggested, 'equality and all that. What about those, Mr Bojanus?'

Mr Bojanus smiled up at him tolerantly and kindly, as he might have smiled at some one who had suggested, shall we say, that evening trousers should be turned up at the bottom. 'Liberty, Mr Gumbril?' he said; 'you don't suppose any serious-minded person imagines a revolution is going to bring liberty, do you?'

'The people who make the revolution always seem to ask for liberty.'

'But do they ever get it, Mr Gumbril?' Mr Bojanus cocked his head playfully and smiled. 'Look at 'istory, Mr Gumbril, look at 'istory. First it's the French Revolution. They ask for political liberty. And they gets it. Then comes the Reform Bill, then Forty-Eight, then all the Franchise Acts and Votes for Women — always more and more political liberty. And what's the result, Mr Gumbril? Nothing at all. Who's freer for political liberty? Not a soul, Mr Gumbril. There was never a greater swindle 'atched in the 'ole of 'istory. And when you think 'ow those poor young men like Shelley talked about it — it's pathetic,' said Mr Bojanus, shaking his head, 'reelly pathetic. Political liberty's a swindle because a man doesn't spend his time being political. He spends it sleeping, eating, amusing himself a little and working — mostly working. When they'd got all the political liberty they wanted — or found they didn't want — they began to understand this. And so now it's all for the industrial revolution,

Mr Gumbril. But bless you, that's as big a swindle as the other. How can there ever be liberty under any system? No amount of profit-sharing or self-government by the workers, no amount of hygienic conditions or cocoa villages or recreation grounds can get rid of the fundamental slavery — the necessity of working. Liberty? why, it doesn't exist! There's no liberty in this world; only gilded cages. And then, Mr Gumbril, even suppose you could somehow get rid of the necessity of working, suppose a man's time were all leisure. Would he be free then? I say nothing of the natural slavery of eating and sleeping and all that, Mr Gumbril; I say nothing of that, because that, if I may say so, would be too 'air-splitting and metaphysical. But what I do ask you is this,' and Mr Bojanus wagged his forefinger almost menacingly at the sleeping partner in this dialogue: 'would a man with unlimited leisure be free, Mr Gumbril? I say he would not. Not unless he 'appened to be a man like you or me, Mr Gumbril, a man of sense, a man of independent judgment. An ordinary man would not be free. Because he wouldn't know how to occupy his leisure except in some way that would be forced on 'im by other people. People don't know 'ow to entertain themselves now; they leave it to other people to do it for them. They swallow what's given them. They 'ave to swallow it, whether they like it or not. Cinemas, newspapers, magazines, gramophones, football matches, wireless, telephones — take them or leave them, if you want to amuse yourself. The ordinary man can't leave them. He takes; and what's that but slavery? And so you see, Mr Gumbril,' Mr Bojanus smiled with a kind of roguish triumph, 'you see that even in the purely 'ypothetical case of a man with indefinite leisure, there still would be no freedom. ... And the case, as I have said, is purely 'ypothetical; at any rate so far as concerns the sort of people who want a revolution. And as for the sort of people who do enjoy leisure, even now — why I think, Mr Gumbril, you and I know enough about the Best People to know that freedom, except possibly sexual freedom, is not their strongest point. And sexual freedom — what's that?' Mr Bojanus dramatically inquired. 'You and I, Mr Gumbril,' he answered confidentially, 'we know. It's an 'orrible, 'ideous slavery. That's what it is. Or am I wrong, Mr Gumbril?'

'Quite right, quite right, Mr Bojanus,' Gumbril hastened to reply.

'From all of which,' continued Mr Bojanus, 'it follows that, except for a few, a very few people like you and me, Mr Gumbril, there's no such thing as liberty. It's an 'oax, Mr Gumbril. An 'orrible plant. And if I may be allowed to say so,' Mr Bojanus lowered his voice, but still spoke with emphasis, 'a bloody swindle.'

'But in that case, Mr Bojanus, why are you so anxious to have a revolution?' Gumbril inquired.

Thoughtfully, Mr Bojanus twisted to a finer point his waxed moustaches. 'Well,' he said at last, 'it would be a nice change. I was always one for change and a little excitement. And then there's the scientific interest. You never quite know 'ow an experiment will turn out, do you, Mr Gumbril? I remember when I was a boy, my old dad — a great gardener he was, a regular floriculturist, you might say, Mr Gumbril — he tried the experiment of grafting a sprig of Gloire de Dijon on to a black currant bush. And, would you believe it? the roses came out black, coal black, Mr Gumbril.



Nobody would ever have guessed that if the thing had never been tried. And that's what I say about the revolution. You don't know what'll come of it till you try. Black roses, blue roses— 'oo knows, Mr Gumbril, 'oo knows?'

'Who indeed?' Gumbril looked at his watch. 'About those trousers ...' he added.

'Those garments,' corrected Mr Bojanus. 'Ah, yes. Should we say next Tuesday?'

'Let us say next Tuesday.' Gumbril opened the shop door. 'Good morning, Mr Bojanus.'

Mr Bojanus bowed him out, as though he had been a prince of the blood.

The sun was shining and at the end of the street between the houses the sky was blue. Gauzily the distances faded to a soft, rich indistinctness; there were veils of golden muslin thickening down the length of every vista. On the trees in the Hanover Square gardens the young leaves were still so green that they seemed to be alight, green fire, and the sooty trunks looked blacker and dirtier than ever. It would have been a pleasant and apposite thing if a cuckoo had started calling. But though the cuckoo was silent it was a happy day. A day, Gumbril reflected, as he strolled idly along, to be in love.

From the world of tailors Gumbril passed into that of the artificial-pearl merchants, and with a still keener appreciation of the amorous qualities of this clear spring day, he began a leisured march along the perfumed pavements of Bond Street. He thought with a profound satisfaction of those sixty-three papers on the Risorgimento. How pleasant it was to waste time! And Bond Street offered so many opportunities for wasting it agreeably. He trotted round the Spring Exhibition at the Grosvenor and came out, a little regretting, he had to confess, his eighteenpence for admission. After that, he pretended that he wanted to buy a grand piano. When he had finished practising his favourite passages on the magnificent instrument to which they obsequiously introduced him, he looked in for a few moments at Sotheby's, sniffed among the ancient books and strolled on again, admiring the cigars, the lucid scent-bottles, the socks, the old masters, the emerald necklaces — everything, in fact, in all the shops he passed.

'Forthcoming Exhibition of Works by Casimir Lypiatt.' The announcement caught his eye. And so poor old Lypiatt was on the warpath again, he reflected, as he pushed open the doors of the Albemarle Galleries. Poor old Lypiatt! Dear old Lypiatt, even. He liked Lypiatt. Though he had his defects. It would be fun to see him again.

Gumbril found himself in the midst of a dismal collection of etchings. He passed them in review, wondering why it was that, in these hard days when no painter can sell a picture, almost any dull fool who can scratch a conventional etcher's view of two boats, a suggested cloud and the flat sea should be able to get rid of his prints by the dozen and at guineas apiece. He was interrupted in his speculations by the approach of the assistant in charge of the gallery. He came up shyly and uncomfortably, but with the conscientious determination of one ambitious to do his duty and make good. He was a very young man with pale hair, to which heavy oiling had given a curious greyish colour, and a face of such childish contour and so imberb that he looked like

a little boy playing at grown-ups. He had only been at this job a few weeks and he found it very difficult.

'This,' he remarked, with a little introductory cough, pointing to one view of the two boats and the flat sea, 'is an earlier state than this.' And he pointed to another view, where the boats were still two and the sea seemed just as flat — though possibly, on a closer inspection, it might really have been flatter.

'Indeed,' said Gumbril.

The assistant was rather pained by his coldness. He blushed; but constrained himself to go on. 'Some excellent judges,' he said, 'prefer the earlier state, though it is less highly finished.'

'Ah?'

'Beautiful atmosphere, isn't it?' The assistant put his head on one side and pursed his childish lips appreciatively.

Gumbril nodded.

With desperation, the assistant indicated the shadowed rump of one of the boats. 'A wonderful feeling in this passage,' he said, redder than ever.

'Very intense,' said Gumbril.

The assistant smiled at him gratefully. 'That's the word,' he said, delighted. 'Intense. That's it. Very intense.' He repeated the word several times, as though to make sure of remembering it for use when the occasion next presented itself. He was determined to make good.

'I see Mr Lypiatt is to have a show here soon,' remarked Gumbril, who had had enough of the boats.

'He is making the final arrangements with Mr Albemarle at this very moment,' said the assistant triumphantly, with the air of one who produces, at the dramatic and critical moment, a rabbit out of the empty hat.

'You don't say so?' Gumbril was duly impressed. 'Then I'll wait till he comes out,' he said, and sat down with his back to the boats.

The assistant returned to his desk and picked up the gold-belted fountain pen which his aunt had given him when he first went into business, last Christmas. 'Very intense,' he wrote in capitals on a half-sheet of notepaper. 'The feeling in this passage is very intense.' He studied the paper for a few moments, then folded it up carefully and put it away in his waistcoat pocket. 'Always make a note of it.' That was one of the business mottoes he had himself written out so laboriously in Indian ink and old English lettering. It hung over his bed between 'The Lord is my Shepherd', which his mother had given him, and a quotation from Dr Frank Crane, 'A smiling face sells more goods than a clever tongue'. Still, a clever tongue, the young assistant had often reflected, was a very useful thing, especially in this job. He wondered whether one could say that the composition of a picture was very intense. Mr Albemarle was very keen on the composition, he noticed. But perhaps it was better to stick to plain 'fine', which was a little commonplace, perhaps, but very safe. He would ask Mr Albemarle about it. And then there was all that stuff about plastic values and pure plasticity.

He sighed. It was all very difficult. A chap might be as willing and eager to make good as he liked; but when it came to this about atmosphere and intense passages and plasticity — well, really, what could a chap do? Make a note of it. It was the only thing.

In Mr Albemarle's private room Casimir Lypiatt thumped the table. 'Size, Mr Albemarle,' he was saying, 'size and vehemence and spiritual significance — that's what the old fellows had, and we haven't. ...' He gesticulated as he talked, his face worked and his green eyes, set in their dark, charred orbits, were full of a troubled light. The forehead was precipitous, the nose long and sharp; in the bony and almost fleshless face, the lips of the wide mouth were surprisingly full.

'Precisely, precisely,' said Mr Albemarle in his juicy voice. He was a round, smooth, little man with a head like an egg; he spoke, he moved with a certain pomp, a butlerish gravity, that were evidently meant to be ducal.

'That's what I've set myself to recapture,' Lypiatt went on: 'the size, the masterfulness of the masters.' He felt a warmth running through him as he spoke, flushing his cheeks, pulsing hotly behind the eyes, as though he had drunk a draught of some heartening red wine. His own words elated him, and drunkenly gesticulating, he was as though drunken. The greatness of the masters — he felt it in him. He knew his own power, he knew, he knew. He could do all that they had done. Nothing was beyond his strength.

Egg-headed Albemarle confronted him, impeccably the butler, exacerbatingly serene. Albemarle too should be fired. He struck the table once more, he broke out again:

'It's been my mission,' he shouted, 'all these years.'

All these years. ... Time had worn the hair from his temples; the high, steep forehead seemed higher than it really was. He was forty now; the turbulent young Lypiatt who had once declared that no man could do anything worth doing after he was thirty, was forty now. But in these fiery moments he could forget the years, he could forget the disappointments, the unsold pictures, the bad reviews. 'My mission,' he repeated; 'and by God! I feel, I know I can carry it through.'

Warmly the blood pulsed behind his eyes.

'Quite,' said Mr Albemarle, nodding the egg. 'Quite.'

'And how small the scale is nowadays!' Lypiatt went on, rhapsodically. 'How trivial the conception, how limited the scope! You see no painter-sculptor-poets, like Michelangelo; no scientist-artists, like Leonardo; no mathematician-courtiers, like Boscovitch; no impresario-musicians, like Handel; no geniuses of all trades, like Wren. I have set myself against this abject specialization of ours. I stand alone, opposing it with my example.' Lypiatt raised his hand. Like the statue of Liberty, standing colossal and alone.

'Nevertheless,' began Mr Albemarle.

'Painter, poet, musician,' cried Lypiatt. 'I am all three. I ...'

'... there is a danger of — how shall I put it — dissipating one's energies,' Mr Albemarle went on with determination. Discreetly, he looked at his watch. This conversation, he thought, seemed to be prolonging itself unnecessarily.

'There is a greater danger in letting them stagnate and atrophy,' Lypiatt retorted. 'Let me give you my experience.' Vehemently, he gave it.

Out in the gallery, among the boats, the views of the Grand Canal, and the Firth of Forth, Gumbril placidly ruminated. Poor old Lypiatt, he was thinking. Dear old Lypiatt, even, in spite of his fantastic egotism. Such a bad painter, such a bombinating poet, such a loud emotional improviser on the piano! And going on like this, year after year, pegging away at the same old things — always badly! And always without a penny, always living in the most hideous squalor! Magnificent and pathetic old Lypiatt!

A door suddenly opened and a loud, unsteady voice, now deep and harsh, now breaking to shrillness, exploded into the gallery.

'... like a Veronese,' it was saying; 'enormous, vehement, a great swirling composition' ('swirling composition' — mentally, the young assistant made a note of that), 'but much more serious, of course, much more spiritually significant, much more—'

'Lypiatt!' Gumbril had risen from his chair, had turned, had advanced, holding out his hand.

'Why, it's Gumbril. Good Lord!' and Lypiatt seized the proffered hand with an ex-cruciating cordiality. He seemed to be in exuberantly good spirits. 'We're settling about my show, Mr Albemarle and I,' he explained. 'You know Gumbril, Mr Albemarle?'

'Pleased to meet you,' said Mr Albemarle. 'Our friend, Mr Lypiatt,' he added richly, 'has the true artistic temp—'

'It's going to be magnificent.' Lypiatt could not wait till Mr Albemarle had finished speaking. He gave Gumbril a heroic blow on the shoulder.

'... artistic temperament, as I was saying,' pursued Mr Albemarle. 'He is altogether too impatient and enthusiastic for us poor people. ...' a ducal smile of condescension accompanied this graceful act of self-abasement ... 'who move in the prosaic, practical, workaday world.'

Lypiatt laughed, a loud, discordant peal. He didn't seem to mind being accused of having an artistic temperament; he seemed, indeed, to enjoy it, if anything. 'Fire and water,' he said aphoristically, 'brought together, beget steam. Mr Albemarle and I go driving along like a steam engine. Psh, psh!' He worked his arms like a pair of alternate pistons. He laughed; but Mr Albemarle only coldly and courteously smiled. 'I was just telling Mr Albemarle about the great Crucifixion I've just been doing. It's as big and headlong as a Veronese, but much more serious, more. ...'

Behind them the little assistant was expounding to a new visitor the beauties of the etchings. 'Very intense,' he was saying, 'the feeling in this passage.' The shadow, indeed, clung with an insistent affection round the stern of the boat. 'And what a fine, what a—' he hesitated for an instant, and under his pale, oiled hair his face became suddenly very red— 'what a swirling composition.' He looked anxiously at the visitor. The remark had been received without comment. He felt immensely relieved.

They left the galleries together. Lypiatt set the pace, striding along at a great rate and with a magnificent brutality through the elegant and leisured crowd, gesticulating and loudly talking as he went. He carried his hat in his hand; his tie was brilliantly orange. People turned to look at him as he passed and he liked it. He had, indeed, a remarkable face — a face that ought by rights to have belonged to a man of genius. Lypiatt was aware of it. The man of genius, he liked to say, bears upon his brow a kind of mark of Cain, by which men recognize him at once— ‘and having recognized, generally stone him,’ he would add with that peculiar laugh he always uttered whenever he said anything rather bitter or cynical; a laugh that was meant to show that the bitterness, the cynicism, justifiable as events might have made them, were really only a mask, and that beneath it the artist was still serenely and tragically smiling. Lypiatt thought a great deal about the ideal artist. That titanic abstraction stalked within his own skin. He was it — a little too consciously, perhaps.

‘This time,’ he kept repeating, ‘they’ll be bowled over. This time. ... It’s going to be terrific.’ And with the blood beating behind his eyes, with the exultant consciousness and certainty of power growing and growing in him with every word he spoke, Lypiatt began to describe the pictures there would be at his show; he talked about the preface he was writing to the catalogue, the poems that would be printed in it by way of literary complement to the pictures. He talked, he talked.

Gumbril listened, not very attentively. He was wondering how any one could talk so loud, could boast so extravagantly. It was as though the man had to shout in order to convince himself of his own existence. Poor Lypiatt; after all these years, Gumbril supposed, he must have some doubts about it. Ah, but this time, this time he was going to bowl them all over.

‘You’re pleased, then, with what you’ve done recently,’ he said at the end of one of Lypiatt’s long tirades.

‘Pleased?’ exclaimed Lypiatt; ‘I should think I was.’

Gumbril might have reminded him that he had been as well pleased in the past and that ‘they’ had by no means been bowled over. He preferred, however, to say nothing. Lypiatt went on about the size and universality of the old masters. He himself, it was tacitly understood, was one of them.

They parted near the bottom of the Tottenham Court Road, Lypiatt to go northward to his studio off Maple Street, Gumbril to pay one of his secret visits to those rooms of his in Great Russell Street. He had taken them nearly a year ago now, two little rooms over a grocer’s shop, promising himself goodness only knew what adventures in them. But somehow there had been no adventures. Still, it had pleased him, all the same, to be able to go there from time to time when he was in London and to think, as he sat in solitude before his gas fire, that there was literally not a soul in the universe who knew where he was. He had an almost childish affection for mysteries and secrets.

‘Good-bye,’ said Gumbri!l, raising his hand to the salute. ‘And I’ll beat up some people for dinner on Friday.’ (For they had agreed to meet again.) He turned away, thinking that he had spoken the last words; but he was mistaken.

‘Oh, by the way,’ said Lypiatt, who had also turned to go, but who now came stepping quickly after his companion. ‘Can you, by any chance, lend me five pounds? Only till after the exhibition, you know. I’m a bit short.’

Poor old Lypiatt! But it was with reluctance that Gumbri!l parted from his Treasury notes.

## Chapter IV

LYPIATT HAD A habit, which some of his friends found rather trying — and not only friends, for Lypiatt was ready to let the merest acquaintances, the most absolute strangers, even, into the secrets of his inspiration — a habit of reciting at every possible opportunity his own verses. He would declaim in a voice loud and tremulous, with an emotion that never seemed to vary with the varying subject-matter of his poems, for whole quarters of an hour at a stretch; would go on declaiming till his auditors were overwhelmed with such a confusion of embarrassment and shame, that the blood rushed to their cheeks and they dared not meet one another’s eyes.

He was declaiming now; not merely across the dinner-table to his own friends, but to the whole restaurant. For at the first reverberating lines of his latest, ‘The Conquistador’, there had been a startled turning of heads, a craning of necks from every corner of the room. The people who came to this Soho restaurant because it was, notoriously, so ‘artistic’, looked at one another significantly and nodded; they were getting their money’s worth, this time. And Lypiatt, with a fine air of rapt unconsciousness, went on with his recitation.

‘Look down on Mexico, Conquistador’ — that was the refrain.

The Conquistador, Lypiatt had made it clear, was the Artist, and the Vale of Mexico on which he looked down, the towered cities of Tlacopan and Chalco, of Tenochtitlan and Iztapalapan symbolized — well, it was difficult to say precisely what. The universe, perhaps?

‘Look down,’ cried Lypiatt, with a quivering voice.

‘Look down, Conquistador!

There on the valley’s broad green floor,

There lies the lake; the jewelled cities gleam;

Chalco and Tlacopan

Await the coming Man.

Look down on Mexico, Conquistador,

Land of your golden dream.’

‘Not “dream”,’ said Gumbriil, putting down the glass from which he had been profoundly drinking. ‘You can’t possibly say “dream”, you know.’

‘Why do you interrupt me?’ Lypiatt turned on him angrily. His wide mouth twitched at the corners, his whole long face worked with excitement. ‘Why don’t you let me finish?’ He allowed his hand, which had hung awkwardly in the air above him, suspended, as it were, at the top of a gesture, to sink slowly to the table. ‘Imbecile!’ he said, and once more picked up his knife and fork.

‘But really,’ Gumbriil insisted, ‘you can’t say “dream”. Can you now, seriously?’ He had drunk the best part of a bottle of Burgundy and he felt good-humoured, obstinate and a little bellicose.

‘And why not?’ Lypiatt asked.

‘Oh, because one simply can’t.’ Gumbriil leaned back in his chair, smiled and caressed his drooping blond moustache. ‘Not in this year of grace, nineteen twenty-two.’

‘But why?’ Lypiatt repeated, with exasperation.

‘Because it’s altogether too late in the day,’ declared precious Mr Mercaptan, rushing up to his emphasis with flutes and roaring, like a true Conquistador, to fall back, however, at the end of the sentence rather ignominiously into a breathless confusion. He was a sleek, comfortable young man with smooth brown hair parted in the centre and conducted in a pair of flowing curves across the temples, to be looped in damp curls behind his ears. His face ought to have been rather more exquisite, rather more refinedly dix-huitième than it actually was. It had a rather gross, snouty look, which was sadly out of harmony with Mr Mercaptan’s inimitably graceful style. For Mr Mercaptan had a style and used it, delightfully, in his middle articles for the literary weeklies. His most precious work, however, was that little volume of essays, prose poems, vignettes and paradoxes, in which he had so brilliantly illustrated his favourite theme — the pettiness, the simian limitations, the insignificance and the absurd pretentiousness of Homo soi-disant Sapiens. Those who met Mr Mercaptan personally often came away with the feeling that perhaps, after all, he was right in judging so severely of humanity.

‘Too late in the day,’ he repeated. ‘Times have changed. Sunt lacrymae rerum, nos et mutamur in illis.’ He laughed his own applause.

‘Quot homines, tot disputandum est,’ said Gumbriil, taking another sip of his Beaune Supérieure. At the moment, he was all for Mercaptan.

‘But why is it too late?’ Lypiatt insisted.

Mr Mercaptan made a delicate gesture. ‘Ça se sent, mon cher ami,’ he said, ‘ça ne s’explique pas.’ Satan, it is said, carries hell in his heart; so it was with Mr Mercaptan — wherever he was, it was Paris. ‘Dreams in nineteen twenty-two. ...’ He shrugged his shoulders.

‘After you’ve accepted the war, swallowed the Russian famine,’ said Gumbriil. ‘Dreams!’

‘They belonged to the Rostand epoch,’ said Mr Mercaptan, with a little titter. ‘Le Rêve — ah!’

Lypiatt dropped his knife and fork with a clatter and leaned forward, eager for battle. 'Now I have you,' he said, 'now I have you on the hip. You've given yourselves away. You've given away the secret of your spiritual poverty, your weakness and pettiness and impotence. ...'

'Impotence? You malign me, sir,' said Gumbril.

Shearwater ponderously stirred. He had been silent all this time, sitting with hunched shoulders, his elbows on the table, his big round head bent forward, absorbed, apparently, in the slow meticulous crumbling of a piece of bread. Sometimes he put a piece of crust in his mouth and under the bushy black moustache his jaw moved slowly, ruminatively, with a sideways motion, like a cow's. He nudged Gumbril with his elbow. 'Ass,' he said, 'be quiet.'

Lypiatt went on torrentially. 'You're afraid of ideals, that's what it is. You daren't admit to having dreams. Oh, I call them dreams,' he added parenthetically. 'I don't mind being thought a fool and old-fashioned. The word's shorter and more English. Besides, it rhymes with gleams. Ha, ha!' And Lypiatt laughed his loud Titan's laugh, the laugh of cynicism which seems to belie, but which, for those who have understanding, reveals the high, positive spirit within. 'Ideals — they're not sufficiently genteel for you civilized young men. You've quite outgrown that sort of thing. No dream, no religion, no morality.'

'I glory in the name of earwig,' said Gumbril. He was pleased with that little invention. It was felicitous; it was well chosen. 'One's an earwig in sheer self-protection,' he explained.

But Mr Mercaptan refused to accept the name of earwig at any price. 'What there is to be ashamed of in being civilized, I really don't know,' he said, in a voice that was now the bull's, now the piping robin's. 'No, if I glory in anything, it's in my little rococo boudoir, and the conversations across the polished mahogany, and the delicate, lascivious, witty little flirtations on ample sofas inhabited by the soul of Crebillon Fils. We needn't all be Russians, I hope. These revolting Dostoievskys.' Mr Mercaptan spoke with a profound feeling. 'Nor all Utopians. Homo au naturel—' Mr Mercaptan applied his thumb and forefinger to his, alas! too snout-like nose, 'ça pue. And as for Homo à la H.G. Wells — ça ne pue pas assez. What I glory in is the civilized, middle way between stink and asepsis. Give me a little musk, a little intoxicating feminine exhalation, the bouquet of old wine and strawberries, a lavender bag under every pillow and potpourri in the corners of the drawing-room. Readable books, amusing conversation, civilized women, graceful art and dry vintage, music, with a quiet life and reasonable comfort — that's all I ask for.'

'Talking about comfort,' Gumbril put in, before Lypiatt had time to fling his answering thunders, 'I must tell you about my new invention. Pneumatic trousers,' he explained. 'Blow them up. Perfect comfort. You see the idea? You're a sedentary man, Mercaptan. Let me put you down for a couple of pairs.'



Mr Mercaptan shook his head. 'Too Wellsian,' he said. 'Too horribly Utopian. They'd be ludicrously out of place in my boudoir. And besides, my sofa is well enough sprung already, thank you.'

'But what about Tolstoy?' shouted Lypiatt, letting out his impatience in a violent blast.

Mr Mercaptan waved his hand. 'Russian,' he said, 'Russian.'

'And Michelangelo?'

'Alberti,' said Gumbril, very seriously, giving them all a piece of his father's mind—'Alberti was much the better architect, I assure you.'

'And pretentiousness for pretentiousness,' said Mr Mercaptan, 'I prefer old Borromini and the baroque.'

'What about Beethoven?' went on Lypiatt. 'What about Blake? Where do they come in under your scheme of things?'

Mr Mercaptan shrugged his shoulders. 'They stay in the hall,' he said. 'I don't let them into the boudoir.'

'You disgust me,' said Lypiatt, with rising indignation, and making wilder gestures. 'You disgust me — you and your odious little sham eighteenth-century civilization; your piddling little poetry; your art for art's sake instead of for God's sake; your nauseating little copulations without love or passion; your hoggish materialism; your bestial indifference to all that's unhappy and your yelping hatred of all that's great.'

'Charming, charming,' murmured Mr Mercaptan, who was pouring oil on his salad.

'How can you ever hope to achieve anything decent or solid, when you don't even believe in decency or solidity? I look about me,' and Lypiatt cast his eyes wildly round the crowded room, 'and I find myself alone, spiritually alone. I strive on by myself, by myself.' He struck his breast, a giant, a solitary giant. 'I have set myself to restore painting and poetry to their rightful position among the great moral forces. They have been amusements, they have been mere games for too long. I am giving my life for that. My life.' His voice trembled a little. 'People mock me, hate me, stone me, deride me. But I go on, I go on. For I know I'm right. And in the end they too will recognize that I've been right.' It was a loud soliloquy. One could fancy that Lypiatt had been engaged in recognizing himself.

'All the same,' said Gumbril with a cheerful stubbornness, 'I persist that the word "dreams" is inadmissible.'

'Inadmissible,' repeated Mr Mercaptan, imparting to the word an additional significance by giving it its French pronunciation. 'In the age of Rostand, well and good. But now. ...'

'Now,' said Gumbril, 'the word merely connotes Freud.'

'It's a matter of literary tact,' explained Mr Mercaptan. 'Have you no literary tact?'

'No,' said Lypiatt, with emphasis, 'thank God, I haven't. I have no tact of any kind. I do things straightforwardly, frankly, as the spirit moves me. I don't like compromises.'

He struck the table. The gesture startlingly let loose a peal of cracked and diabolic laughter. Gumbril and Lypiatt and Mr Mercaptan looked quickly up; even Shearwater

lifted his great spherical head and turned towards the sound the large disk of his face. A young man with a blond, fan-shaped beard stood by the table, looking down at them through a pair of bright blue eyes and smiling equivocally and disquietingly as though his mind were full of some nameless and fantastic malice.

‘Come sta la Sua Terribiltà?’ he asked; and, taking off his preposterous bowler hat, he bowed profoundly to Lypiatt. ‘How I recognize my Buonarrotti!’ he added affectionately.

Lypiatt laughed, rather uncomfortably, and no longer on the Titanic scale. ‘How I recognize my Coleman!’ he echoed, rather feebly.

‘On the contrary,’ Gumbril corrected, ‘how almost completely I fail to recognize. This beard’ — he pointed to the blond fan— ‘why, may I ask?’

‘More Russianism,’ said Mr Mercaptan, and shook his head.

‘Ah, why indeed?’ Coleman lowered his voice to a confidential whisper. ‘For religious reasons,’ he said, and made the sign of the cross.

‘Christlike is my behaviour,

Like every good believer,

I imitate the Saviour,

And cultivate a beaver.

There be beavers which have made themselves beavers for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. But there are some beavers, on the other hand, which were so born from their mother’s womb.’ He burst into a fit of outrageous laughter which stopped as suddenly and as voluntarily as it had begun.

Lypiatt shook his head. ‘Hideous,’ he said, ‘hideous.’

‘Moreover,’ Coleman went on, without paying any attention, ‘I have other and, alas! less holy reasons for this change of face. It enables one to make such delightful acquaintances in the street. You hear some one saying, “Beaver”, as you pass, and you immediately have the right to rush up and get into conversation. I owe to this dear symbol,’ and he caressed the golden beard tenderly with the palm of his hand, ‘the most admirably dangerous relations.’

‘Magnificent,’ said Gumbril, drinking his own health. ‘I shall stop shaving at once.’

Shearwater looked round the table with raised eyebrows and a wrinkled forehead. ‘This conversation is rather beyond me,’ he said gravely. Under the formidable moustache, under the thick, tufted eyebrows, the mouth was small and ingenuous, the mild grey eyes full of an almost childish inquiry. ‘What does the word “beaver” signify in this context? You don’t refer, I suppose, to the rodent, *Castor fiber*?’

‘But this is a very great man,’ said Coleman, raising his bowler. ‘Tell me, who he is?’

‘Our friend Shearwater,’ said Gumbril, ‘the physiologist.’

Coleman bowed. ‘Physiological Shearwater,’ he said. ‘Accept my homage. To one who doesn’t know what a beaver is, I resign all my claims to superiority. There’s nothing else but beavers in all the papers. Tell me, do you never read the Daily Express?’

‘No.’

‘Nor the Daily Mail?’

Shearwater shook his head.

‘Nor the Mirror? nor the Sketch? nor the Graphic? nor even (for I was forgetting that physiologists must surely have Liberal opinions) — even the Daily News?’

Shearwater continued to shake his large spherical head.

‘Nor any of the evening papers?’

‘No.’

Coleman once more lifted his hat. ‘O eloquent, just and mighty Death!’ he exclaimed, and replaced it on his head. ‘You never read any papers at all — not even our friend Mercaptan’s delicious little middles in the weeklies? How is your delicious little middle, by the way?’ Coleman turned to Mr Mercaptan and with the point of his huge stick gave him a little prod in the stomach. ‘Ça marche — les tripes? Hein?’ He turned back to Shearwater. ‘Not even those?’ he asked.

‘Never,’ said Shearwater. ‘I have more serious things to think about than newspapers.’

‘And what serious thing, may I ask?’

‘Well, at the present moment,’ said Shearwater, ‘I am chiefly preoccupied with the kidneys.’

‘The kidneys!’ In an ecstasy of delight, Coleman thumped the floor with the ferrule of his stick. ‘The kidneys! Tell me all about kidneys. This is of the first importance. This is really life. And I shall sit down at your table without asking permission of Buonarrotti here, and in the teeth of Mercaptan, and without so much as thinking about this species of Gumbriel, who might as well not be there at all. I shall sit down and—’

‘Talking of sitting,’ said Gumbriel, ‘I wish I could persuade you to order a pair of my patent pneumatic trousers. They will—’

Coleman waved him away. ‘Not now, not now,’ he said. ‘I shall sit down and listen to the physiologue talking about runions, while I myself actually eat them — sautés. Sautés, mark my words.’

Laying his hat and stick on the floor beside him, he sat down at the end of the table, between Lypiatt and Shearwater.

‘Two believers,’ he said, laying his hand for a moment on Lypiatt’s arm, ‘and three black-hearted unbelievers — confronted. Eh, Buonarrotti? You and I are both croyants et pratiquants, as Mercaptan would say. I believe in one devil, father quasi-almighty, Samael and his wife, the Woman of Whoredom. Ha, ha!’ He laughed his ferocious, artificial laugh.

‘Here’s an end to any civilized conversation,’ Mr Mercaptan complained, hissing on the c, labiating lingeringly on the v of ‘civilized’ and giving the first two i’s their fullest value. The word, in his mouth, seemed to take on a special and a richer significance.

Coleman ignored him. ‘Tell me, you physiologue,’ he went on, ‘tell me about the physiology of the Archetypal Man. This is most important; Buonarrotti shares my opinion about this, I know. Has the Archetypal Man a boyau rectum, as Mercaptan

would say again, or not? Everything depends on this, as Voltaire realized ages ago. "His feet," as we know already on inspired authority, "were straight feet; and the soles of his feet were like the sole of a calf's foot." But the viscera, you must tell us something about the viscera. Mustn't he, Buonarrotti? And where are my rognons sautés?" he shouted at the waiter.

'You revolt me,' said Lypiatt.

'Not mortually, I 'ope?' Coleman turned with solicitude to his neighbour; then shook his head. 'Mortually I fear. Kiss me 'Ardy, and I die happy.' He blew a kiss into the air. 'But why is the physiologue so slow? Up, pachyderm, up! Answer. You hold the key to everything. The key, I tell you, the key. I remember, when I used to hang about the biological laboratories at school, eviscerating frogs — crucified with pins, they were, belly upwards, like little green Christs — I remember once, when I was sitting there, quietly poring over the entrails, in came the laboratory boy and said to the stinks usher: "Please, sir, may I have the key of the Absolute?" And, would you believe it, that usher calmly put his hand in his trouser pocket and fished out a small Yale key and gave it him without a word. What a gesture! The key of the Absolute. But it was only the absolute alcohol the urchin wanted — to pickle some loathsome foetus in, I suppose. God rot his soul in peace! And now, Castor Fiber, out with your key. Tell us about the Archetypal Man, tell us about the primordial Adam. Tell us all about the boyau rectum.'

Ponderously, Shearwater moved his clumsy frame; leaning back in his chair he scrutinized Coleman with a large, benevolent curiosity. The eyes under the savage eyebrows were mild and gentle; behind the fearful disguise of the moustache he smiled poutingly, like a baby who sees the approaching bottle. The broad, domed forehead was serene. He ran his hand through his thick brown hair, scratched his head meditatively and then, when he had thoroughly examined, had comprehended and duly classified the strange phenomenon of Coleman, opened his mouth and uttered a little good-natured laugh of amusement.

'Voltaire's question,' he said at last, in his slow, deep voice, 'seemed at the time he asked it an unanswerable piece of irony. It would have seemed almost equally ironic to his contemporaries, if he had asked whether God had a pair of kidneys. We know a little more about the kidneys nowadays. If he had asked me, I should answer: why not? The kidneys are so beautifully organized; they do their work of regulation with such a miraculous — it's hard to find another word — such a positively divine precision, such knowledge and wisdom, that there's no reason why your archetypal man, whoever he is, or any one else, for that matter, should be ashamed of owning a pair.'

Coleman clapped his hands. 'The key,' he cried, 'the key. Out of the trouser pocket of babes and sucklings it comes. The genuine, the unique Yale. How right I was to come here to-night! But, holy Sephiroth, there's my trollop.'

He picked up his stick, jumped from his chair and threaded his way between the tables. A woman was standing near the door. Coleman came up to her, pointed without

speaking to the table, and returned, driving her along in front of him, tapping her gently over the haunches with his stick, as one might drive a docile animal to the slaughter.

‘Allow me to introduce,’ said Coleman. ‘The sharer of my joys and sorrows. La compagne de mes nuits blanches et de mes jours plutôt sales. In a word, Zoe. Qui ne comprend pas le français, qui me déteste avec une passion égale à la mienne, et qui mangera, ma foi, des rognons pour faire honneur au physiologue.’

‘Have some Burgundy?’ Gumbriel proffered the bottle.

Zoe nodded and pushed forward her glass. She was dark-haired, had a pale skin and eyes like round blackberries. Her mouth was small and floridly curved. She was dressed, rather depressingly, like a picture by Augustus John, in blue and orange. Her expression was sullen and ferocious, and she looked about her with an air of profound contempt.

‘Shearwater’s no better than a mystic,’ fluted Mr Mercaptan. ‘A mystical scientist; really, one hadn’t reckoned on that.’

‘Like a Liberal Pope,’ said Gumbriel. ‘Poor Metternich, you remember? Pio Nono.’ And he burst into a fit of esoteric laughter. ‘Of less than average intelligence,’ he murmured delightedly, and refilled his glass.

‘It’s only the deliberately blind who wouldn’t reckon on the combination,’ Lypiatt put in, indignantly. ‘What are science and art, what are religion and philosophy but so many expressions in human terms of some reality more than human? Newton and Boehme and Michelangelo — what are they doing but expressing, in different ways, different aspects of the same thing?’

‘Alberti, I beg you,’ said Gumbriel. ‘I assure you he was the better architect.’

‘Fi donc!’ said Mr Mercaptan. ‘San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane—’ But he got no further. Lypiatt abolished him with a gesture.

‘One reality,’ he cried, ‘there is only one reality.’

‘One reality,’ Coleman reached out a hand across the table and caressed Zoe’s bare white arm, ‘and that is callipygous.’ Zoe jabbed at his hand with her fork.

‘We are all trying to talk about it,’ continued Lypiatt. ‘The physicists have formulated their laws, which are after all no more than stammering provisional theories about a part of it. The physiologists are penetrating into the secrets of life, psychologists into the mind. And we artists are trying to say what is revealed to us about the moral nature, the personality of that reality, which is the universe.’

Mr Mercaptan threw up his hands in affected horror. ‘Oh, barbaridad, barbaridad!’ Nothing less than the pure Castilian would relieve his feelings. ‘But all this is meaningless.’

‘Quite right about the chemists and physicists,’ said Shearwater. ‘They’re always trying to pretend that they’re nearer the truth than we are. They take their crude theories as facts and try to make us accept them when we’re dealing with life. Oh, they are sacred, their theories. Laws of Nature they call them; and they talk about their known truths and our romantic biological fancies. What a fuss they make when we talk about life! Bloody fools!’ said Shearwater, mild and crushing. ‘Nobody but a

fool could talk of mechanism in face of the kidneys. And there are actually imbeciles who talk about the mechanism of heredity and reproduction.'

'All the same,' began Mr Mercaptan very earnestly, anxious to deny his own life, 'there are eminent authorities. I can only quote what they say, of course. I can't pretend to know anything about it myself. But—'

'Reproduction, reproduction,' Coleman murmured the word to himself ecstatically. 'Delightful and horrifying to think they all come to that, even the most virginal; that they were all made for that, little she-dogs, in spite of their china-blue eyes. What sort of a mandrake shall we produce, Zoe and I?' he asked, turning to Shearwater. 'How I should like to have a child,' he went on without waiting for an answer. 'I shouldn't teach it anything; no language, nothing at all. Just a child of nature. I believe it would really be the devil. And then what fun it would be if it suddenly started to say "Bekkos", like the children in Herodotus. And Buonarroti here would paint an allegorical picture of it and write an epic called "The Ignoble Savage". And Castor Fiber would come and sound its kidneys and investigate its sexual instincts. And Mercaptan would write one of his inimitable middle articles about it. And Gumbril would make it a pair of patent trousers. And Zoe and I would look parentally on and fairly swell with pride. Shouldn't we, Zoe?' Zoe preserved her expression of sullen, unchanging contempt and did not deign to answer. 'Ah, how delightful it would be! I long for posterity. I live in hopes. I stope against Stopes. I—'

Zoe threw a piece of bread, which caught him on the cheek, a little below the eye. Coleman leaned back and laughed and laughed till the tears rolled down his face.

## Chapter V

ONE AFTER ANOTHER, they engaged themselves in the revolving doors of the restaurant, trotted round in the moving cage of glass and ejected themselves into the coolness and darkness of the street. Shearwater lifted up his large face and took two or three deep breaths. 'Too much carbon dioxide and ammonia in there,' he said.

'It is unfortunate that when two or three are gathered together in God's name, or even in the more civilized name of Mercaptan of the delicious middle,' Mercaptan dexterously parried the prod which Coleman aimed at him, 'it is altogether deplorable that they should necessarily empest the air.'

Lypiatt had turned his eyes heavenwards. 'What stars,' he said, 'and what prodigious gaps between the stars!'

'A real light opera summer night.' And Mercaptan began to sing, in fragmentary German, the 'Barcarolle' from the Tales of Hoffmann. 'Liebe Nacht, du schöne Nacht, oh stille mein tummy-tum. Te, tum, Te tum. ... Delicious Offenbach. Ah, if only we could have a third Empire! Another comic Napoleon! That would make Paris look like Paris again. Tiddy, tummy-ti-tum.'

They walked along without any particular destination, but simply for the sake of walking through this soft cool night. Coleman led the way, tapping the pavement at every step with the ferrule of his stick. 'The blind leading the blind,' he explained. 'Ah, if only there were a ditch, a crevasse, a great hole full of stinging centipedes and dung. How gleefully I should lead you all into it!'

'I think you would do well,' said Shearwater gravely, 'to go and see a doctor.'

Coleman gave vent to a howl of delight.

'Does it occur to you,' he went on, 'that at this moment we are walking through the midst of seven million distinct and separate individuals, each with distinct and separate lives and all completely indifferent to our existence? Seven million people, each one of whom thinks himself quite as important as each of us does. Millions of them are now sleeping in an empested atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment engaged in mutually caressing one another in a manner too hideous to be thought of, but in no way differing from the manner in which each of us performs, delightfully, passionately and beautifully, his similar work of love. Thousands of women are now in the throes of parturition, and of both sexes thousands are dying of the most diverse and appalling diseases, or simply because they have lived too long. Thousands are drunk, thousands have over-eaten, thousands have not had enough to eat. And they are all alive, all unique and separate and sensitive, like you and me. It's a horrible thought. Ah, if I could lead them all into that great hole of centipedes.'

He tapped and tapped on the pavement in front of him, as though searching for the crevasse. At the top of his voice he began to chant: 'O all ye Beasts and Cattle, curse ye the Lord: curse him and vilify him for ever.'

'All this religion,' sighed Mercaptan. 'What with Lypiatt on one side, being a muscular Christian artist, and Coleman on the other, howling the black mass. ... Really!' He elaborated an Italianate gesture, and turned to Zoe. 'What do you think of it all?' he asked.

Zoe jerked her head in Coleman's direction. 'I think 'e's a bloody swine,' she said. They were the first words she had spoken since she had joined the party.

'Hear, hear!' cried Coleman, and he waved his stick.

In the warm yellow light of the coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner loitered a little group of people. Among the peaked caps and the chauffeurs' dust-coats, among the weather-stained workmen's jackets and the knotted handkerchiefs, there emerged an alien elegance. A tall tubed hat and a silk-faced overcoat, a cloak of flame-coloured satin, and in bright, coppery hair a great Spanish comb of carved tortoiseshell.

'Well, I'm damned,' said Gumbril as they approached. 'I believe it's Myra Viveash.'

'So it is,' said Lypiatt, peering in his turn. He began suddenly to walk with an affected swagger, kicking his heels at every step. Looking at himself from outside, his divining eyes pierced through the veil of cynical *je-m'en-fichisme* to the bruised heart beneath. Besides, he didn't want any one to guess.

'The Viveash, is it?' Coleman quickened his rapping along the pavement. 'And who is the present incumbent?' He pointed at the top hat.

‘Can it be Bruin Opps?’ said Gumbril dubiously.

‘Opps!’ Coleman yelled out the name. ‘Opps!’

The top hat turned, revealing a shirt front, a long grey face, a glitter of circular glass over the left eye. ‘Who the devil are you?’ The voice was harsh and arrogantly offensive.

‘I am that I am,’ said Coleman. ‘But I have with me’ — he pointed to Shearwater, to Gumbril, to Zoe — ‘a physiologue, a pedagogue and a priapagogue; for I leave out of account mere artists and journalists whose titles do not end with the magic syllable. And finally,’ indicating himself, ‘plain Dog, which, being interpreted kabbalistically backwards, signifies God. All at your service.’ He took off his hat and bowed.

The top hat turned back towards the Spanish comb. ‘Who is this horrible drunk?’ it inquired.

Mrs Viveash did not answer him, but stepped forward to meet the newcomers. In one hand she held a peeled, hard-boiled egg and a thick slice of bread and butter in the other, and between her sentences she bit at them alternately.

‘Coleman!’ she exclaimed, and her voice, as she spoke, seemed always on the point of expiring, as though each word were the last, utterly faintly and breakingly from a death-bed — the last, with all the profound and nameless significance of the ultimate word. ‘It’s a very long time since I heard you raving last. And you, Theodore darling, why do I never see you now?’

Gumbril shrugged his shoulders. ‘Because you don’t want to, I suppose,’ he said.

Myra laughed and took another bite at her bread and butter. ... She laid the back of her hand — for she was still holding the butt end of her hard-boiled egg — on Lypiatt’s arm. The Titan, who had been looking at the sky, seemed to be surprised to find her standing there. ‘You?’ he said, smiling and wrinkling up his forehead interrogatively.

‘It’s to-morrow I’m sitting for you, Casimir, isn’t it?’

‘Ah, you remembered.’ The veil parted for a moment. Poor Lypiatt! ‘And happy Mercaptan? Always happy?’

Gallantly Mercaptan kissed the back of the hand which held the egg. ‘I might be happier,’ he murmured, rolling up at her from the snouty face a pair of small brown eyes. ‘Puis-je espérer?’

Mrs Viveash laughed expiringly from her inward death-bed and turned on him, without speaking, her pale unwavering glance. Her eyes had a formidable capacity for looking and expressing nothing; they were like the pale blue eyes which peer out of the Siamese cat’s black-velvet mask.

‘Bellissima,’ murmured Mercaptan, flowering under their cool light.

Mrs Viveash addressed herself to the company at large. ‘We have had the most appalling evening,’ she said. ‘Haven’t we, Bruin?’

Bruin Opps said nothing, but only scowled. He didn’t like these damned intruders. The skin of his contracted brows oozed over the rim of his monocle, on to the shining glass.



‘I thought it would be fun,’ Myra went on, ‘to go to that place at Hampton Court, where you have dinner on an island and dance. ...’

‘What is there about islands,’ put in Mercaptan, in a deliriously whimsical parenthesis, ‘that makes them so peculiarly voluptuous? Cythera, Monkey Island, Capri. Je me demande.’

‘Another charming middle.’ Coleman pointed his stick menacingly; Mr Mercaptan stepped quickly out of range.

‘So we took a cab,’ Mrs Viveash continued, ‘and set out. And what a cab, my God! A cab with only one gear, and that the lowest. A cab as old as the century, a museum specimen, a collector’s piece.’ They had been hours and hours on the way. And when they got there, the food they were offered to eat, the wine they were expected to drink! From her eternal death-bed Mrs Viveash cried out in unaffected horror. Everything tasted as though it had been kept soaking for a week in the river before being served up — rather weedy, with that delicious typhoid flavour of Thames water. There was Thames even in the champagne. They had not been able to eat so much as a crust of bread. Hungry and thirsty, they had re-embarked in their antique taxi, and here, at last, they were, at the first outpost of civilization, eating for dear life.

‘Oh, a terrible evening,’ Mrs Viveash concluded. ‘The only thing which kept up my spirits was the spectacle of Bruin’s bad temper. You’ve no idea, Bruin, what an incomparable comic you can be.’

Bruin ignored the remark. With an expression of painfully repressed disgust he was eating a hard-boiled egg. Myra’s caprices were becoming more and more impossible. That Hampton Court business had been bad enough; but when it came to eating in the street, in the middle of a lot of filthy workmen — well, really, that was rather too much.

Mrs Viveash looked about her. ‘Am I never to know who this mysterious person is?’ She pointed to Shearwater, who was standing a little apart from the group, his back leaning against the park railings and staring thoughtfully at the ground.

‘The physiologue,’ Coleman explained, ‘and he has the key. The key, the key!’ He hammered the pavement with his stick.

Gumbril performed the introduction in more commonplace style.

‘You don’t seem to take much interest in us, Mr Shearwater,’ Myra called expiringly. Shearwater looked up; Mrs Viveash regarded him intently through pale, unwavering eyes, smiling as she looked that queer, downward-turning smile which gave to her face, through its mask of laughter, a peculiar expression of agony. ‘You don’t seem to take much interest in us,’ she repeated.

Shearwater shook his heavy head. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I don’t think I do.’

‘Why don’t you?’

‘Why should I? There’s not time to be interested in everything. One can only be interested in what’s worth while.’

‘And we’re not worth while?’

‘Not to me personally,’ replied Shearwater with candour. ‘The Great Wall of China, the political situation in Italy, the habits of Trematodes — all these are most interesting in themselves. But they aren’t interesting to me; I don’t permit them to be. I haven’t the leisure.’

‘And what do you allow yourself to be interested in?’

‘Shall we go?’ said Bruin impatiently; he had succeeded in swallowing the last fragment of his hard-boiled egg. Mrs Viveash did not answer, did not even look at him.

Shearwater, who had hesitated before replying, was about to speak. But Coleman answered for him. ‘Be respectful,’ he said to Mrs Viveash. ‘This is a great man. He reads no papers, not even those in which our Mercaptan so beautifully writes. He does not know what a beaver is. And he lives for nothing but the kidneys.’

Mrs Viveash smiled her smile of agony. ‘Kidneys? But what a memento mori! There are other portions of the anatomy.’ She threw back her cloak, revealing an arm, a bare shoulder, a slant of pectoral muscle. She was wearing a white dress that, leaving her back and shoulders bare, came up, under either arm, to a point in front and was held there by a golden thread about the neck. ‘For example,’ she said, and twisted her hand several times over and over, making the slender arm turn at the elbow, as though to demonstrate the movement of the articulations and the muscular play.

‘Memento vivere,’ Mr Mercaptan aptly commented. ‘Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus.’

Mrs Viveash dropped her arm and pulled the cloak back into place. She looked at Shearwater, who had followed all her movements with conscientious attention, and who now nodded with an expression of interrogation on his face, as though to ask: what next?

‘We all know that you’ve got beautiful arms,’ said Bruin angrily. ‘There’s no need for you to make an exhibition of them in the street, at midnight. Let’s get out of this.’ He laid his hand on her shoulder and made as if to draw her away. ‘We’d better be going. Goodness knows what’s happening behind us.’ He indicated with a little movement of the head the loiterers round the coffee-stall. ‘Some disturbance among the canaille.’

Mrs Viveash looked round. The cab-drivers and the other consumers of midnight coffee had gathered in an interested circle, curious and sympathetic, round the figure of a woman who was sitting, like a limp bundle tied up in black cotton and mackintosh, on the stall-keeper’s high stool, leaning wearily against the wall of the booth. A man stood beside her drinking tea out of a thick white cup. Every one was talking at once.

‘Mayn’t the poor wretches talk?’ asked Mrs Viveash, turning back to Bruin. ‘I never knew any one who had the lower classes on the brain as much as you have.’

‘I loathe them,’ said Bruin. ‘I hate every one poor, or ill, or old. Can’t abide them; they make me positively sick.’

‘Quelle âme bien-née,’ piped Mr Mercaptan. ‘And how well and frankly you express what we all feel and lack the courage to say.’

Lypiatt gave vent to indignant laughter.

'I remember when I was a little boy,' Bruin went on, 'my old grandfather used to tell me stories about his childhood. He told me that when he was about five or six, just before the passing of the Reform Bill of 'thirty-two, there was a song which all right-thinking people used to sing, with a chorus that went like this: "Rot the People, blast the People, damn the Lower Classes". I wish I knew the rest of the words and the tune. It must have been a good song.'

Coleman was enraptured with the song. He shouldered his walking-stick and began marching round and round the nearest lamp-post chanting the words to a stirring march tune. 'Rot the People, blast the People ...' He marked the rhythm with heavy stamps of his feet.

'Ah, if only they'd invent servants with internal combustion engines,' said Bruin, almost pathetically. 'However well trained they are, they always betray their humanity occasionally. And that is really intolerable.'

'How tedious is a guilty conscience!' Gumbriel murmured the quotation.

'But Mr Shearwater,' said Myra, bringing back the conversation to more congenial themes, 'hasn't told us yet what he thinks of arms.'

'Nothing at all,' said Shearwater. 'I'm occupied with the regulation of the blood at the moment.'

'But is it true what he says, Theodore?' She appealed to Gumbriel.

'I should think so.' Gumbriel's answer was rather dim and remote. He was straining to hear the talk of Bruin's canaille, and Mrs Viveash's question seemed a little irrelevant.

'I used to do cartin' jobs,' the man with the teacup was saying. ' 'Ad a van and a nold pony of me own. And didn't do so badly neither. The only trouble was me lifting furniture and 'eavy weights about the place. Because I 'ad malaria out in India, in the war ...'

'Nor even — you compel me to violate the laws of modesty — nor even,' Mrs Viveash went on, smiling painfully, speaking huskily, expiringly, 'of legs?'

A spring of blasphemy was touched in Coleman's brain. 'Neither delighteth He in any man's legs,' he shouted, and with an extravagant show of affection he embraced Zoe, who caught hold of his hand and bit it.

'It comes back on you when you get tired like, malaria does.' The man's face was sallow and there was an air of peculiar listlessness and hopelessness about his misery. 'It comes back on you, and then you go down with fever and you're as weak as a child.'

Shearwater shook his head.

'Nor even of the heart?' Mrs Viveash lifted her eyebrows. 'Ah, now the inevitable word has been pronounced, the real subject of every conversation has appeared on the scene. Love, Mr Shearwater!'

'But as I says,' recapitulated the man with the teacup, 'we didn't do so badly after all. We 'ad nothing to complain about. 'Ad we, Florrie?'

The black bundle made an affirmative movement with its upper extremity.

‘That’s one of the subjects,’ said Shearwater, ‘like the Great Wall of China and the habits of Trematodes, I don’t allow myself to be interested in.’

Mrs Viveash laughed, breathed out a little ‘Good God!’ of incredulity and astonishment, and asked, ‘Why not?’

‘No time,’ he explained. ‘You people of leisure have nothing else to do or think about. I’m busy, and so naturally less interested in the subject than you; and I take care, what’s more, to limit such interest as I have.’

‘I was goin’ up Ludgate ‘Ill one day with a vanload of stuff for a chap in Clerkenwell. I was leadin’ Jerry up the ‘ill — Jerry’s the name of our ole pony. ...’

‘One can’t have everything,’ Shearwater was explaining, ‘not all at the same time, in any case. I’ve arranged my life for work now. I’m quietly married, I simmer away domestically.’

‘Quelle horreur!’ said Mr Mercaptan. All the Louis Quinze Abbé in him was shocked and revolted by the thought.

‘But love?’ questioned Mrs Viveash. ‘Love?’

‘Love!’ Lypiatt echoed. He was looking up at the Milky Way.

‘All of a sudden out jumps a copper at me. “ ‘Ow old is that ‘orse?” ’e says. “It ain’t fit to drawr a load, it limps in all four feet,” ’e says. “No, it doesn’t,” I says. “None of your answerin’ back,” ’e says. “Take it outer the shafts at once.” ’

‘But I know all about love already. I know precious little still about kidneys.’

‘But, my good Shearwater, how can you know all about love before you’ve made it with all women?’

‘Off we goes, me and the cop and the ‘orse, up in front of the police-court magistrate. ...’

‘Or are you one of those imbeciles,’ Mrs Viveash went on, ‘who speak of women with a large W and pretend we’re all the same? Poor Theodore here might possibly think so in his feebler moments.’ Gumbriel smiled vaguely from a distance. He was following the man with the teacup into the magistrate’s stuffy court. ‘And Mercaptan certainly does, because all the women who ever sat on his dix-huitième sofa certainly were exactly like one another. And perhaps Casimir does too; all women look like his absurd ideal. But you, Shearwater, you’re intelligent. Surely you don’t believe anything so stupid?’

Shearwater shook his head.

‘The cop, ’e gave evidence against me. “Limping in all four feet,” ’e says. “It wasn’t,” I says, and the police-court vet, ’e bore me out. “The ‘orse ‘as been very well treated,” ’e says. “But ‘e’s old, ‘e’s very old.” “I know ‘e’s old,” I says. “But where am I goin’ to find the price for a young one?” ’

‘ $x-y$ ,’ Shearwater was saying, ‘ $=(x+y)(x-y)$ . And the equation holds good whatever the values of  $x$  and  $y$ . ... It’s the same with your love business, Mrs Viveash. The relation is still fundamentally the same, whatever the value of the unknown personal quantities concerned. Little individual tics and peculiarities — after all, what do they matter?’

‘What indeed!’ said Coleman. ‘Tics, mere tics. Sheep ticks, horse ticks, bed bugs, tape worms, taint worms, guinea worms, liver flukes. ...’

‘ ”The ‘orse must be destroyed,” says the beak. “ ’E’s too old for work.” “But I’m not,” I says. “I can’t get a old age pension at thirty-two, can I? ‘Ow am I to earn my living if you take away what I earns my living by?” ’

Mrs Viveash smiled agonizingly. ‘Here’s a man who thinks personal peculiarities are trivial and unimportant,’ she said. ‘You’re not even interested in people, then?’

‘ ”I don’t know what you can do,” ’e says. “I’m only ’ere to administer the law.” “Seems a queer sort of law,” I says. “What law is it?” ’

Shearwater scratched his head. Under his formidable black moustache he smiled at last his ingenuous, childish smile. ‘No,’ he said. ‘No, I suppose I’m not. It hadn’t occurred to me, until you said it. But I suppose I’m not. No.’ He laughed, quite delighted, it seemed, by this discovery about himself.

‘ ”What law is it?” ’e says. “The Croolty to Animals law. That’s what it is,” ’e says.’

The smile of mockery and suffering appeared and faded. ‘One of these days,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘you may find them more absorbing than you do now.’

‘Meanwhile,’ said Shearwater ...

‘I couldn’t find a job ’ere, and ‘aving been workin’ on my own, my own master like, couldn’t get unemployment pay. So when we ‘eard of jobs at Portsmouth, we thought we’d try to get one, even if it did mean walkin’ there.’

‘Meanwhile, I have my kidneys.’

‘ ”’Opeless,” ’e says to me, “quite ‘opeless. More than two hundred come for three vacancies.” So there was nothing for it but to walk back again. Took us four days it did, this time. She was very bad on the way, very bad. Being nearly six months gone. Our first it is. Things will be ‘arder still, when it comes.’

From the black bundle there issued a sound of quiet sobbing.

‘Look here,’ said Gumbriel, making a sudden irruption into the conversation. ‘This is really too awful.’ He was consumed with indignation and pity; he felt like a prophet in Nineveh.

‘There are two wretched people here,’ and Gumbriel told them breathlessly what he had overheard. It was terrible, terrible. ‘All the way to Portsmouth and back again; on foot; without proper food; and the woman’s with child.’

Coleman exploded with delight. ‘Gravid,’ he kept repeating, ‘gravid, gravid. The laws of gravidy, first formulated by Newton, now recodified by the immortal Einstein. God said, Let Newstein be, and there was light. And God said, Let there be Light; and there was darkness o’er the face of the earth.’ He roared with laughter.

Between them they raised five pounds. Mrs Viveash undertook to give them to the black bundle. The cabmen made way for her as she advanced; there was an uncomfortable silence. The black bundle lifted a face that was old and worn, like the face of a statue in the portal of a cathedral; an old face, but one was aware, somehow, that it belonged to a woman still young by the reckoning of years. Her hands trembled as

she took the notes, and when she opened her mouth to speak her hardly articulate whisper of gratitude, one saw that she had lost several of her teeth.

The party disintegrated. All went their ways: Mr Mercaptan to his rococo boudoir, his sweet barocco bedroom in Sloane Street; Coleman and Zoe towards goodness only knew what scenes of intimate life in Pimlico; Lypiatt to his studio off the Tottenham Court Road, alone, silently brooding and perhaps too consciously bowed with unhappiness. But the unhappiness, poor Titan! was real enough, for had he not seen Mrs Viveash and the insufferable, the stupid and loutish Opps driving off in one taxi? 'Must finish up with a little dancing,' Myra had huskily uttered from that death-bed on which her restless spirit for ever and wearily exerted itself. Obediently, Bruin had given an address and they had driven off. But after the dancing? Oh, was it possible that that odious, bad-blooded young cad was her lover? And that she should like him? It was no wonder that Lypiatt should have walked, bent like Atlas under the weight of a world. And when, in Piccadilly, a belated and still unsuccessful prostitute sidled out of the darkness, as he strode by unseeing in his misery when she squeaked up at him a despairing 'Cheer up, duckie,' Lypiatt suddenly threw up his head and laughed titanicly, with the terrible bitterness of a noble soul in pain. Even the poor drabs at the street corners were affected by the unhappiness that radiated out from him, wave after throbbing wave, like music, he liked to fancy, into the night. Even the wretched drabs. He walked on, more desperately bowed than ever; but met no further adventure on his way.

Gumbril and Shearwater both lived in Paddington; they set off in company up Park Lane, walking in silence. Gumbril gave a little skip to get himself into step with his companion. To be out of step, when steps so loudly and flat-footedly flapped on empty pavements, was disagreeable, he found, was embarrassing, was somehow dangerous. Stepping, like this, out of time, one gave oneself away, so to speak, one made the night aware of two presences, when there might, if steps sounded in unison, be only one, heavier, more formidable, more secure than either of the separate two. In unison, then, they flapped up Park Lane. A policeman and the three poets, sulking back to back on their fountain, were the only human things besides themselves under the mauve electric moons.

'It's appalling, it's horrible,' said Gumbril at last, after a long, long silence, during which he had, indeed, been relishing to the full the horror of it all. Life, don't you know.

'What's appalling?' Shearwater inquired. He walked with his big head bowed, his hands clasped behind his back and clutching his hat; walked clumsily, with sudden lurches of his whole massive anatomy. Wherever he was, Shearwater always seemed to take up the space that two or three ordinary people would normally occupy. Cool fingers of wind passed refreshingly through his hair. He was thinking of the experiment he meant to try, in the next few days, down at the physiological laboratory. You'd put a man on an ergometer in a heated chamber and set him to work — hours at a time. He'd sweat, of course, prodigiously. You'd make arrangements for collecting the

sweat, weighing it, analyzing it and so on. The interesting thing would be to see what happened at the end of a few days. The man would have got rid of so much of his salts, that the blood composition might be altered and all sorts of delightful consequences might follow. It ought to be a capital experiment. Gumbрил's exclamation disturbed him. 'What's appalling?' he asked rather irritably.

'Those people at the coffee-stall,' Gumbрил answered. 'It's appalling that human beings should have to live like that. Worse than dogs.'

'Dogs have nothing to complain of.' Shearwater went off at a tangent. 'Nor guinea-pigs, nor rats. It's these blasted anti-vivisection maniacs who make all the fuss.'

'But think,' cried Gumbрил, 'what these wretched people have had to suffer! Walking all the way to Portsmouth in search of work; and the woman with child. It's horrifying. And then, the way people of that class are habitually treated. One has no idea of it until one has actually been treated that way oneself. In the war, for example, when one went to have one's mitral murmurs listened to by the medical board — they treated one then as though one belonged to the lower orders, like all the rest of the poor wretches. It was a real eye-opener. One felt like a cow being got into a train. And to think that the majority of one's fellow-beings pass their whole lives being shoved about like maltreated animals!'

'H'm,' said Shearwater. If you went on sweating indefinitely, he supposed, you would end by dying.

Gumbрил looked through the railings at the profound darkness of the park. Vast it was and melancholy, with a string, here and there, of receding lights. 'Terrible,' he said, and repeated the word several times. 'Terrible, terrible.' All the legless soldiers grinding barrel-organs, all the hawkers of toys stamping their leaky boots in the gutters of the Strand; at the corner of Cursitor Street and Chancery Lane, the old woman with matches, for ever holding to her left eye a handkerchief as yellow and dirty as the winter fog. What was wrong with the eye? He had never dared to look, but hurried past as though she were not there, or sometimes, when the fog was more than ordinarily cold and stifling, paused for an instant with averted eyes to drop a brown coin into her tray of matches. And then there were the murderers hanged at eight o'clock, while one was savouring, almost with voluptuous consciousness, the final dream-haunted doze. There was the phthisical charwoman who used to work at his father's house, until she got too weak and died. There were the lovers who turned on the gas and the ruined shopkeepers jumping in front of trains. Had one a right to be contented and well-fed, had one a right to one's education and good taste, a right to knowledge and conversation and the leisurely complexities of love?

He looked once more through the railings at the park's impenetrable, rustic night, at the lines of beaded lamps. He looked, and remembered another night, years ago, during the war, when there were no lights in the park and the electric moons above the roadway were in almost total eclipse. He had walked up this street alone, full of melancholy emotions which, though the cause of them was different, were in themselves

much the same as the melancholy emotions which swelled windily up within him to-night. He had been most horribly in love.

‘What did you think,’ he asked abruptly, ‘of Myra Viveash?’

‘Think?’ said Shearwater. ‘I don’t know that I thought very much about her. Not a case for ratiocination exactly, is she? She seemed to me entertaining enough, as women go. I said I’d lunch with her on Thursday.’

Gumbril felt, all of a sudden, the need to speak confidentially. ‘There was a time,’ he said in a tone that was quite unreal, airy, off-hand and disengaged, ‘years ago, when I totally lost my head about her. Totally.’ Those tear-wet patches on his pillow, cold against his cheek in the darkness; and oh, the horrible pain of weeping, vainly, for something that was nothing, that was everything in the world! ‘Towards the end of the war it was. I remember walking up this dismal street one night, in the pitch darkness, writhing with jealousy.’ He was silent. Spectrally, like a dim, haunting ghost, he had hung about her; dumbly, dumbly imploring, appealing. ‘The weak, silent man,’ she used to call him. And once for two or three days, out of pity, out of affection, out of a mere desire, perhaps, to lay the tiresome ghost, she had given him what his mournful silence implored — only to take it back, almost as soon as accorded. That other night, when he had walked up this street before, desire had eaten out his vitals and his body seemed empty, sickeningly and aching void; jealousy was busily reminding him, with an unflagging malice, of her beauty — of her beauty and the hateful, ruffian hands which now caressed, the eyes which looked on it. That was all long ago.

‘She is certainly handsome,’ said Shearwater, commenting, at one or two removes, on Gumbril’s last remark. ‘I can see that she might make any one who got involved with her decidedly uncomfortable.’ After a day or two’s continuous sweating, it suddenly occurred to him, one might perhaps find sea-water more refreshing than fresh water. That would be queer.

Gumbril burst out ferociously laughing. ‘But there were other times,’ he went on jauntily, ‘when other people were jealous of me.’ Ah, revenge, revenge. In the better world of the imagination it was possible to get one’s own back. What fiendish vendettas were there carried to successful ends! ‘I remember once writing her a quatrain in French.’ (He had written it years after the whole thing was over, he had never sent it to any one at all; but that was all one.) ‘How did it go? Ah, yes.’ And he recited, with suitable gestures:

‘ ”Puisque nous sommes là, je dois

Vous avertir, sans trop de honte,

Que je n’égale pas le Comte

Casanovesque de Sixfois.”

Rather prettily turned, I flatter myself. Rather elegantly gross.’

Gumbril’s laughter went hooting past the Marble Arch. It stopped rather suddenly, however, at the corner of the Edgware Road. He had suddenly remembered Mr Mer-captan, and the thought depressed him.



## Chapter VI

IT WAS BETWEEN Whitfield Street and the Tottenham Court Road, in a 'heavenly Mews', as he liked to call it (for he had a characteristic weakness for philosophical paronomasia), that Casimir Lypiatt lived and worked. You passed under an archway of bald and sooty brick — and at night, when the green gas-lamp underneath the arch threw livid lights and enormous architectural shadows, you could fancy yourself at the entrance of one of Piranesi's prisons — and you found yourself in a long cul-de-sac, flanked on either side by low buildings, having stabling for horses below and, less commodiously, stabling for human beings in the attics above. An old-fashioned smell of animals mingled with the more progressive stink of burnt oil. The air was a little thicker here, it seemed, than in the streets outside; looking down the mews on even the clearest day, you could see the forms of things dimming and softening, the colours growing richer and deeper with every yard of distance. It was the best place in the world, Lypiatt used to say, for studying aerial perspective; that was why he lived there. But you always felt about poor Lypiatt that he was facing misfortune with a jest a little too self-consciously.

Mrs Viveash's taxi drove in under the Piranesian arch, drove in slowly and as though with a gingerly reluctance to soil its white wheels on pavements so sordid. The cabman looked round inquiringly.

'This right?' he asked.

With a white-gloved finger Mrs Viveash prodded the air two or three times, indicating that he was to drive straight on. Halfway down the mews she rapped the glass; the man drew up.

'Never been down 'ere before,' he said, for the sake of making a little conversation, while Mrs Viveash fumbled for her money. He looked at her with a polite and slightly ironic curiosity that was frankly mingled with admiration.

'You're lucky,' said Mrs Viveash. 'We poor decayed gentlewomen — you see what we're reduced to.' And she handed him a florin.

Slowly the taxi-man unbuttoned his coat and put the coin away in an inner pocket. He watched her as she crossed the dirty street, placing her feet with a meticulous precision one after the other in the same straight line, as though she were treading a knife edge between goodness only knew what invisible gulfs. Floating she seemed to go, with a little spring at every step and the skirt of her summery dress — white it was, with a florid pattern printed in black all over it — blowing airily out around her swaying march. Decayed gentlewomen indeed! The driver started his machine with an unnecessary violence; he felt, for some reason, positively indignant.

Between the broad double-doors through which the horses passed to their fodder and repose were little narrow human doors — for the Yahoos, Lypiatt used to say in his large allusive way; and when he said it he laughed with the loud and bell-mouthed cynicism of one who sees himself as a misunderstood and embittered Prometheus. At

one of these little Yahoo doors Mrs Viveash halted and rapped as loudly as a small and stiff-hinged knocker would permit. Patiently she waited; several small and dirty children collected to stare at her. She knocked again, and again waited. More children came running up from the farther end of the mews; two young girls of fifteen or sixteen appeared at a neighbouring doorway and immediately gave tongue in whoops of mirthless, hyena-like laughter.

‘Have you ever read about the Pied Piper of Hamelin?’ Mrs Viveash asked the nearest child. Terrified, it shrank away. ‘I thought not,’ she said, and knocked again.

There was a sound, at last, of heavy feet slowly descending steep stairs; the door opened.

‘Welcome to the palazzo!’ It was Lypiatt’s heroic formula of hospitality.

‘Welcome at last,’ Mrs Viveash corrected, and followed him up a narrow, dark staircase that was as steep as a ladder. He was dressed in a velveteen jacket and linen trousers that should have been white, but needed washing. He was dishevelled and his hands were dirty.

‘Did you knock more than once?’ he asked, looking back over his shoulder.

‘More than twenty times,’ Mrs Viveash justifiably exaggerated.

‘I’m infinitely sorry,’ protested Lypiatt. ‘I get so deeply absorbed in my work, you know. Did you wait long?’

‘The children enjoyed it, at any rate.’ Mrs Viveash was irritated by a suspicion, which was probably, after all, quite unjustified, that Casimir had been rather consciously absorbed in his work; that he had heard her first knock and plunged the more profoundly into those depths of absorption where the true artist always dwells, or at any rate ought to dwell; to rise at her third appeal with a slow, pained reluctance, cursing, perhaps, at the importunity of a world which thus noisily interrupted the flow of his inspiration. ‘Queer, the way they stare at one,’ she went on, with a note in her dying voice of a petulance that the children had not inspired. ‘Does one look such a guy?’

Lypiatt threw open the door at the head of the stairs and stood there on the threshold, waiting for her. ‘Queer?’ he repeated. ‘Not a bit.’ And as she moved past him into the room, he laid his hand on her shoulder and fell into step with her, leaving the door to slam behind them. ‘Merely an example of the mob’s instinctive dislike of the aristocratic individual. That’s all. “Oh, why was I born with a different face?” Thank God I was, though. And so were you. But the difference has its disadvantages; the children throw stones.’

‘They didn’t throw stones.’ Mrs Viveash was too truthful, this time.

They halted in the middle of the studio. It was not a very large room and there were too many things in it. The easel stood near the centre of the studio; round it Lypiatt kept a space permanently cleared. There was a broad fairway leading to the door, and another, narrower and tortuously winding between boxes and piled-up furniture and tumbled books, gave access to his bed. There was a piano and a table permanently set with dirty plates and strewn with the relics of two or three meals. Bookshelves stood

on either side of the fireplace, and lying on the floor were still more books, piles on dusty piles. Mrs Viveash stood looking at the picture on the easel (abstract again — she didn't like it), and Lypiatt, who had dropped his hand from her shoulder, and had stepped back the better to see her, stood earnestly looking at Mrs Viveash.

'May I kiss you?' he asked after a silence.

Mrs Viveash turned towards him, smiling agonizingly, her eyebrows ironically lifted, her eyes steady and calm and palely, brightly inexpressive. 'If it really gives you any pleasure,' she said. 'It won't, I may say, to me.'

'You make me suffer a great deal,' said Lypiatt, and said it so quietly and unaffectedly, that Myra was almost startled; she was accustomed, with Casimir, to noisier and more magniloquent protestations.

'I'm very sorry,' she said; and, really, she felt sorry. 'But I can't help it, can I?'

'I suppose you can't,' he said. 'You can't,' he repeated, and his voice had now become the voice of Prometheus in his bitterness. 'Nor can tigresses.' He had begun to pace up and down the unobstructed fairway between his easel and the door; Lypiatt liked pacing while he talked. 'You like playing with the victim,' he went on; 'he must die slowly.'

Reassured, Mrs Viveash faintly smiled. This was the familiar Casimir. So long as he could talk like this, could talk like an old-fashioned French novel, it was all right; he couldn't really be so very unhappy. She sat down on the nearest unencumbered chair. Lypiatt continued to walk back and forth, waving his arms as he walked.

'But perhaps it's good for one to suffer,' he went on, 'perhaps it's unavoidable and necessary. Perhaps I ought to thank you. Can an artist do anything if he's happy? Would he ever want to do anything? What is art, after all, but a protest against the horrible inclemency of life?' He halted in front of her, with arms extended in a questioning gesture. Mrs Viveash slightly shrugged her shoulders. She really didn't know; she couldn't answer. 'Ah, but that's all nonsense,' he burst out again, 'all rot. I want to be happy and contented and successful; and of course I should work better if I were. And I want, oh, above everything, everything, I want you: to possess you completely and exclusively and jealously and for ever. And the desire is like rust corroding my heart, it's like moth eating holes in the fabric of my mind. And you merely laugh.' He threw up his hands and let them limply fall again.

'But I don't laugh,' said Mrs Viveash. On the contrary, she was very sorry for him; and, what was more, he rather bored her. For a few days, once, she had thought she might be in love with him. His impetuosity had seemed a torrent strong enough to carry her away. She had found out her mistake very soon. After that he had rather amused her: and now he rather bored her. No, decidedly, she never laughed. She wondered why she still went on seeing him. Simply because one must see some one? or why? 'Are you going to go on with my portrait?' she asked.

Lypiatt sighed. 'Yes,' he said, 'I suppose I'd better be getting on with my work. Work — it's the only thing. "Portrait of a Tigress".' The cynical Titan spoke again. 'Or shall I call it, "Portrait of a Woman who has never been in Love"?''

‘That would be a very stupid title,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Or, “Portrait of the Artist’s Heart Disease”? That would be good, that would be damned good!’ Lypiatt laughed very loudly and slapped his thighs. He looked, Mrs Viveash thought, peculiarly ugly when he laughed. His face seemed to go all to pieces; not a corner of it but was wrinkled and distorted by the violent grimace of mirth. Even the forehead was ruined when he laughed. Foreheads are generally the human part of people’s faces. Let the nose twitch and the mouth grin and the eyes twinkle as monkeyishly as you like; the forehead can still be calm and serene, the forehead still knows how to be human. But when Casimir laughed, his forehead joined in the general disintegrating grimace. And sometimes even when he wasn’t laughing, when he was just vivaciously talking, his forehead seemed to lose its calm and would twitch and wrinkle itself in a dreadful kind of agitation. ‘Portrait of the Artist’s Heart Disease’ — she didn’t find it so very funny.

‘The critics would think it was a problem picture,’ Lypiatt went on. ‘And so it would be, by God, so it would be. You are a problem. You’re the Sphinx. I wish I were Œdipus and could kill you.’

All this mythology! Mrs Viveash shook her head.

He made his way through the intervening litter and picked up a canvas that was leaning with averted face against the wall near the window. He held it out at arm’s length and examined it, his head critically cocked on one side. ‘Oh, it’s good,’ he said softly. ‘It’s good. Look at it.’ And, stepping out once more into the open, he propped it up against the table so that Mrs Viveash could see it without moving from her chair.

It was a stormy vision of her; it was Myra seen, so to speak, through a tornado. He had distorted her in the portrait, had made her longer and thinner than she really was, had turned her arms into sleek tubes and put a bright, metallic polish on the curve of her cheek. The figure in the portrait seemed to be leaning backwards a little from the surface of the canvas, leaning sideways too, with the twist of an ivory statuette carved out of the curving tip of a great tusk. Only somehow in Lypiatt’s portrait the curve seemed to lack grace, it was without point, it had no sense.

‘You’ve made me look,’ said Mrs Viveash at last, ‘as though I were being blown out of shape by the wind.’ All this show of violence — what was the point of it? She didn’t like it, she didn’t like it at all. But Casimir was delighted with her comment. He slapped his thighs and once more laughed his restless, sharp-featured face to pieces.

‘Yes, by God,’ he shouted, ‘by God, that’s right! Blown out of shape by the wind. That’s it: you’ve said it.’ He began stamping up and down the room again, gesticulating. ‘The wind, the great wind that’s in me.’ He struck his forehead. ‘The wind of life, the wild west wind. I feel it inside me, blowing, blowing. It carries me along with it; for though it’s inside me, it’s more than I am, it’s a force that comes from somewhere else, it’s Life itself, it’s God. It blows me along in the teeth of opposing fate, it makes me work on, fight on.’ He was like a man who walks along a sinister road at night and sings to keep up his own spirits, to emphasize and magnify his own existence. ‘And when I paint, when I write or improvise my music, it bends the things I have in my

mind, it pushes them in one direction, so that everything I do has the look of a tree that streams north-east with all its branches and all its trunk from the root upwards, as though it were trying to run from before the Atlantic gale.'

Lypiatt stretched out his two hands and, with fingers splayed out to the widest and trembling in the excessive tension of the muscles, moved them slowly upwards and sideways, as though he were running his palms up the stem of a little wind-wizened tree on a hilltop above the ocean.

Mrs Viveash continued to look at the unfinished portrait. It was as noisy and easy and immediately effective as a Vermouth advertisement in the streets of Padua. Cinzano, Bonomelli, Campari — illustrious names. Giotto and Mantegna mouldered meanwhile in their respective chapels.

'And look at this,' Lypiatt went on. He took down the canvas that was clamped to the easel and held it out for her inspection. It was one of Casimir's abstract paintings: a procession of machine-like forms rushing up diagonally from right to left across the canvas, with as it were a spray of energy blowing back from the crest of the wave towards the top right-hand corner. 'In this painting,' he said, 'I symbolize the Artist's conquering spirit — rushing on the universe, making it its own.' He began to declaim:

'Look down, Conquistador,  
There on the valley's broad green floor,  
There lies the lake, the jewelled cities gleam,  
Chalco and Tlacopan  
Await the coming Man;  
Look down on Mexico, Conquistador,  
Land of your golden dream.

Or the same idea in terms of music—' and Lypiatt dashed to the piano and evoked a distorted ghost of Scriabin. 'You see?' he asked feverishly, when the ghost was laid again and the sad cheap jangling had faded again into silence. 'You feel? The artist rushes on the world, conquers it, gives it beauty, imposes a moral significance.' He returned to the picture. 'This will be fine when it's finished,' he said. 'Tremendous. You feel the wind blowing there, too.' And with a pointing finger he followed up the onrush of the forms. 'The great south-wester driving them on. "Like leaves from an enchanter fleeing." Only not chaotically, not in disorder. They're blown, so to speak in column of four — by a conscious wind.' He leaned the canvas against the table and was free again to march and brandish his conquering fists.

'Life,' he said, 'life — that's the great, essential thing. You've got to get life into your art, otherwise it's nothing. And life only comes out of life, out of passion and feeling; it can't come out of theories. That's the stupidity of all this chatter about art for art's sake and the æsthetic emotions and purely formal values and all that. It's only the formal relations that matter; one subject is just as good as another — that's the theory. You've only got to look at the pictures of the people who put it into practice to see that it won't do. Life comes out of life. You must paint with passion, and the passion will stimulate your intellect to create the right formal relations. And to paint with

passion, you must paint things that passionately interest you, moving things, human things. Nobody, except a mystical pantheist, like Van Gogh, can seriously be as much interested in napkins, apples and bottles as in his lover's face, or the resurrection, or the destiny of man. Could Mantegna have devised his splendid compositions if he had painted arrangements of Chianti flasks and cheeses instead of Crucifixions, martyrs and triumphs of great men? Nobody but a fool could believe it. And could I have painted that portrait if I hadn't loved you, if you weren't killing me?

Ah, Bonomelli and illustrious Cinzano!

'Passionately I paint passion. I draw life out of life. And I wish them joy of their bottles and their Canadian apples and their muddy table napkins with the beastly folds in them that look like loops of tripe.' Once more Lypiatt disintegrated himself with laughter; then was silent.

Mrs Viveash nodded, slowly and reflectively. 'I think you're right,' she said. Yes, he was surely right; there must be life, life was the important thing. That was precisely why his paintings were so bad — she saw now; there was no life in them. Plenty of noise there was, and gesticulation and a violent galvanized twitching; but no life, only the theatrical show of it. There was a flaw in the conduit; somewhere between the man and his work life leaked out. He protested too much. But it was no good; there was no disguising the deadness. Her portrait was a dancing mummy. He bored her now. Did she even positively dislike him? Behind her unchanging pale eyes Mrs Viveash wondered. But in any case, she reflected, one needn't always like the people with whom one associates. There are music-halls as well as confidential boudoirs; some people are admitted to the tea-party and the tête-à-tête, others, on a stage invisible, poor things! to themselves, do their little song-and-dance, roll out their characteristic patter, and having provided you with your entertainment are dismissed with their due share of applause. But then, what if they become boring?

'Well,' said Lypiatt at last — he had stood there, motionless, for a long time, biting his nails, 'I suppose we'd better begin our sitting.' He picked up the unfinished portrait and adjusted it on the easel. 'I've wasted a lot of time,' he said, 'and there isn't, after all, so much of it to waste.' He spoke gloomily, and his whole person had become, all of a sudden, curiously shrunken and deflated. 'There isn't so much of it,' he repeated, and sighed. 'I still think of myself as a young man, young and promising, don't you know. Casimir Lypiatt — it's a young, promising sort of name, isn't it? But I'm not young, I've passed the age of promise. Every now and then I realize it, and it's painful, it's depressing.'

Mrs Viveash stepped up on to the model's dais and took her seat. 'Is that right?' she asked.

Lypiatt looked first at her, then at his picture. Her beauty, his passion — were they only to meet on the canvas? Opps was her lover. Time was passing; he felt tired. 'That'll do,' he said, and began painting. 'How young are you?' he asked after a moment.

'Twenty-five, I should imagine,' said Mrs Viveash.

‘Twenty-five? Good Lord, it’s nearly fifteen years since I was twenty-five. Fifteen years, fighting all the time. God, how I hate people sometimes! Everybody. It’s not their malignity I mind; I can give them back as good as they give me. It’s their power of silence and indifference, it’s their capacity for making themselves deaf. Here am I with something to say to them, something important and essential. And I’ve been saying it for more than fifteen years, I’ve been shouting it. They pay no attention. I bring them my head and heart on a charger, and they don’t even notice that the things are there. I sometimes wonder how much longer I can manage to go on.’ His voice had become very low, and it trembled. ‘One’s nearly forty, you know. ...’ The voice faded huskily away into silence. Languidly and as though the business exhausted him, he began mixing colours on his palette.

Mrs Viveash looked at him. No, he wasn’t young; at the moment, indeed, he seemed to have become much older than he really was. An old man was standing there, peaked and sharp and worn. He had failed, he was unhappy. But the world would have been unjust, less discriminating if it had given him success.

‘Some people believe in you,’ she said; there was nothing else for her to say.

Lypiatt looked up at her. ‘You?’ he asked.

Mrs Viveash nodded, deliberately. It was a lie. But was it possible to tell the truth? ‘And then there is the future,’ she reassured him, and her faint death-bed voice seemed to prophesy with a perfect certainty. ‘You’re not forty yet; you’ve got twenty, thirty years of work in front of you. And there were others, after all, who had to wait — a long time — sometimes till after they were dead. Great men; Blake, for instance. ...’ She felt positively ashamed; it was like a little talk by Doctor Frank Crane. But she felt still more ashamed when she saw that Casimir had begun to cry, and that the tears were rolling, one after another, slowly down his face.

He put down his palette, he stepped on to the dais, he came and knelt at Mrs Viveash’s feet. He took one of her hands between his own and he bent over it, pressing it to his forehead, as though it were a charm against unhappy thoughts, sometimes kissing it; soon it was wet with tears. He wept almost in silence.

‘It’s all right,’ Mrs Viveash kept repeating, ‘it’s all right,’ and she laid her free hand on his bowed head, she patted it comfortingly as one might pat the head of a large dog that comes and thrusts its muzzle between one’s knees. She felt, even as she made it, how meaningless and unintimate the gesture was. If she had liked him, she would have run her fingers through his hair; but somehow his hair rather disgusted her. ‘It’s all right, all right.’ But, of course, it wasn’t all right; and she was comforting him under false pretences and he was kneeling at the feet of somebody who simply wasn’t there — so utterly detached, so far away she was from all this scene and all his misery.

‘You’re the only person,’ he said at last, ‘who cares or understands.’

Mrs Viveash could almost have laughed.

He began once more to kiss her hand.

‘Beautiful and enchanting Myra — you were always that. But now you’re good and dear as well, now I know you’re kind.’

‘Poor Casimir!’ she said. Why was it that people always got involved in one’s life? If only one could manage things on the principle of the railways! Parallel tracks — that was the thing. For a few miles you’d be running at the same speed. There’d be delightful conversation out of the windows; you’d exchange the omelette in your restaurant car for the vol-au-vent in theirs. And when you’d said all there was to say, you’d put on a little more steam, wave your hand, blow a kiss and away you’d go, forging ahead along the smooth, polished rails. But instead of that, there were these dreadful accidents; the points were wrongly set, the trains came crashing together; or people jumped on as you were passing through the stations and made a nuisance of themselves and wouldn’t allow themselves to be turned off. Poor Casimir! But he irritated her, he was a horrible bore. She ought to have stopped seeing him.

‘You can’t wholly dislike me, then?’

‘But of course not, my poor Casimir!’

‘If you knew how horribly I loved you!’ He looked up at her despairingly.

‘But what’s the good?’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Have you ever known what it’s like to love some one so much that you feel you could die of it? So that it hurts all the time. As though there were a wound. Have you ever known that?’

Mrs Viveash smiled her agonizing smile, nodded slowly and said, ‘Perhaps. And one doesn’t die, you know. One doesn’t die.’

Lypiatt was leaning back, staring fixedly up at her. The tears were dry on his face, his cheeks were flushed. ‘Do you know what it is,’ he asked, ‘to love so much that you begin to long for the anodyne of physical pain to quench the pain in the soul? You don’t know that.’ And suddenly, with his clenched fist, he began to bang the wooden dais on which he was kneeling, blow after blow, with all his strength.

Mrs Viveash leant forward and tried to arrest his hand. ‘You’re mad, Casimir,’ she said. ‘You’re mad. Don’t do that.’ She spoke with anger.

Lypiatt laughed till his face was all broken up with the grimace, and proffered for her inspection his bleeding knuckles. The skin hung in little white tags and tatters, and from below the blood was slowly oozing up to the surface. ‘Look,’ he said, and laughed again. Then suddenly, with an extraordinary agility, he jumped to his feet, bounded from the dais and began once more to stride up and down the fairway between his easel and the door.

‘By God,’ he kept repeating, ‘by God, by God. I feel it in me. I can face the whole lot of you; the whole damned lot. Yes, and I shall get the better of you yet. An Artist’ — he called up that traditional ghost and it comforted him; he wrapped himself with a protective gesture within the ample folds of its bright mantle — ‘an Artist doesn’t fail under unhappiness. He gets new strength from it. The torture makes him sweat new masterpieces. ...’

He began to talk about his books, his poems and pictures; all the great things in his head, the things he had already done. He talked about his exhibition — ah, by God, that would astonish them, that would bowl them over, this time. The blood mounted



to his face; there was a flush over the high projecting cheek-bones. He could feel the warm blood behind his eyes. He laughed aloud; he was a laughing lion. He stretched out his arms; he was enormous, his arms reached out like the branches of a cedar. The Artist walked across the world and the mangy dogs ran yelping and snapping behind him. The great wind blew and blew, driving him on; it lifted him and he began to fly.

Mrs Viveash listened. It didn't look as though he would get much further with the portrait.

## Chapter VII

IT WAS PRESS Day. The critics had begun to arrive; Mr Albemarle circulated among them with a ducal amiability. The young assistant hovered vaguely about, straining to hear what the great men had to say and trying to pretend that he wasn't eavesdropping. Lypiatt's pictures hung on the walls, and Lypiatt's catalogue, thick with its preface and its explanatory notes, was in all hands.

'Very strong,' Mr Albemarle kept repeating, 'very strong indeed!' It was his password for the day.

Little Mr Clew, who represented the Daily Post, was inclined to be enthusiastic. 'How well he writes!' he said to Mr Albemarle, looking up from the catalogue. 'And how well he paints! What impasto!'

Impasto, impasto — the young assistant sidled off unobtrusively to the desk and made a note of it. He would look the word up in Grubb's Dictionary of Art and Artists later on. He made his way back, circuitously, and as though by accident, into Mr Clew's neighbourhood.

Mr Clew was one of those rare people who have a real passion for art. He loved painting, all painting, indiscriminately. In a picture-gallery he was like a Turk in a harem; he adored them all. He loved Memling as much as Raphael, he loved Grünewald and Michelangelo, Holman Hunt and Manet, Romney and Tintoretto; how happy he could be with all of them! Sometimes, it is true, he hated; but that was only when familiarity had not yet bred love. At the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition, for example, in 1911, he had taken a very firm stand. 'This is an obscene farce,' he had written then. Now, however, there was no more passionate admirer of Matisse's genius. As a connoisseur and kunstforscher, Mr Clew was much esteemed. People would bring him dirty old pictures to look at, and he would exclaim at once: Why, it's an El Greco, a Piazzetta, or some other suitable name. Asked how he knew, he would shrug his shoulders and say: But it's signed all over. His certainty and his enthusiasm were infectious. Since the coming of El Greco into fashion, he had discovered dozens of early works by that great artist. For Lord Petersfield's collection alone he had found four early El Grecos, all by pupils of Bassano. Lord Petersfield's confidence in Mr Clew was unbounded; not even that affair of the Primitives had shaken it. It was a sad affair: Lord Petersfield's Duccio

had shown signs of cracking; the estate carpenter was sent for to take a look at the panel; he had looked. 'A worse-seasoned piece of Illinois hickory,' he said, 'I've never seen.' After that he looked at the Simone Martini; for that, on the contrary, he was full of praise. Smooth-grained, well-seasoned — it wouldn't crack, no, not in a hundred years. 'A nicer slice of board never came out of America.' He had a hyperbolical way of speaking. Lord Petersfield was extremely angry; he dismissed the estate carpenter on the spot. After that he told Mr Clew that he wanted a Giorgione, and Mr Clew went out and found him one which was signed all over.

'I like this very much,' said Mr Clew, pointing to one of the thoughts with which Lypiatt had prefaced his catalogue. ' "Genius," ' he adjusted his spectacles and began to read aloud, ' "is life. Genius is a force of nature. In art, nothing else counts. The modern impotents, who are afraid of genius and who are envious of it, have invented in self-defence the notion of the Artist. The Artist with his sense of form, his style, his devotion to pure beauty, et cetera, et cetera. But Genius includes the Artist; every Genius has, among very many others, the qualities attributed by the impotents to the Artist. The Artist without genius is a carver of fountains through which no water flows." ' Very true,' said Mr Clew, 'very true indeed.' He marked the passage with his pencil.

Mr Albemarle produced the password. 'Very strongly put,' he said.

'I have always felt that myself,' said Mr Clew. 'El Greco, for example ...'

'Good morning. What about El Greco?' said a voice, all in one breath. The thin, long, skin-covered skeleton of Mr Mallard hung over them like a guilty conscience. Mr Mallard wrote every week in the *Hebdomadal Digest*. He had an immense knowledge of art, and a sincere dislike of all that was beautiful. The only modern painter whom he really admired was Hodler. All others were treated by him with a merciless savagery; he tore them to pieces in his weekly articles with all the holy gusto of a Calvinist iconoclast smashing images of the Virgin.

'What about El Greco?' he repeated. He had a peculiarly passionate loathing of El Greco.

Mr Clew smiled up at him propitiatingly; he was afraid of Mr Mallard. His enthusiasms were no match for Mr Mallard's erudite and logical disgusts. 'I was merely quoting him as an example,' he said.

'An example, I hope, of incompetent drawing, baroque composition, disgusting forms, garish colouring and hysterical subject-matter.' Mr Mallard showed his old ivory teeth in a menacing smile. 'Those are the only things which El Greco's work exemplifies.'

Mr Clew gave a nervous little laugh. 'What do you think of these?' he asked, pointing to Lypiatt's canvases.

'They look to me very ordinarily bad,' answered Mr Mallard.

The young assistant listened appalled. In a business like this, how was it possible to make good?

‘All the same,’ said Mr Clew courageously, ‘I like that bowl of roses in the window with the landscape behind. Number twenty-nine.’ He looked in the catalogue. ‘And there’s a really charming little verse about it:

“O beauty of the rose,  
Goodness as well as perfume exhaling!  
Who gazes on these flowers,  
On this blue hill and ripening field — he knows  
Where duty leads and that the nameless Powers  
In a rose can speak their will.”

Really charming!’ Mr Clew made another mark with his pencil.

‘But commonplace, commonplace.’ Mr Mallard shook his head. ‘And in any case a verse can’t justify a bad picture. What an unsubtle harmony of colour! And how uninteresting the composition is! That receding diagonal — it’s been worked to death.’ He too made a mark in his catalogue — a cross and a little circle, arranged like the skull and cross-bones on a pirate’s flag. Mr Mallard’s catalogues were always covered with these little marks: they were his symbols of condemnation.

Mr Albemarle, meanwhile, had moved away to greet the new arrivals. To the critic of the Daily Cinema he had to explain that there were no portraits of celebrities. The reporter from the Evening Planet had to be told which were the best pictures.

‘Mr Lypiatt,’ he dictated, ‘is a poet and philosopher as well as a painter. His catalogue is a — h’m — declaration of faith.’

The reporter took it down in shorthand. ‘And very nice too,’ he said. ‘I’m most grateful to you, sir, most grateful.’ And he hurried away, to get to the Cattle Show before the King should arrive. Mr Albemarle affably addressed himself to the critic of the Morning Globe.

‘I always regard this gallery,’ said a loud and cheerful voice, full of bulls and canaries in chorus, ‘as positively a mauvais lieu. Such exhibitions!’ And Mr Mercaptan shrugged his shoulders expressively. He halted to wait for his companion.

Mrs Viveash had lagged behind, reading the catalogue as she slowly walked along. ‘It’s a complete book,’ she said, ‘full of poems and essays and short stories even, so far as I can see.’

‘Oh, the usual cracker mottoes.’ Mr Mercaptan laughed. ‘I know the sort of thing. “Look after the past and the future will look after itself.” “God squared minus Man squared equals Art-plus-life times Art-minus-Life.” “The Higher the Art the fewer the morals” — only that’s too nearly good sense to have been invented by Lypiatt. But I know the sort of thing. I could go on like that for ever.’ Mr Mercaptan was delighted with himself.

‘I’ll read you one of them,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘ ”A picture is a chemical combination of plastic form and spiritual significance.” ’

‘Crikey!’ said Mr Mercaptan.

‘ ”Those who think that a picture is a matter of nothing but plastic form are like those who imagine that water is made of nothing but hydrogen.” ’

Mr Mercaptan made a grimace. 'What writing!' he exclaimed; 'le style c'est l'homme. Lypiatt hasn't got a style. Argal — inexorable conclusion — Lypiatt doesn't exist. My word, though. Look at those horrible great nudes there. Like Caraccis with cubical muscles.'

'Samson and Delilah,' said Mrs Viveash. 'Would you like me to read about them?'  
'Certainly not.'

Mrs Viveash did not press the matter. Casimir, she thought, must have been thinking of her when he wrote this little poem about Poets and Women, crossed genius, torments, the sweating of masterpieces. She sighed. 'Those leopards are rather nice,' she said, and looked at the catalogue again. ' "An animal is a symbol and its form is significant. In the long process of adaptation, evolution has refined and simplified and shaped, till every part of the animal expresses one desire, a single idea. Man, who has become what he is, not by specialization, but by generalization, symbolizes with his body no one thing. He is a symbol of everything from the most hideous and ferocious bestiality to godhead." '

'Dear me,' said Mr Mercaptan.

A canvas of mountains and enormous clouds like nascent sculptures presented itself.

' "Aerial Alps" ' Mrs Viveash began to read.

' "Aerial Alps of amber and of snow,

Junonian flesh, and bosomy alabaster

Carved by the wind's uncertain hands ..." '

Mr Mercaptan stopped his ears. 'Please, please,' he begged.

'Number seventeen,' said Mrs Viveash, 'is called "Woman on a Cosmic Background." ' A female figure stood leaning against a pillar on a hilltop, and beyond was a blue night with stars. 'Underneath is written: "For one at least, she is more than the starry universe." ' Mrs Viveash remembered that Lypiatt had once said very much that sort of thing to her. 'So many of Casimir's things remind me,' she said, 'of those Italian vermouth advertisements. You know — Cinzano, Bonomelli and all those. I wish they didn't. This woman in white with her head in the Great Bear. ...' She shook her head. 'Poor Casimir.'

Mr Mercaptan roared and squealed with laughter. Bonomelli,' he said; 'that's precisely it. What a critic, Myra! I take off my hat.' They moved on. 'And what's this grand transformation scene?' he asked.

Mrs Viveash looked at the catalogue. 'It's called "The Sermon on the Mount",' she said. 'And really, do you know, I rather like it. All that crowd of figures slanting up the hill and the single figure on the top — it seems to me very dramatic.'

'My dear,' protested Mr Mercaptan.

'And in spite of everything,' said Mrs Viveash, feeling suddenly and uncomfortably that she had somehow been betraying the man, 'he's really very nice, you know. Very nice indeed.' Her expiring voice sounded very decidedly.

‘Ah, ces femmes,’ exclaimed Mr Mercaptan, ‘ces femmes! They’re all Pasiphaes and Ledas. They all in their hearts prefer beasts to men, savages to civilized beings. Even you, Myra, I really believe.’ He shook his head.

Mrs Viveash ignored the outburst. ‘Very nice,’ she repeated thoughtfully. ‘Only rather a bore ...’ Her voice expired altogether.

They continued their round of the gallery.

## Chapter VIII

CRITICALLY, IN THE glasses of Mr Bojanus’s fitting-room, Gumbril examined his profile, his back view. Inflated, the Patent Small-Clothes bulged, bulged decidedly, though with a certain gracious opulence that might, in a person of the other sex, have seemed only deliciously natural. In him, however, Gumbril had to admit, the opulence seemed a little misplaced and paradoxical. Still, if one has to suffer in order to be beautiful, one must also expect to be ugly in order not to suffer. Practically, the trousers were a tremendous success. He sat down heavily on the hard wooden bench of the fitting-room and was received as though on a lap of bounding resiliency; the Patent Small-Clothes, there was no doubt, would be proof even against marble. And the coat, he comforted himself, would mask with its skirts the too decided bulge. Or if it didn’t, well, there was no help for it. One must resign oneself to bulging, that was all.

‘Very nice,’ he declared at last.

Mr Bojanus, who had been watching his client in silence and with a polite but also, Gumbril could not help feeling, a somewhat ironical smile, coughed. ‘It depends,’ he said, ‘precisely what you mean by “nice”.’ He cocked his head on one side, and the fine waxed end of his moustache was like a pointer aimed up at some remote star.

Gumbril said nothing, but catching sight once more of his own side view, nodded a dubious agreement.

‘If by nice,’ continued Mr Bojanus, ‘you mean comfortable, well and good. If, however, you mean elegant, then, Mr Gumbril, I fear I must disagree.’

‘But elegance,’ said Gumbril, feebly playing the philosopher, ‘is only relative, Mr Bojanus. There are certain African negroes among whom it is considered elegant to pierce the lips and distend them with wooden plates, until the mouth looks like a pelican’s beak.’

Mr Bojanus placed his hand in his bosom and slightly bowed. ‘Very possibly, Mr Gumbril,’ he replied. ‘But if you’ll pardon my saying so, we are not African negroes.’

Gumbril was crushed, deservedly. He looked at himself again in the mirrors. ‘Do you object,’ he asked after a pause, ‘to all eccentricities in dress, Mr Bojanus? Would you put us all into your elegant uniform?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Mr Bojanus. ‘There are certain walks of life in which eccentricity in appearance is positively a *sine qua non*, Mr Gumbril, and I might almost say *de rigueur*.’

‘And which walks of life, Mr Bojanus, may I ask? You refer, perhaps, to the artistic walks? Sombreros and Byronic collars and possibly velveteen trousers? Though all that sort of thing is surely a little out of date, nowadays.’

Enigmatically Mr Bojanus smiled, a playful Sphinx. He thrust his right hand deeper into his bosom and with his left twisted to a finer needle the point of his moustache. ‘Not artists, Mr Gumbril.’ He shook his head. ‘In practice they may show themselves a little eccentric and negleejay. But they have no need to look unusual on principle. It’s only the politicians who need do it on principle. It’s only *de rigueur*, as one might say, in the political walks, Mr Gumbril.’

‘You surprise me,’ said Gumbril. ‘I should have thought that it was to the politician’s interest to look respectable and normal.’

‘But it is still more to his interest as a leader of men to look distinguished,’ Mr Bojanus replied. ‘Well, not precisely distinguished,’ he corrected himself, ‘because that implies that politicians look distangay, which I regret to say, Mr Gumbril, they very often don’t. Distinguishable, is more what I mean.’

‘Eccentricity is their badge of office?’ suggested Gumbril. He sat down luxuriously on the Patent Small-Clothes.

‘That’s more like it,’ said Mr Bojanus, tilting his moustaches. ‘The leader has got to look different from the other ones. In the good old days they always wore their official badges. The leader ‘ad his livery, like every one else, to show who he was. That was sensible, Mr Gumbril. Nowadays he has no badge — at least not for ordinary occasions-for I don’t count Privy Councillors’ uniforms and all that sort of once-a-year fancy dress. ‘E’s reduced to dressing in some eccentric way or making the most of the peculiarities of ‘is personal appearance. A very ‘apazard method of doing things, Mr Gumbril, very ‘apazard.’

Gumbril agreed.

Mr Bojanus went on, making small, neat gestures as he spoke. ‘Some of them,’ he said, ‘wear ‘uge collars, like Mr Gladstone. Some wear orchids and eyeglasses, like Joe Chamberlain. Some let their ‘air grow, like Lloyd George. Some wear curious ‘ats, like Winston Churchill. Some put on black shirts, like this Mussolini, and some put on red ones, like Garibaldi. Some turn up their moustaches, like the German Emperor. Some turn them down, like Clemenceau. Some grow whiskers, like Tirpitz. I don’t speak of all the uniforms, orders, ornaments, ‘ead-dresses, feathers, crowns, buttons, tattooings, ear-rings, sashes, swords, trains, tiaras, urims, thummims and what not, Mr Gumbril, that ‘ave been used in the past and in other parts of the world to distinguish the leader. We, ‘oo know our ‘istory, Mr Gumbril, we know all about that.’

Gumbril made a deprecating gesture. ‘You speak for yourself, Mr Bojanus,’ he said.

Mr Bojanus bowed.

‘Pray continue,’ said Gumbril.

Mr Bojanus bowed again. 'Well, Mr Gumbril,' he said, 'the point of all these things, as I've already remarked, is to make the leader look different, so that 'e can be recognized at the first coop d'oil, as you might say, by the 'erd 'e 'appens to be leading. For the 'uman 'erd, Mr Gumbril, is an 'erd which can't do without a leader. Sheep, for example: I never noticed that they 'ad a leader; nor rooks. Bees, on the other 'and, I take it, 'ave. At least when they're swarming. Correct me, Mr Gumbril, if I'm wrong. Natural 'istory was never, as you might say, my forty.'

'Nor mine,' protested Gumbril.

'As for elephants and wolves, Mr Gumbril, I can't pretend to speak of them with first-'and knowledge. Nor llamas, nor locusts, nor squab pigeons, nor lemmings. But 'uman beings, Mr Gumbril, those I can claim to talk of with authority, if I may say so in all modesty, and not as the scribes. I 'ave made a special study of them, Mr Gumbril. And my profession 'as brought me into contact with very numerous specimens.'

Gumbril could not help wondering where precisely in Mr Bojanus's museum he himself had his place.

'The 'uman 'erd,' Mr Bojanus went on, 'must have a leader. And a leader must have something to distinguish him from the 'erd. It's important for 'is interests that he should be recognized easily. See a baby reaching out of a bath and you immediately think of Pears' Soap; see the white 'air waving out behind, and you think of Lloyd George. That's the secret. But in my opinion, Mr Gumbril, the old system was much more sensible, give them regular uniforms and badges, I say; make Cabinet Ministers wear feathers in their 'air. Then the people will be looking to a real fixed symbol of leadership, not to the peculiarities of the mere individuals. Beards and 'air and funny collars change; but a good uniform is always the same. Give them feathers, that's what I say, Mr Gumbril. Feathers will increase the dignity of the State and lessen the importance of the individual. And that,' concluded Mr Bojanus with emphasis, 'that, Mr Gumbril, will be all to the good.'

'But you don't mean to tell me,' said Gumbril, 'that if I chose to show myself to the multitude in my inflated trousers, I could become a leader — do you?'

'Ah, no,' said Mr Bojanus. 'You'd 'ave to 'ave the talent for talking and ordering people about, to begin with. Feathers wouldn't give the genius, but they'd magnify the effect of what there was.'

Gumbril got up and began to divest himself of the Small-Clothes. He unscrewed the valve and the air whistled out, dyingly. He too sighed. 'Curious,' he said pensively, 'that I've never felt the need for a leader. I've never met any one I felt I could wholeheartedly admire or believe in, never any one I wanted to follow. It must be pleasant, I should think, to hand oneself over to somebody else. It must give you a warm, splendid, comfortable feeling.'

Mr Bojanus smiled and shook his head. 'You and I, Mr Gumbril,' he said, 'we're not the sort of people to be impressed with feathers or even by talking and ordering about. We may not be leaders ourselves. But at any rate we aren't the 'erd.'

'Not the main herd, perhaps.'

‘Not any ‘erd,’ Mr Bojanus insisted proudly.

Gumbril shook his head dubiously and buttoned up his trousers. He was not sure, now he came to think of it, that he didn’t belong to all the herds — by a sort of honorary membership and temporarily, as occasion offered, as one belongs to the Union at the sister university or to the Naval and Military Club while one’s own is having its annual clean-out. Shearwater’s herd, Lypiatt’s herd, Mr Mercaptan’s herd, Mrs Viveash’s herd, the architectural herd of his father, the educational herd (but that, thank God! was now bleating on distant pastures), the herd of Mr Bojanus — he belonged to them all a little, to none of them completely. Nobody belonged to his herd. How could they? No chameleon can live with comfort on a tartan. He put on his coat.

‘I’ll send the garments this evening,’ said Mr Bojanus.

Gumbril left the shop. At the theatrical wig-maker’s in Leicester Square he ordered a blond fan-shaped beard to match his own hair and moustache. He would, at any rate, be his own leader; he would wear a badge, a symbol of authority. And Coleman had said that there were dangerous relations to be entered into by the symbol’s aid.

Ah, now he was provisionally a member of Coleman’s herd. It was all very depressing.

## Chapter IX

FAN-SHAPED, BLOND, MOUNTED on gauze and guaranteed undetectable, it arrived from the wig-maker, preciously packed in a stout cardboard box six times too large for it and accompanied by a quarter of a pint of the choicest spirit gum. In the privacy of his bedroom Gumbril uncoffined it, held it out for his own admiration, caressed its silkiness, and finally tried it on, holding it provisionally to his chin, in front of the looking-glass. The effect, he decided immediately, was stunning, was grandiose. From melancholy and all too mild he saw himself transformed on the instant into a sort of jovial Henry the Eighth, into a massive Rabelaisian man, broad and powerful and exuberant with vitality and hair.

The proportions of his face were startlingly altered. The podium, below the mouth, had been insufficiently massive to carry the stately order of the nose; and the ratiocinative attic of the forehead, noble enough, no doubt, in itself, had been disproportionately high. The beard now supplied the deficiencies in the stylobate, and planted now on a firm basement of will, the order of the senses, the aerial attic of ideas, reared themselves with a more classical harmoniousness of proportion. It only remained for him to order from Mr Bojanus an American coat, padded out at the shoulders as squarely and heroically as a doublet of the Cinquecento, and he would look the complete Rabelaisian man. Great eater, deep drinker, stout fighter, prodigious lover; clear thinker, creator of beauty, seeker of truth and prophet of heroic grandeurs. Fitted out with coat and beard, he could qualify for the next vacancy among the cœnobites of Thelema.



He removed his beard— ‘put his beaver up,’ as they used to say in the fine old days of chivalry; he would have to remember that little joke for Coleman’s benefit. He put his beaver up — ha, ha! — and stared ruefully at the far from Rabelaisian figure which now confronted him. The moustache — that was genuine enough — which had looked, in conjunction with the splendid work of art below, so fierce and manly, served by itself, he now perceived, only droopily to emphasize his native mildness and melancholy.

It was a dismal affair, which might have belonged to Maurice Barrès in youth; a slanting, flagging, sagging thing, such as could only grow on the lip of an assiduous Cultivator of the Me, and would become, as one grew older, ludicrously out of place on the visage of a roaring Nationalist. If it weren’t that it fitted in so splendidly with the beard, if it weren’t that it became so marvellously different in the new context he had now discovered for it, he would have shaved it off then and there.

Mournful appendage. But now he would transform it, he would add to it its better half. Zadig’s quatrain to his mistress, when the tablet on which it was written was broken in two, became a treasonable libel on the king. So this moustache, thought Gumbril, as gingerly he applied the spirit gum to his cheeks and chin, this moustache which by itself serves only to betray me, becomes, as soon as it is joined to its missing context, an amorous arm for the conquest of the fair sex.

A little far-fetched, he decided; a little ponderous. And besides, as so few people had read Zadig, not much use in conversation. Cautiously and with neat, meticulous finger-tips he adjusted the transformation to his gummed face, pressed it firmly, held it while it stuck fast. The portals of Thelema opened before him; he was free of those rich orchards, those halls and courts, those broad staircases winding in noble spirals within the flanks of each of the fair round towers. And it was Coleman who had pointed out the way; he felt duly grateful. One last look at the Complete Man, one final and definitive constataion that the Mild and Melancholy one was, for the time at least, no more; and he was ready in all confidence to set out. He selected a loose, light great-coat — not that he needed a coat at all, for the day was bright and warm; but until Mr Bojanus had done his labour of padding he would have to broaden himself out in this way, even if it did mean that he might be uncomfortably hot. To fall short of Complete Manhood for fear of a little inconvenience would be absurd. He slipped, therefore, into his light coat — a toga, Mr Bojanus called it, a very neat toga in real West Country whipcord. He put on his broadest and blackest felt hat, for breadth above everything was what he needed to give him completeness — breadth of stature, breadth of mind, breadth of human sympathy, breadth of smile, breadth of humour, breadth of everything. The final touch was a massive and antique Malacca cane belonging to his father. If he had possessed a bulldog, he would have taken it out on a leash. But he did not. He issued into the sunshine, unaccompanied.

But unaccompanied he did not mean to remain for long. These warm, bright May days were wonderful days for being in love on. And to be alone on such days was like a malady. It was a malady from which the Mild and Melancholy Man suffered all too frequently. And yet there were millions of superfluous women in the country; millions

of them. Every day, in the streets, one saw thousands of them passing; and some were exquisite, were ravishing, the only possible soul-mates. Thousands of unique soul-mates every day. The Mild and Melancholy one allowed them to pass — for ever. But to-day — to-day he was the complete and Rabelaisian man; he was bearded to the teeth; the imbecile game was at its height; there would be opportunities, and the Complete Man could know how to take them. No, he would not be unaccompanied for long.

Outside in the square the fourteen plane-trees glowed in their young, unsullied green. At the end of every street the golden muslin of the haze hung in an unwrinkled curtain that thinned away above the sky's gauzy horizon to transparent nothing against the intenser blue. The dim, conch-like murmur that in a city is silence seemed hazily to identify itself with the golden mistiness of summer, and against this dim, wide background the yells of the playing children detached themselves, distinct and piercing. 'Beaver,' they shouted, 'beaver!' and, 'Is it cold up there?' Full of playful menace, the Complete Man shook at them his borrowed Malacca. He accepted their prompt hail as the most favourable of omens.

At the first tobacconist's Gumbril bought the longest cigar he could find, and trailing behind him expiring blue wreaths of Cuban smoke, he made his way slowly and with an ample swagger towards the park. It was there, under the elms, on the shores of the ornamental waters, that he expected to find his opportunity, that he intended — how confidently behind his Gargantuan mask! — to take it.

The opportunity offered itself sooner than he expected.

He had just turned into the Queen's Road and was sauntering past Whiteley's with the air of one who knows that he has a right to a good place, to two or three good places even, in the sun, when he noticed just in front of him, peering intently at the New Season's Models, a young woman whom in his mild and melancholy days he would have only hopelessly admired, but who now, to the Complete Man, seemed a destined and accessible prey. She was fairly tall, but seemed taller than she actually was, by reason of her remarkable slenderness. Not that she looked disagreeably thin, far from it. It was a rounded slenderness. The Complete Man decided to consider her as tubular — flexible and tubular, like a section of boa constrictor, should one say? She was dressed in clothes that emphasized this serpentine slimness: in a close-fitting grey jacket that buttoned up to the neck and a long, narrow grey skirt that came down to her ankles. On her head was a small, sleek black hat, that looked almost as though it were made of metal. It was trimmed on one side with a bunch of dull golden foliage.

Those golden leaves were the only touch of ornament in all the severe smoothness and unbroken tubularity of her person. As for her face, that was neither strictly beautiful nor strictly ugly, but combined elements of both beauty and ugliness into a whole that was unexpected, that was oddly and somehow unnaturally attractive.

Pretending, he too, to take an interest in the New Season's Models, Gumbril made, squinting sideways over the burning tip of his cigar, an inventory of her features. The forehead, that was mostly hidden by her hat; it might be pensively and serenely high, it might be of that degree of lowness which in men is villainous, but in women is only

another — a rather rustic one perhaps, rather canaille even, but definitely another — attraction. There was no telling. As for her eyes, they were green, and limpid; set wide apart in her head, they looked out from under heavy lids and through openings that slanted up towards the outer corners. Her nose was slightly aquiline. Her mouth was full-lipped, but straight and unexpectedly wide. Her chin was small, round and firm. She had a pale skin, a little flushed over the cheek-bones, which were prominent.

On the left cheek, close under the corner of the slanting eye, she had a brown mole. Such hair as Gumbril could see beneath her hat was pale and inconspicuously blond. When she had finished looking at the New Season's Models she moved slowly on, halting for a moment before the travelling-trunks and the fitted picnic-baskets; dwelling for a full minute over the corsets, passing the hats, for some reason, rather contemptuously, but pausing, which seemed strange, for a long pensive look at the cigars and wine. As for the tennis rackets and cricket bats, the school outfits and the gentleman's hosiery — she hadn't so much as a look for one of them. But how lovingly she lingered before the boots and shoes! Her own feet, the Complete Man noticed with satisfaction, had an elegance of florid curves. And while other folk walked on neat's leather she was content to be shod with nothing coarser than mottled serpent's skin.

Slowly they drifted up Queen's Road, lingering before every jeweller's, every antiquarian's, every milliner's on the way. The stranger gave him no opportunity, and indeed, Gumbril reflected, how should she? For the imbecile game on which he was relying is a travelling piquet for two players, not a game of patience. No sane human being could play it in solitude. He would have to make the opportunity himself.

All that was mild in him, all that was melancholy, shrank with a sickened reluctance from the task of breaking — with what consequences delicious and perilous in the future or, in the case of the deserved snub, immediately humiliating? — a silence which, by the tenth or twelfth shop window, had become quite unbearably significant. The Mild and Melancholy one would have drifted to the top of the road, sharing, with that community of tastes which is the basis of every happy union, her enthusiasm for brass candlesticks and toasting-forks, imitation Chippendale furniture, gold watch-bracelets and low-waisted summer frocks; would have drifted to the top of the road and watched her, dumbly, disappearing for ever into the green park or along the blank pavements of the Bayswater Road; would have watched her for ever disappear and then, if the pubs had happened to be open, would have gone and ordered a glass of port, and sitting at the bar would have savoured, still dumbly, among the other drinkers, the muddy grapes of the Douro, and his own unique loneliness.

That was what the Mild and Melancholy one would have done. But the sight, as he gazed earnestly into an antiquary's window, of his own powerful bearded face reflected in a sham Heppelwhite mirror, reminded him that the Mild and Melancholy one was temporarily extinct, and that it was the Complete Man who now dawdled, smoking his long cigar, up the Queen's Road towards the Abbey of Thelema.

He squared his shoulders; in that loose toga of Mr Bojanus's he looked as copious as François Premier. The time, he decided, had come.

It was at this moment that the reflection of the stranger's face joined itself in the little mirror, as she made a little movement away from the Old Welsh dresser in the corner, to that of his own. She looked at the spurious Heppelwhite. Their eyes met in the hospitable glass. Gumbril smiled. The corners of the stranger's wide mouth seemed faintly to move; like petals of the magnolia, her eyelids came slowly down over her slanting eyes. Gumbril turned from the reflection to the reality.

'If you want to say Beaver,' he said, 'you may.'

The Complete Man had made his first speech.

'I want to say nothing,' said the stranger. She spoke with a charming precision and distinctness, lingering with a pretty emphasis on the n of nothing. 'N — n — nothing' — it sounded rather final. She turned away, she moved on.

But the Complete Man was not one to be put off by a mere ultimatum. 'There,' he said, falling into step with her, 'now I've had it — the deserved snub. Honour is saved, prestige duly upheld. Now we can get on with our conversation.'

The Mild and Melancholy one stood by, gasping with astonished admiration.

'You are v — very impertinent,' said the stranger, smiling and looking up from under the magnolia petals.

'It is in my character,' said the Complete Man. 'You mustn't blame me. One cannot escape from one's heredity; that's one's share of original sin.'

'There is always grace,' said the stranger.

Gumbril caressed his beard. 'True,' he replied.

'I advise you to pr — ray for it.'

His prayer, the Mild and Melancholy one reflected, had already been answered. The original sin in him had been self-corrected.

'Here is another antique shop,' said Gumbril. 'Shall we stop and have a look at it?'

The stranger glanced at him doubtfully. But he looked quite serious. They stopped.

'How revolting this sham cottage furniture is,' Gumbril remarked. The shop, he noticed, was called 'Ye Olde Farme House.'

The stranger, who had been on the point of saying how much she liked those lovely Old Welsh dressers, gave him her heartiest agreement. 'So v — vulgar.'

'So horribly refined. So refined and artistic.'

She laughed on a descending chromatic scale. This was excitingly new. Poor Aunt Aggie with her Arts and Crafts, and her old English furniture. And to think she had taken them so seriously! She saw in a flash the fastidious lady that she now was — with Louis whatever-it-was furniture at home, and jewels, and young poets to tea, and real artists. In the past, when she had imagined herself entertaining real artists, it had always been among really artistic furniture. Aunt Aggie's furniture. But now — no, oh no. This man was probably an artist. His beard; and that big black hat. But not poor; very well dressed.

'Yes, it's funny to think that there are people who call that sort of thing artistic. One's quite s — sorry for them,' she added, with a little hiss.

'You have a kind heart,' said Gumbril. 'I'm glad to see that.'

‘Not v — very kind, I’m af — fraid.’ She looked at him sideways, and significantly as the fastidious lady would have looked at one of the poets.

‘Well, kind enough, I hope,’ said the Complete Man. He was delighted with his new acquaintance.

Together they disembogued into the Bayswater Road. It was here, Gumbril reflected, that the Mild and Melancholy one would dumbly have slunk away to his glass of port and his loneliness among the alien toppers at the bar. But the Complete Man took his new friend by the elbow, and steered her into the traffic. Together they crossed the road, together entered the park.

‘I still think you are v — very impertinent,’ said the lady. ‘What induced you to follow me?’

With a single comprehensive gesture, Gumbril indicated the sun, the sky, the green trees airily glittering, the grass, the emerald lights and violet shadows of the rustic distance. ‘On a day like this,’ he said, ‘how could I help it?’

‘Original sin?’

‘Oh,’ the Complete Man modestly shook his head, ‘I lay no claim to originality in this.’

The stranger laughed. This was nearly as good as a young poet at the tea-table. She was very glad that she’d decided, after all, to put on her best suit this afternoon, even if it was a little stuffy for the warmth of the day. He, too, she noticed, was wearing a great-coat; which seemed rather odd.

‘Is it original,’ he went on, ‘to go and tumble stupidly like an elephant into a pitfall, head over ears, at first sight ...?’

She looked at him sideways, then closed down the magnolia petals, and smiled. This was going to be the real thing — one of those long, those interminable, or, at any rate, indefinitely renewable conversations about love; witty, subtle, penetrating and bold, like the conversations in books, like the conversations across the tea-table between brilliant young poets and ladies of quality, grown fastidious through an excessive experience, fastidious and a little weary, but still, in their subtle way, insatiably curious.

‘Suppose we sit down,’ suggested Gumbril, and he pointed to a couple of green iron chairs, standing isolated in the middle of the grass close together and with their fronts slanting inwards a little towards one another in a position that suggested a confidential intimacy. At the prospect of the conversation that, inevitably, was about to unroll itself, he felt decidedly less elated than did his new friend. If there was anything he disliked it was conversations about love. It bored him, oh, it bored him most horribly, this minute analysis of the passion that young women always seemed to expect one, at some point or other in one’s relation with them, to make. How love alters the character for both good and bad; how physical passion need not be incompatible with the spiritual; how a hateful and tyrannous possessiveness can be allied in love with the most unselfish solicitude for the other party — oh, he knew all this and much more, so well, so well. And whether one can be in love with more than one person at a time, whether love

can exist without jealousy, whether pity, affection, desire can in any way replace the full and genuine passion — how often he had had to thrash out these dreary questions!

And all the philosophic speculations were equally familiar, all the physiological and anthropological and psychological facts. In the theory of the subject he had ceased to take any interest. Unhappily, a discussion of the theory always seemed to be an essential preliminary to the practice of it. He sighed a little wearily as he took his seat on the green iron chair. But then, recollecting that he was now the Complete Man, and that the Complete Man must do everything with a flourish and a high hand, he leaned forward and, smiling with a charming insolence through his beard, began:

‘Tiresias, you may remember, was granted the singular privilege of living both as a man and a woman.’

Ah, this was the genuine young poet. Supporting an elbow on the back of her chair and leaning her cheek against her hand, she disposed herself to listen and, where necessary, brilliantly to interpellate; it was through half-closed eyes that she looked at him, and she smiled faintly in a manner which she knew, from experience, to be enigmatic, and though a shade haughty, though a tiny bit mocking and ironical, exceedingly attractive.

An hour and a half later they were driving towards an address in Bloxam Gardens, Maida Vale. The name seemed vaguely familiar to Gumbril. Bloxam Gardens — perhaps one of his aunts had lived there once?

‘It’s a dr — dreadful little maisonnette,’ she explained. ‘Full of awful things. We had to take it furnished. It’s so impossible to find anything now.’

Gumbril leaned back in his corner, wondering, as he studied that averted profile, who or what this young woman could be. She seemed to be in the obvious movement, to like the sort of things one would expect people to like; she seemed to be as highly civilized, in Mr Mercaptan’s rather technical sense of the term, as free of all prejudices as the great exponent of civilization himself.

She seemed, from her coolly dropped hints, to possess all the dangerous experience, all the assurance and easy ruthlessness of a great lady whose whole life is occupied in the interminable affairs of the heart, the senses and the head. But, by a strange contradiction, she seemed to find her life narrow and uninteresting. She had complained in so many words that her husband misunderstood and neglected her, had complained, by implication, that she knew very few interesting people.

The maisonnette in Bloxam Gardens was certainly not very splendid — six rooms on the second and third floors of a peeling stucco house. And the furniture — decidedly Hire Purchase. And the curtains and cretonnes — brightly ‘modern’, positively ‘futurist’.

‘What one has to put up with in furnished flats!’ The lady made a grimace as she ushered him into the sitting-room. And while she spoke the words, she really managed to persuade herself that the furniture wasn’t theirs, that they had found all this sordid stuff cluttering up the rooms, not chosen it, oh and with pains! themselves, not doggedly paid for it, month by month.

‘Our own things,’ she murmured vaguely, ‘are stored. In the Riviera.’ It was there, under the palms, among the gaudy melon flowers and the croupiers that the fastidious lady had last held her salon of young poets. In the Riviera — that would explain, now she came to think of it, a lot of things, if explanation ever became necessary.

The Complete Man nodded sympathetically. ‘Other people’s tastes,’ he held up his hands, they both laughed. ‘But why do we think of other people?’ he added. And coming forward with a conquering impulsiveness, he took both her long, fine hands in his and raised them to his bearded mouth.

She looked at him for a second, then dropped her eyelids, took back her hands. ‘I must go and make the tea,’ she said. ‘The servants’ — the plural was a pardonable exaggeration— ‘are out.’

Gallantly, the Complete Man offered to come and help her. These scenes of intimate life had a charm all their own. But she would not allow it. ‘No, no,’ she was very firm, ‘I simply forbid you. You must stay here. I won’t be a moment,’ and she was gone, closing the door carefully behind her.

Left to himself, Gumbril sat down and filed his nails.

As for the young lady, she hurried along to her dingy little kitchen, lit the gas, put the kettle on, set out the teapot and the cups on a tray, and from the biscuit-box, where it was stored, took out the remains of a chocolate cake, which had already seen service at the day-before-yesterday’s tea-party. When all was ready here, she tip-toed across to her bedroom and sitting down at her dressing-table, began with hands that trembled a little with excitement to powder her nose and heighten the colour of her cheeks. Even after the last touch had been given, she still sat there, looking at her image in the glass.

The lady and the poet, she was thinking, the grande dame and the brilliant young man of genius. She liked young men with beards. But he was not an artist, in spite of the beard, in spite of the hat. He was a writer of sorts. So she gathered; but he was reticent, he was delightfully mysterious. She too, for that matter. The great lady slips out, masked, into the street; touches the young man’s sleeve: Come with me. She chooses, does not let herself passively be chosen. The young poet falls at her feet; she lifts him up. One is accustomed to this sort of thing.

She opened her jewel-box, took out all her rings — there were not many of them, alas! — and put them on. Two or three of them, on second thoughts, she took off again; they were a little, she suspected with a sudden qualm, in other people’s taste.

He was very clever, very artistic — only that seemed to be the wrong word to use; he seemed to know all the new things, all the interesting people. Perhaps he would introduce her to some of them. And he was so much at ease behind his knowledge, so well assured. But for her part, she felt pretty certain, she had made no stupid mistakes. She too had been, had looked at any rate — which was the important thing — very much at ease.

She liked young men with beards. They looked so Russian. Catherine of Russia had been one of the great ladies with caprices. Masked in the streets. Young poet, come

with me. Or even, Young butcher's boy. But that, no, that was going too far, too low. Still, life, life — it was there to be lived — life — to be enjoyed. And now, and now? She was still wondering what would happen next, when the kettle, which was one of those funny ones which whistle when they come to the boil, began, fitfully at first, then, under full steam, unflaggingly, to sound its mournful, other-worldly note. She sighed and bestirred herself to attend to it.

'Let me help you.' Gumbriel jumped up as she came into the room. 'What can I do?' He hovered rather ineptly round her.

The lady put down her tray on the little table. 'N — nothing,' she said.

'N — nothing?' he imitated her with a playful mockery. 'Am I good for n — nothing at all?' He took one of her hands and kissed it.

'Nothing that's of the l — least importance.' She sat down and began to pour out the tea.

The Complete Man also sat down. 'So to adore at first sight,' he asked, 'is not of the l — least importance?'

She shook her head, smiled, raised and lowered her eyelids. One was so well accustomed to this sort of thing; it had no importance. 'Sugar?' she asked. The young poet was safely there, sparkling across the tea-table. He offered love and she, with the easy heartlessness of one who is so well accustomed to this sort of thing, offered him sugar.

He nodded. 'Please. But if it's of no importance to you,' he went on, 'then I'll go away at once.'

The lady laughed her section of a descending chromatic scale. 'Oh, no, you won't,' she said. 'You can't.' And she felt that the grande dame had made a very fine stroke.

'Quite right,' the Complete Man replied; 'I couldn't.' He stirred his tea. 'But who are you,' he looked up at her suddenly, 'you devilish female?' He was genuinely anxious to know; and besides, he was paying her a very pretty compliment. 'What do you do with your dangerous existence?'

'I enjoy life,' she said. 'I think one ought to enjoy life. Don't you? I think it's one's first duty.' She became quite grave. 'One ought to enjoy every moment of it,' she said. 'Oh, passionately, adventurously, newly, excitingly, uniquely.'

The Complete Man laughed. 'A conscientious hedonist. I see.'

She felt uncomfortably that the fastidious lady had not quite lived up to her character. She had spoken more like a young woman who finds life too dull and daily, and would like to get on to the cinema. 'I am very conscientious,' she said, making significant play with the magnolia petals and smiling her riddling smile. She must retrieve the Great Catherine's reputation.

'I could see that from the first,' mocked the Complete Man with a triumphant insolence. 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all.'

The fastidious lady only contemptuously smiled. 'Have a little chocolate cake,' she suggested. Her heart was beating. She wondered, she wondered.

There was a long silence. Gumbriel finished his chocolate cake, gloomily drank his tea and did not speak. He found, all at once, that he had nothing to say. His jovial



confidence seemed, for the moment, to have deserted him. He was only the Mild and Melancholy one foolishly disguised as a Complete Man; a sheep in beaver's clothing. He entrenched himself behind his formidable silence and waited; waited, at first, sitting in his chair, then, when this total inactivity became unbearable, striding about the room.

She looked at him, for all her air of serene composure, with a certain disquiet. What on earth was he up to now? What could he be thinking about? Frowning like that, he looked like a young Jupiter, bearded and burly (though not, she noticed, quite so burly as he had appeared in his overcoat), making ready to throw a thunderbolt. Perhaps he was thinking of her — suspecting her, seeing through the fastidious lady and feeling angry at her attempted deception. Or perhaps he was bored with her, perhaps he was wanting to go away. Well, let him go; she didn't mind. Or perhaps he was just made like that — a moody young poet; that seemed, on the whole, the most likely explanation; it was also the most pleasing and romantic. She waited. They both waited.

Gumbril looked at her and was put to shame by the spectacle of her quiet serenity. He must do something, he told himself; he must recover the Complete Man's lost morale. Desperately he came to a halt in front of the one decent picture hanging on the walls. It was an eighteenth-century engraving of Raphael's 'Transfiguration' — better, he always thought, in black and white than in its bleakly-coloured original.

'That's a nice engraving,' he said. 'Very nice.' The mere fact of having uttered at all was a great comfort to him, a real relief.

'Yes,' she said. 'That belongs to me. I found it in a second-hand shop, not far from here.'

'Photography,' he pronounced, with that temporary earnestness which made him seem an enthusiast about everything, 'is a mixed blessing. It has made it possible to reproduce pictures so easily and cheaply, that all the bad artists who were well occupied in the past, making engravings of good men's paintings, are now free to do bad original work of their own.' All this was terribly impersonal, he told himself, terribly off the point. He was losing ground. He must do something drastic to win it back. But what?

She came to his rescue. 'I bought another at the same time,' she said. 'The Last Communion of St Jerome', by — who is it? I forget.'

'Ah, you mean Domenichino's "St Jerome"?' The Complete Man was afloat again. 'Poussin's favourite picture. Mine too, very nearly. I'd like to see that.'

'It's in my room, I'm afraid. But if you don't mind.'

He bowed. 'If you don't.'

She smiled graciously to him and got up. 'This way,' she said, and opened the door.

'It's a lovely picture,' Gumbril went on, loquaciously now, behind her, as they walked down the dark corridor. 'And besides, I have a sentimental attachment to it. There used to be a copy of an engraving of it at home, when I was a child. And I remember wondering and wondering — oh, it went on for years — every time I saw the picture; wondering why on earth that old bishop (for I did know it was a bishop) should be handing the naked old man a five-shilling piece.'

She opened a door; they were in her very pink room. Grave in its solemn and subtly harmonious beauty, the picture hung over the mantelpiece, hung there, among the photographs of the little friends of her own age, like some strange object from another world. From within that chipped gilt frame all the beauty, all the grandeur of religion looked darkly out upon the pink room. The little friends of her own age, all deliriously nubile, sweetly smiled, turned up their eyes, clasped Persian cats or stood jauntily, feet apart, hand in the breeches pocket of the land-girl's uniform; the pink roses on the wallpaper, the pink and white curtains, the pink bed, the strawberry-coloured carpet, filled all the air with the rosy reflections of nakedness and life.

And utterly remote, absorbed in their grave, solemn ecstasy, the robed and mitred priest held out, the dying saint yearningly received, the body of the Son of God. The ministrants looked gravely on, the little angels looped in the air above a gravely triumphant festoon, the lion slept at the saint's feet, and through the arch beyond, the eye travelled out over a quiet country of dark trees and hills.

'There it is,' she waved towards the mantelpiece.

But Gumbriel had taken it all in long ago. 'You see what I mean by the five-shilling piece.' And stepping up to the picture, he pointed to the round bright wafer which the priest holds in his hand and whose averted disk is like the essential sun at the centre of the picture's harmonious universe. 'Those were the days of five-shilling pieces,' he went on. 'You're probably too young to remember those large, lovely things. They came my way occasionally, and consecrated wafers didn't. So you can understand how much the picture puzzled me. A bishop giving a naked old man five shillings in a church, with angels fluttering overhead, and a lion sleeping in the foreground. It was obscure, it was horribly obscure.' He turned away from the picture and confronted his hostess, who was standing a little way behind him smiling enigmatically and invitingly.

'Obscure,' he repeated. 'But so is everything. So is life in general. And you,' he stepped towards her, 'you in particular.'

'Am I?' she lifted her limpid eyes at him. Oh, how her heart was beating, how hard it was to be the fastidious lady, calmly satisfying her caprice. How difficult it was to be accustomed to this sort of thing. What was going to happen next?

What happened next was that the Complete Man came still closer, put his arms round her, as though he were inviting her to the fox-trot, and began kissing her with a startling violence. His beard tickled her neck; shivering a little, she brought down the magnolia petals across her eyes. The Complete Man lifted her up, walked across the room carrying the fastidious lady in his arms and deposited her on the rosy catafalque of the bed. Lying there with her eyes shut, she did her best to pretend she was dead.

Gumbriel had looked at his wrist watch and found that it was six o'clock. Already? He prepared himself to take his departure. Wrapped in a pink kimono, she came out into the hall to wish him farewell.

'When shall I see you again, Rosie?' He had learnt that her name was Rosie.

She had recovered her great lady's equanimity and detachment, and was able to shrug her shoulders and smile. 'How should I know?' she asked, implying that she could not foresee what her caprice might be an hour hence.

'May I write, then, and ask one of these days if you do know?'

She put her head on one side and raised her eyebrows, doubtfully. At last nodded. 'Yes, you can write,' she permitted.

'Good,' said the Complete Man, and picked up his wide hat. She held out her hand to him with stateliness, and with a formal gallantry he kissed it. He was just closing the front door behind him, when he remembered something. He turned round. 'I say,' he called after the retreating pink kimono. 'It's rather absurd. But how can I write? I don't know your name. I can't just address it "Rosie".'

The great lady laughed delightedly. This had the real capriccio flavour. 'Wait,' she said, and she ran into the sitting-room. She was back again in a moment with an oblong of pasteboard. 'There,' she said, and dropped it into his great-coat pocket. Then blowing a kiss she was gone.

The Complete Man closed the door and descended the stairs. Well, well, he said to himself; well, well. He put his hand in his coat pocket and took out the card. In the dim light of the staircase he read the name on it with some difficulty. Mrs James — but no, but no. He read again, straining his eyes; there was no question of it. Mrs James Shearwater.

Mrs James Shearwater.

That was why he had vaguely known the name of Bloxam Gardens.

Mrs James Shear — . Step after step he descended, ponderously. 'Good Lord,' he said out loud. 'Good Lord.'

But why had he never seen her? Why did Shearwater never produce her? Now he came to think of it, he hardly ever spoke of her.

Why had she said the flat wasn't theirs? It was; he had heard Shearwater talk about it.

Did she make a habit of this sort of thing?

Could Shearwater be wholly unaware of what she was really like? But, for that matter, what was she really like?

He was half-way down the last flight, when with a rattle and a squeak of hinges the door of the house, which was only separated by a short lobby from the foot of the stairs, opened, revealing, on the doorstep, Shearwater and a friend, eagerly talking.

'... I take my rabbit,' the friend was saying — he was a young man with dark, protruding eyes, and staring, doggy nostrils; very eager, lively and loud. 'I take my rabbit and I inject into it the solution of eyes, pulped eyes of another dead rabbit. You see?'

Gumbril's first instinct was to rush up the stairs and hide in the first likely-looking corner. But he pulled himself together at once. He was a Complete Man, and Complete Men do not hide; moreover, he was sufficiently disguised to be quite unrecognizable. He stood where he was, and listened to the conversation.

‘The rabbit,’ continued the young man, and with his bright eyes and staring, sniffing nose, he looked like a poacher’s terrier ready to go barking after the first white tail that passed his way; ‘the rabbit naturally develops the appropriate resistance, develops a specific anti-eye to protect itself. I then take some of its anti-eye serum and inject it into my female rabbit; I then immediately breed from her.’ He paused.

‘Well?’ asked Shearwater, in his slow, ponderous way. He lifted his great round head inquiringly and looked at the doggy young man from under his bushy eyebrows.

The doggy young man smiled triumphantly. ‘The young ones,’ he said, emphasizing his words by striking his right fist against the extended palm of his left hand, ‘the young ones are born with defective sight.’

Thoughtfully Shearwater pulled at his formidable moustache. ‘H’m,’ he said slowly. ‘Very remarkable.’

‘You realize the full significance of it?’ asked the young man. ‘We seem to be affecting the germ-plasm directly. We have found a way of making acquired characteristics ...’

‘Pardon me,’ said Gumbril. He had decided that it was time to be gone. He ran down the stairs and across the tiled hall, he pushed his way firmly but politely between the talkers.

‘... heritable,’ continued the young man, imperturbably eager, speaking through and over and round the obstacle.

‘Damn!’ said Shearwater. The Complete Man had trodden on his toe. ‘Sorry,’ he added, absent-mindedly apologizing for the injury he had received.

Gumbril hurried off along the street. ‘If we really have found out a technique for influencing the germ-plasm directly ...’ he heard the doggy young man saying; but he was already too far away to catch the rest of the sentence. There are many ways, he reflected, of spending an afternoon.

The doggy young man refused to come in, he had to get in his game of tennis before dinner. Shearwater climbed the stairs alone. He was taking off his hat in the little hall of his own apartment, when Rosie came out of the sitting-room with a trayful of tea-things.

‘Well?’ he asked, kissing her affectionately on the forehead. ‘Well? People to tea?’

‘Only one,’ Rosie replied. ‘I’ll go and make you a fresh cup.’

She glided off, rustling in her pink kimono towards the kitchen.

Shearwater sat down in the sitting-room. He had brought home with him from the library the fifteenth volume of the Journal of Biochemistry. There was something in it he wanted to look up. He turned over the pages. Ah, here it was. He began reading. Rosie came back again.

‘Here’s your tea,’ she said.

He thanked her without looking up. The tea grew cold on the little table at his side.

Lying on the sofa, Rosie pondered and remembered. Had the events of the afternoon, she asked herself, really happened? They seemed very improbable and remote, now, in this studious silence. She couldn’t help feeling a little disappointed. Was it only this? So simple and obvious? She tried to work herself up into a more exalted mood. She

even tried to feel guilty; but there she failed completely. She tried to feel rapturous; but without much more success. Still, he certainly had been a most extraordinary man. Such impudence, and at the same time such delicacy and tact.

It was a pity she couldn't afford to change the furniture. She saw now that it wouldn't do at all. She would go and tell Aunt Aggie about the dreadful middle-classness of her Art and Craftiness.

She ought to have an Empire chaise longue. Like Madame Récamier. She could see herself lying there, dispensing tea. 'Like a delicious pink snake.' He had called her that.

Well, really, now she came to think of it all again, it had been too queer, too queer. 'What's a hedonist?' she suddenly asked.

Shearwater looked up from the Journal of Biochemistry. 'What?' he said.

'A hedonist.'

'A man who holds that the end of life is pleasure.'

A 'conscientious hedonist' — ah, that was good.

'This tea is cold,' Shearwater remarked.

'You should have drunk it before,' she said. The silence renewed and prolonged itself.

Rosie was getting much better, Shearwater reflected, as he washed his hands before supper, about not interrupting him when he was busy. This evening she had really not disturbed him at all, or at most only once, and that not seriously. There had been times in the past when the child had really made life almost impossible. There were those months at the beginning of their married life, when she had thought she would like to study physiology herself and be a help to him. He remembered the hours he had spent trying to teach her elementary facts about the chromosomes. It had been a great relief when she abandoned the attempt. He had suggested she should go in for stencilling patterns on Government linen. Such pretty curtains and things one could make like that. But she hadn't taken very kindly to the idea. There had followed a long period when she seemed to have nothing to do but prevent him from doing anything. Ringing him up at the laboratory, invading his study, sitting on his knee, or throwing her arms round his neck, or pulling his hair, or asking ridiculous questions when he was trying to work.

Shearwater flattered himself that he had been extremely patient. He had never got cross. He had just gone on as though she weren't there. As though she weren't there.

'Hurry up,' he heard her calling. 'The soup's getting cold.'

'Coming,' he shouted back, and began to dry his large, blunt hands.

She seemed to have been improving lately. And to-night, to-night she had been a model of non-existence.

He came striding heavily into the dining-room. Rosie was sitting at the head of the table, ladling out the soup. With her left hand she held back the flowing pink sleeve of her kimono so that it should not trail in the plates or the tureen. Her bare arm showed white and pearly through the steam of lentils.

How pretty she was! He could not resist the temptation, but coming up behind her bent down and kissed her, rather clumsily, on the back of her neck.

Rosie drew away from him. 'Really, Jim,' she said, disapprovingly. 'At meal-times!' The fastidious lady had to draw the line at these ill-timed, tumbling familiarities.

'And what about work-times?' Shearwater asked laughing. 'Still, you were wonderful this evening, Rosie, quite wonderful.' He sat down and began eating his soup. 'Not a sound all the time I was reading; or, at any rate, only one sound, so far as I remember.'

The great lady said nothing, but only smiled — a little contemptuously and with a touch of pity. She pushed away the plate of soup unfinished and planted her elbows on the table. Slipping her hands under the sleeves of her kimono, she began, lightly, delicately, with the tips of her fingers, to caress her own arms.

How smooth they were, how soft and warm and how secret under the sleeves. And all her body was as smooth and warm, was as soft and secret, still more secret beneath the pink folds. Like a warm serpent hidden away, secretly, secretly.

## Chapter X

MR BOLDERO LIKED the idea of the Patent Small-Clothes. He liked it immensely, he said, immensely.

'There's money in it,' he said.

Mr Boldero was a small dark man of about forty-five, active as a bird and with a bird's brown, beady eyes, a bird's sharp nose. He was always busy, always had twenty different irons in the fire at once, was always fresh, clear-headed, never tired. He was also always unpunctual, always untidy. He had no sense of time or of order. But he got away with it, as he liked to say. He delivered the goods — or rather the goods, in the convenient form of cash, delivered themselves, almost miraculously it always seemed, to him.

He was like a bird in appearance. But in mind, Gumbril found, after having seen him once or twice, he was like a caterpillar: he ate all that was put before him, he consumed a hundred times his own mental weight every day. Other people's ideas, other people's knowledge — they were his food. He devoured them and they were at once his own. All that belonged to other people he annexed without a scruple or a second thought, quite naturally, as though it were already his own. And he absorbed it so rapidly and completely, he laid public claim to it so promptly that he sometimes deceived people into believing that he had really anticipated them in their ideas, that he had known for years and years the things they had just been telling him, and which he would at once airily repeat to them with the perfect assurance of one who knows — knows by instinct, as it were, by inheritance.

At their first luncheon he had asked Gumbril to tell him all about modern painting. Gumbril had given him a brief lecture; before the savoury had appeared on the table,

Mr Boldero was talking with perfect familiarity of Picasso and Derain. He almost made it understood that he had a fine collection of their works in his drawing-room at home. Being a trifle deaf, however, he was not very good at names, and Gumbriel's all-too-tactful corrections were lost on him. He could not be induced to abandon his Bacosso in favour of any other version of the Spaniard's name. Bacosso — why, he had known all about Bacosso since he was a schoolboy! Bacosso was an old master, already.

Mr Boldero was very severe with the waiters and knew so well how things ought to be done at a good restaurant, that Gumbriel felt sure he must recently have lunched with some meticulous gormandizer of the old school. And when the waiter made as though to serve them with brandy in small glasses, Mr Boldero was so passionately indignant that he sent for the manager.

'Do you mean to tell me,' he shouted in a perfect frenzy of righteous anger, 'that you don't yet know how brandy ought to be drunk?'

Perhaps it was only last week that he himself, Gumbriel reflected, had learned to aerate his cognac in Gargantuan beakers.

Meanwhile, of course, the Patent Small-Clothes were not neglected. As soon as he had been told about the things, Mr Boldero began speaking of them with a perfect and practised familiarity. They were already his, mentally his. And it was only Mr Boldero's generosity that prevented him from making the Small-Clothes more effectively his own.

'If it weren't for the friendship and respect which I feel for your father, Mr Gumbriel,' he said, twinkling genially over the brandy, 'I'd just annex your Small-Clothes. Bag and baggage. Just annex them.'

'Ah, but they're my patent,' said Gumbriel. 'Or at least they're in process of being patented. The agents are at work.'

Mr Boldero laughed. 'Do you suppose that would trouble me if I wanted to be unscrupulous? I'd just take the idea and manufacture the article. You'd bring an action. I'd have it defended with all the professional erudition that could be brought. You'd find yourself let in for a case that might cost thousands. And how would you pay for it? You'd be forced to come to an agreement out of court, Mr Gumbriel. That's what you'd have to do. And a damned bad agreement it would be for you, I can tell you.' Mr Boldero laughed very cheerfully at the thought of the badness of this agreement. 'But don't be alarmed,' he said. 'I shan't do it, you know.'

Gumbriel was not wholly reassured. Tactfully, he tried to find out what terms Mr Boldero was prepared to offer. Mr Boldero was nebulously vague.

They met again in Gumbriel's rooms. The contemporary drawings on the walls reminded Mr Boldero that he was now an art expert. He told Gumbriel all about it — in Gumbriel's own words. Every now and then, it was true, Mr Boldero made a little slip. Bacosso, for example, remained unshakably Bacosso. But on the whole the performance was most impressive. It made Gumbriel feel very uncomfortable, however, while it lasted. For he recognized in this characteristic of Mr Boldero a horrible caricature of himself. He too was an assimilator; more discriminating, no doubt, more tactful, knowing better than Mr Boldero how to turn the assimilated experience into something new

and truly his own; but still a caterpillar, definitely a caterpillar. He began studying Mr Boldero with a close and disgustful attention, as one might pore over some repulsive memento mori.

It was a relief when Mr Boldero stopped talking art and consented to get down to business. Gumbril was wearing for the occasion the sample pair of Small-Clothes which Mr Bojanus had made for him. For Mr Boldero's benefit he put them, so to speak, through their paces. He allowed himself to drop with a bump on to the floor — arriving there bruiseless and unjarred. He sat in complete comfort for minutes at a stretch on the edge of the ornamental iron fender. In the intervals he paraded up and down before Mr Boldero like a mannequin. 'A trifle bulgy,' said Mr Boldero. 'But still ...' He was, taking it all round, favourably impressed. It was time, he said, to begin thinking of details. They would have to begin by making experiments with the bladders to discover a model combining, as Mr Boldero put it, 'maximum efficiency with minimum bulge'. When they had found the right thing, they would have it made in suitable quantities by any good rubber firm. As for the trousers themselves, they could rely for those on sweated female labour in the East End. 'Cheap and good,' said Mr Boldero.

'It sounds ideal,' said Gumbril.

'And then,' said Mr Boldero, 'there's our advertising campaign. On that I may say,' he went on with a certain solemnity, 'will depend the failure or success of our enterprise. I consider it of the first importance.'

'Quite,' said Gumbril, nodding importantly and with intelligence.

'We must set to work,' said Mr Boldero, 'sci — en — tifically.'

Gumbril nodded again.

'We have to appeal,' Mr Boldero went on so glibly that Gumbril felt sure he must be quoting somebody else's words, 'to the great instincts and feelings of humanity. ... They are the sources of action. They spend the money, if I may put it like that.'

'That's all very well,' said Gumbril. 'But how do you propose to appeal to the most important of the instincts? I refer, as you may well imagine, to sex.'

'I was just going to come to that,' said Mr Boldero, raising his hand as though to ask for a patient hearing. 'Alas! we can't. I don't see any way of hanging our Small-Clothes on the sexual peg.'

'Then we are undone,' said Gumbril, too dramatically.

'No, no,' Mr Boldero was reassuring. 'You make the error of the Viennese. You exaggerate the importance of sex. After all, my dear Mr Gumbril, there is also the instinct of self-preservation; there is also,' he leaned forward, wagging his finger, 'the social instinct, the instinct of the herd.'

'True.'

'Both of them as powerful as sex. What are the Professor's famous Censors but forbidding suggestions from the herd without, made powerful and entrenched by the social instinct within?'

Gumbril had no answer; Mr Boldero continued, smiling:



‘So that we shall be all right if we stick to self-preservation and the herd. Rub in the comfort and the utility, the hygienic virtues of our Small-Clothes; that will catch their self-preservatory feelings. Aim at their dread of public opinion, at their ambition to be one better than their fellows and their terror of being different — at all the ludicrous weaknesses a well-developed social instinct exposes them to. We shall get them, if we set to work scientifically.’ Mr Boldero’s bird-like eyes twinkled very brightly. ‘We shall get them,’ he repeated, and he laughed a happy little laugh, full of such a childlike diabolism, such an innocent gay malignity, that it seemed as though a little leprechaun had suddenly taken the financier’s place in Gumbril’s best arm-chair.

Gumbril laughed too; for this leprechaunish mirth was infectious. ‘We shall get them,’ he echoed. ‘Oh, I’m sure we shall, if you set about it, Mr Boldero.’

Mr Boldero acknowledged the compliment with a smile that expressed no false humility. It was his due, and he knew it.

‘I’ll give you some of my ideas about the advertising campaign,’ he said. ‘Just to give you a notion. You can think them over, quietly, and make suggestions.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Gumbril, nodding.

Mr Boldero cleared his throat. ‘We shall begin,’ he said, ‘by making the most simple elementary appeal to their instinct of self-preservation: we shall point out that the Patent Small-Clothes are comfortable; that to wear them is to avoid pain. A few striking slogans about comfort — that’s all we want. Very simple indeed. It doesn’t take much to persuade a man that it’s pleasanter to sit on air than on wood. But while we’re on the subject of hard seats we shall have to glide off subtly at a tangent to make a flank attack on the social instincts.’ And joining the tip of his forefinger to the tip of his thumb, Mr Boldero moved his hand delicately sideways, as though he were sliding it along a smooth brass rail. ‘We shall have to speak about the glories and the trials of sedentary labour. We must exalt its spiritual dignity and at the same time condemn its physical discomforts. “The seat of honour”, don’t you know. We could talk about that. “The Seats of the Mighty.” “The seat that rules the office rocks the world.” All those lines might be made something of. And then we could have little historical chats about thrones; how dignified, but how uncomfortable they’ve been. We must make the bank clerk and the civil servant feel proud of being what they are and at the same time feel ashamed that, being such splendid people, they should have to submit to the indignity of having blistered hind-quarters. In modern advertising you must flatter your public — not in the oily, abject, tradesman-like style of the old advertisers, crawling before clients who were their social superiors; that’s all over now. It’s we who are the social superiors — because we’ve got more money than the bank clerks and the civil servants. Our modern flattery must be manly, straight-forward, sincere, the admiration of equal for equal — all the more flattering as we aren’t equals.’ Mr Boldero laid a finger to his nose. ‘They’re dirt and we’re capitalists. ...’ He laughed.

Gumbril laughed too. It was the first time that he had ever thought of himself as a capitalist, and the thought was exhilarating.

‘We flatter them,’ went on Mr Boldero. ‘We say that honest work is glorious and ennobling — which it isn’t; it’s merely dull and cretinizing. And then we go on to suggest that it would be finer still, more ennobling, because less uncomfortable, if they wore Gumbriel’s Patent Small-Clothes. You see the line?’

Gumbriel saw the line.

‘After that,’ said Mr Boldero, ‘we get on to the medical side of the matter. The medical side, Mr Gumbriel — that’s most important. Nobody feels really well nowadays — at any rate, nobody who lives in a big town and does the kind of loathsome work that the people we’re catering for does. Keeping this fact before our eyes, we have to make it clear that only those can expect to be healthy who wear pneumatic trousers.’

‘That will be a little difficult, won’t it?’ questioned Gumbriel.

‘Not a bit of it!’ Mr Boldero laughed with an infectious confidence. ‘All we have to do is to talk about the great nerve-centres of the spine: the shocks they get when you sit down too hard; the wearing exhaustion to which long-protracted sitting on unpadded seats subjects them. We’ll have to talk very scientifically about the great lumbar ganglia — if there are such things, which I really don’t pretend to know. We’ll even talk almost mystically about the ganglia. You know that sort of ganglion philosophy?’

Mr Boldero went on parenthetically. ‘Very interesting it is, sometimes, I think. We could put in a lot about the dark, powerful sense-life, sex-life, instinct-life which is controlled by the lumbar ganglion. How important it is that that shouldn’t be damaged. That already our modern conditions of civilization tend unduly to develop the intellect and the thoracic ganglia controlling the higher emotions. That we’re wearing out, growing feeble, losing our balance in consequence. And that the only cure — if we are to continue our present mode of civilized life — is to be found in Gumbriel’s Patent Small-Clothes.’ Mr Boldero brought his hand with an emphatic smack on to the table as he spoke, as he fairly shouted these last words.

‘Magnificent,’ said Gumbriel, with genuine admiration.

‘This sort of medical and philosophical dope,’ Mr Boldero went on, ‘is always very effective, if it’s properly used. The public to whom we are making our appeal is, of course, almost absolutely ignorant on these, or, indeed, on almost all other subjects. It is therefore very much impressed by the unfamiliar words; particularly if they have such a good juicy sound as the word “ganglia”.’

‘There was a young man of East Anglia, whose loins were a tangle of ganglia,’ murmured Gumbriel, improvvisatore.

‘Precisely,’ said Mr Boldero. ‘Precisely. You see how juicy it is? Well, as I say, they’re impressed. And they’re also grateful. They’re grateful to us for having given them a piece of abstruse, unlikely information which they can pass on to their wives, or to such friends as they know don’t read the paper in which our advertisement appears — can pass on airily, don’t you know, with easy erudition, as though they’d known all about ganglia from their childhood. And they’ll feel such a flow of superiority as they hand on the metaphysics and the pathology, that they’ll always think of us with

affection. They'll buy our breeks and they'll get other people to buy. That's why,' Mr Boldero went off again on an instructive tangent, 'that's why the day of secret patent medicines is really over. It's no good saying you have rediscovered some secret known only, in the past, to the Egyptians. People don't know anything about Egyptology; but they have an inkling that such a science exists. And that if it does exist, it's unlikely that patent-medicine makers should have found out facts unknown to the professors at the universities. And it's much the same even with secrets that don't come from Egypt. People know there's such a thing as medical science and they again feel it's improbable that manufacturers should know things ignored by the doctors. The modern democratic advertiser is entirely above-board. He tells you all about it. He explains that the digestive juices acting on bismuth give rise to a disinfectant acid. He points out that lactic ferment gets destroyed before it reaches the large intestine, so that Metchnikoff's cure generally won't work. And he goes on to explain that the only way of getting the ferment there is to mix it with starch and paraffin: starch to feed the ferment on, paraffin to prevent the starch being digested before it gets to the intestine. And, in consequence, he convinces you that a mixture of starch, paraffin and ferment is the only thing that's any good at all. Consequently you buy it; which you would never have done without the explanation. In the same way, Mr Gumbriel, we mustn't ask people to take our trousers on trust. We must explain scientifically why these trousers will be good for their health. And by means of the ganglia, as I've pointed out, we can even show that the trousers will be good for their souls and the whole human race at large. And as you probably know, Mr Gumbriel, there's nothing like a spiritual message to make things go. Combine spirituality with practicality and you've fairly got them. Got them, I may say, on toast. And that's what we can do with our trousers; we can put a message into them, a big, spiritual message. Decidedly,' he concluded, 'we shall have to work those ganglia all we can.'

'I'll undertake to do that,' said Gumbriel, who felt very buoyant and self-assured. Mr Boldero's hydrogenous conversation had blown him up like a balloon.

'And I'm sure you'll do it well,' said Mr Boldero encouragingly. 'There is no better training for modern commerce than a literary education. As a practical business man, I always uphold the ancient universities, especially in their teaching of the Humanities.'

Gumbriel was much flattered. At the moment, it seemed supremely satisfying to be told that he was likely to make a good business man. The business man took on a radiance, began to glow, as it were, with a phosphorescent splendour.

'Then it's very important,' continued Mr Boldero, 'to play on their snobbism; to exploit that painful sense of inferiority which the ignorant and ingenuous always feel in the presence of the knowing. We've got to make our trousers the Thing — socially right as well as merely personally comfortable. We've got to imply somehow that it's bad form not to wear them. We've got to make those who don't wear them feel rather uncomfortable. Like that film of Charlie Chaplin's, where he's the absent-minded young man about town who dresses for dinner immaculately, from the waist up — white waistcoat, tail coat, stiff shirt, top-hat — and only discovers, when he gets down into

the hall of the hotel, that he's forgotten to put on his trousers. We've got to make them feel like that. That's always very successful. You know those excellent American advertisements about young ladies whose engagements are broken off because they perspire too freely or have an unpleasant breath? How horribly uncomfortable those make you feel! We've got to do something of the same sort for our trousers. Or more immediately applicable would be those tailor's advertisements about correct clothes. "Good clothes make you feel good." You know the sort of line. And then those grave warning sentences in which you're told that a correctly cut suit may make the difference between an appointment gained and an appointment lost, an interview granted and an interview refused. But the most masterly examples I can think of,' Mr Boldero went on with growing enthusiasm, 'are those American advertisements of spectacles, in which the manufacturers first assume the existence of a social law about goggles, and then proceed to invoke all the sanctions which fall on the head of the committer of a solecism upon those who break it. It's masterly. For sport or relaxation, they tell you, as though it was a social axiom, you must wear spectacles of pure tortoiseshell. For business, tortoiseshell rims and nickel ear-pieces lend incisive poise — incisive poise, we must remember that for our ads, Mr Gumbriel. "Gumbriel's Patent Small-Clothes lend incisive poise to business men." For semi-evening dress, shell rims with gold ear-pieces and gold nose-bridge. And for full dress, gold-mounted rimless pince-nez are refinement itself, and absolutely correct. Thus we see, a social law has been created, according to which every self-respecting myope or astigmat must have four distinct pairs of glasses. Think if he should wear the all-shell sports model with full dress! Revolting solecism! The people who read advertisements like that begin to feel uncomfortable; they have only one pair of glasses, they are afraid of being laughed at, thought low-class and ignorant and suburban. And since there are few who would not rather be taken in adultery than in provincialism, they rush out to buy four new pairs of spectacles. And the manufacturer gets rich, Mr Gumbriel. Now, we must do something of the kind with our trousers. Imply somehow that they're correct, that you're undressed without, that your fiancée would break off the engagement if she saw you sitting down to dinner on anything but air.' Mr Boldero shrugged his shoulders, vaguely waved his hand.

'It may be rather difficult,' said Gumbriel, shaking his head.

'It may,' Mr Boldero agreed. 'But difficulties are made to be overcome. We must pull the string of snobbery and shame: it's essential. We must find out methods for bringing the weight of public opinion to bear mockingly on those who do not wear our trousers. It is difficult at the moment to see how it can be done. But it will have to be done, it will have to be done,' Mr Boldero repeated emphatically. 'We might even find a way of invoking patriotism to our aid. "English trousers filled with English air for English men." A little far-fetched, perhaps. But there might be something in it.'

Gumbriel shook his head doubtfully.

'Well, it's one of the things we've got to think about in any case,' said Mr Boldero. 'We can't afford to neglect such powerful social emotions as these. Sex, as we've seen, is almost entirely out of the question. We must run the rest, therefore, as hard as

we can. For instance, there's the novelty business. People feel superior if they possess something new which their neighbours haven't got. The mere fact of newness is an intoxication. We must encourage that sense of superiority, brew up that intoxication. The most absurd and futile objects can be sold because they're new. Not long ago I sold four million patent soap-dishes of a new and peculiar kind. The point was that you didn't screw the fixture into the bathroom wall; you made a hole in the wall and built the soap-dish into a niche, like a holy water stoup. My soap-dishes possessed no advantages over other kinds of soap-dishes, and they cost a fantastic amount to instal. But I managed to put them across, simply because they were new. Four million of them.' Mr Boldero smiled with satisfaction at the recollection. 'We shall do the same, I hope, with our trousers. People may be shy of being the first to appear in them; but the shyness will be compensated for by the sense of superiority and elation produced by the consciousness of the newness of the things.'

'Quite so,' said Gumbril.

'And then, of course, there's the economy slogan. "One pair of Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes will outlast six pairs of ordinary trousers." That's easy enough. So easy that it's really uninteresting.' Mr Boldero waved it away.

'We shall have to have pictures,' said Gumbril, parenthetically. He had an idea.

'Oh, of course.'

'I believe I know of the very man to do them,' Gumbril went on. 'His name's Lypiatt. A painter. You've probably heard of him.'

'Heard of him!' exclaimed Mr Boldero. He laughed. 'But who hasn't heard of Lydgate.'

'Lypiatt.'

'Lydgate, I mean, of course.'

'I think he'd be the very man,' said Gumbril.

'I'm certain he would,' said Mr Boldero, not a whit behindhand.

Gumbril was pleased with himself. He felt he had done some one a good turn. Poor old Lypiatt; be glad of the money. Gumbril remembered also his own fiver. And remembering his own fiver, he also remembered that Mr Boldero had as yet made no concrete suggestion about terms. He nerved himself at last to suggest to Mr Boldero that it was time to think of this little matter. Ah, how he hated talking about money! He found it so hard to be firm in asserting his rights. He was ashamed of showing himself grasping. He always thought with consideration of the other person's point of view — poor devil, could he afford to pay? And he was always swindled and always conscious of the fact. Lord, how he hated life on these occasions! Mr Boldero was still evasive.

'I'll write you a letter about it,' he said at last.

Gumbril was delighted. 'Yes, do,' he said enthusiastically, 'do.' He knew how to cope with letters all right. He was a devil with the fountain-pen. It was these personal, hand-to-hand combats that he couldn't manage. He could have been, he always felt, such a ruthless critic and satirist, such a violent, unscrupulous polemical writer. And

if ever he committed his autobiography to paper, how breath-takingly intimate, how naked — naked without so much as a healthy sunburn to colour the whiteness — how quiveringly a sensitive jelly it would be! All the things he had never told any one would be in it. Confession at long range — if anything, it would be rather agreeable.

‘Yes, do write me a letter,’ he repeated. ‘Do.’

Mr Boldero’s letter came at last, and the proposals it contained were derisory. A hundred pounds down and five pounds a week when the business should be started. Five pounds a week — and for that he was to act as a managing director, writer of advertisements and promoter of foreign sales. Gumbril felt thankful that Mr Boldero had put the terms in a letter. If they had been offered point-blank across the luncheon table, he would probably have accepted them without a murmur. He wrote a few neat, sharp phrases saying that he could not consider less than five hundred pounds down and a thousand a year. Mr Boldero’s reply was amiable; would Mr Gumbril come and see him?

See him? Well, of course, it was inevitable. He would have to see him again some time. But he would send the Complete Man to deal with the fellow. A Complete Man matched with a leprechaun — there could be no doubt as to the issue.

‘Dear Mr Boldero,’ he wrote back, ‘I should have come to talk over matters before this. But I have been engaged during the last few days in growing a beard and until this has come to maturity, I cannot, as you will easily be able to understand, leave the house. By the day after to-morrow, however, I hope to be completely presentable and shall come to see you at your office at about three o’clock, if that is convenient to you. I hope we shall be able to arrange matters satisfactorily. — Believe me, dear Mr Boldero, yours very truly,

Theodore Gumbril, Jr.’

The day after to-morrow became in due course to-day; splendidly bearded and Rabelaisianly broad in his whipcord toga, Gumbril presented himself at Mr Boldero’s office in Queen Victoria Street.

‘I should hardly have recognized you,’ exclaimed Mr Boldero as he shook hands. ‘How it does alter you, to be sure!’

‘Does it?’ The Complete Man laughed with a significant joviality.

‘Won’t you take off your coat?’

‘No, thanks,’ said Gumbril. ‘I’ll keep it on.’

‘Well,’ said the leprechaun, leaning back in his chair and twinkling, bird-like, across the table.

‘Well,’ repeated Gumbril on a different tone from behind the stooks of his corn-like beard. He smiled, feeling serenely strong and safe.

‘I’m sorry we should have disagreed,’ said Mr Boldero.

‘So am I,’ the Complete Man replied. ‘But we shan’t disagree for long,’ he added, with significance; and as he spoke the words he brought down his fist with such a bang, that the inkpots on Mr Boldero’s very solid mahogany writing-table trembled and the pens danced, while Mr Boldero himself started with a genuine alarm. He had

not expected them. And now he came to look at him more closely, this young Gumbriel was a great, hulking, dangerous-looking fellow. He had thought he would be easy to manage. How could he have made such a mistake?

Gumbriel left the office with Mr Boldero's cheque for three hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket and an annual income of eight hundred. His bruised right hand was extremely tender to the touch. He was thankful that a single blow had been enough.

## Chapter XI

GUMBRIL HAD SPENT the afternoon at Bloxam Gardens. His chin was still sore from the spirit gum with which he had attached to it the symbol of the Complete Man; he was feeling also a little fatigued. Rosie had been delighted to see him; St Jerome had gone on solemnly communicating all the time.

His father had gone out to dine, and Gumbriel had eaten his rump steak and drunk his bottle of stout alone. He was sitting now in front of the open french windows which led from his father's workroom on to the balcony, with a block on his knee and a fountain-pen in his hand, composing advertisements for the Patent Small-Clothes. Outside, in the plane-trees of the square, the birds had gone through their nightly performance. But Gumbriel had paid no attention to them. He sat there, smoking, sometimes writing a word or two — sunk in the quagmire of his own drowsy and comfortable body. The flawless weather of the day had darkened into a blue May evening. It was agreeable merely to be alive.

He sketched out two or three advertisements in the grand idealistic transatlantic style. He imagined one in particular with a picture of Nelson at the head of the page and 'England expects ...' printed large beneath it. 'England ... Duty ... these are solemn words.' That was how it would begin. 'These are solemn words, and we use them solemnly as men who realize what Duty is, and who do all that in them lies to perform it as Englishmen should. The Manufacturer's is a sacred trust. The guide and ruler of the modern world, he has, like the Monarch of other days, responsibilities towards his people; he has a Duty to fulfil. He rules, but he must also serve. We realize our responsibilities, we take them seriously. Gumbriel's Patent Small-Clothes have been brought into the world that they may serve. Our Duty towards you is a Duty of Service. Our proud boast is that we perform it. But besides his Duty towards Others, every man has a duty towards Himself. What is that Duty? It is to keep himself in the highest possible state of physical and spiritual fitness. Gumbriel's Patent Small-Clothes protect the lumbar ganglia. ...' After that it would be plain medical and mystical sailing.

As soon as he got to the ganglia, Gumbriel stopped writing. He put down the block, sheathed his pen, and abandoned himself to the pleasures of pure idleness. He sat, he smoked his cigar. In the basement, two floors down, the cook and the house-

parlourmaid were reading — one the Daily Mirror, the other the Daily Sketch. For them, Her Majesty the Queen spoke kindly words to crippled female orphans; the jockeys tumbled at the jumps; Cupid was busy in Society, and the murderers who had disembowelled their mistresses were at large. Above him was the city of models, was a bedroom, a servant's bedroom, an attic of tanks and ancient dirt, the roof and, after that, two or three hundred light-years away, a star of the fourth magnitude. On the other side of the party-wall on his right, a teeming family of Jews led their dark, compact, Jewish lives with a prodigious intensity. At this moment they were all passionately quarrelling. Beyond the wall on the left lived the young journalist and his wife. To-night it was he who had cooked the supper. The young wife lay on the sofa, feeling horribly sick; she was going to have a baby, there could be no doubt about it now. They had meant not to have one; it was horrible. And, outside, the birds were sleeping in the trees, the invading children from the slum tumbled and squealed. Ships meanwhile were walloping across the Atlantic freighted with more cigars. Rosie at this moment was probably mending Shearwater's socks. Gumbрил sat and smoked, and the universe arranged itself in a pattern about him, like iron filings round a magnet.

The door opened, and the house-parlourmaid intruded Shearwater upon his lazy felicity, abruptly, in her unceremonious old way, and hurried back to the Daily Sketch.

'Shearwater! This is very agreeable,' said Gumbрил. 'Come and sit down.' He pointed to a chair.

Clumsily, filling the space that two ordinary men would occupy, Shearwater came zigzagging and lurching across the room, bumped against the work-table and the sofa as he passed, and finally sat down in the indicated chair.

It suddenly occurred to Gumbрил that this was Rosie's husband: he had not thought of that before. Could it be in the marital capacity that he presented himself so unexpectedly now? After this afternoon. ... He had come home; Rosie had confessed all. ... Ah! but then she didn't know who he was. He smiled to himself at the thought. What a joke! Perhaps Shearwater had come to complain to him of the unknown Complete Man — to him! It was delightful. Anon — the author of all those ballads in the Oxford Book of English Verse: the famous Italian painter — Ignoto. Gumbрил was quite disappointed when his visitor began to talk of other themes than Rosie. Sunk in the quagmire of his own comfortable guts, he felt good-humouredly obscene. The dramatic scabrousness of the situation would have charmed him in his present mood. Good old Shearwater — but what an ox of a man! If he, Gumbрил, took the trouble to marry a wife, he would at least take some interest in her.

Shearwater had begun to talk in general terms about life. What could he be getting at, Gumbрил wondered? What particulars were ambushed behind these generalizations? There were silences. Shearwater looked, he thought, very gloomy. Under his thick moustache the small, pouting, babyish mouth did not smile. The candid eyes had a puzzled, tired expression in them.

'People are queer,' he said after one of his silences. 'Very queer. One has no idea how queer they are.'



Gumbril laughed. 'But I have a very clear idea of their queerness,' he said. 'Everyone's queer, and the ordinary, respectable, bourgeois people are the queerest of the lot. How do they manage to live like that? It's astonishing. When I think of all my aunts and uncles ...' He shook his head.

'Perhaps it's because I'm rather incurious,' said Shearwater. 'One ought to be curious, I think. I've come to feel lately that I've not been curious enough about people.' The particulars began to peep, alive and individual, out of the vagueness, like rabbits; Gumbril saw them in his fancy, at the fringe of a wood.

'Quite,' he said encouragingly. 'Quite.'

'I think too much of my work,' Shearwater went on, frowning. 'Too much physiology. There's also psychology. People's minds as well as their bodies. ... One shouldn't be limited. Not too much, at any rate. People's minds ...' He was silent for a moment. 'I can imagine,' he went on at last, as in the tone of one who puts a very hypothetical case, 'I can imagine one's getting so much absorbed in somebody else's psychology that one could really think of nothing else.' The rabbits seemed ready to come out into the open.

'That's a process,' said Gumbril, with middle-aged jocularly, speaking out of his private warm morass, 'that's commonly called falling in love.'

There was another silence. Shearwater broke it to begin talking about Mrs Viveash. He had lunched with her three or four days running. He wanted Gumbril to tell him what she was really like. 'She seems to me a very extraordinary woman,' he said.

'Like everybody else,' said Gumbril irritatingly. It amused him to see the rabbits scampering about at last.

'I've never known a woman like that before.'

Gumbril laughed. 'You'd say that of any woman you happened to be interested in,' he said. 'You've never known any women at all.' He knew much more about Rosie, already, than Shearwater did, or probably ever would.

Shearwater meditated. He thought of Mrs Viveash, her cool, pale, critical eyes; her laughter, faint and mocking; her words that pierced into the mind, goading it into thinking unprecedented thoughts.

'She interests me,' he repeated. 'I want you to tell me what she's really like.' He emphasized the word really, as though there must, in the nature of things, be a vast difference between the apparent and the real Mrs Viveash.

Most lovers, Gumbril reflected, picture to themselves, in their mistresses, a secret reality, beyond and different from what they see every day. They are in love with somebody else — their own invention. And sometimes there is a secret reality; and sometimes reality and appearance are the same. The discovery, in either case, is likely to cause a shock. 'I don't know,' he said. 'How should I know? You must find out for yourself.'

'But you know her, you know her well,' said Shearwater, almost with anxiety in his voice.

'Not so well as all that.'

Shearwater sighed profoundly, like a whale in the night. He felt restless, incapable of concentrating. His mind was full of a horrible confusion. A violent eruptive bubbling up from below had shaken its calm clarity to pieces. All this absurd business of passion — he had always thought it nonsense, unnecessary. With a little strength of will one could shut it out. Women — only for half an hour out of the twenty-four. But she had laughed, and his quiet, his security had vanished. ‘I can imagine,’ he had said to her yesterday, ‘I can imagine myself giving up everything, work and all, to go running round after you.’ ‘And do you suppose I should enjoy that?’ Mrs Viveash had asked. ‘It would be ridiculous,’ he said, ‘it would be almost shameful.’ And she had thanked him for the compliment. ‘And at the same time,’ he went on, ‘I feel that it might be worth it. It might be the only thing.’ His mind was confused, full of new thoughts. ‘It’s difficult,’ he said after a pause, ‘arranging things. Very difficult. I thought I had arranged them so well ...’

‘I never arrange anything,’ said Gumbriel, very much the practical philosopher. ‘I take things as they come.’ And as he spoke the words, suddenly he became rather disgusted with himself. He shook himself; he climbed up out of his own morass. ‘It would be better, perhaps, if I arranged things more,’ he added.

‘Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s,’ said Shearwater, as though to himself; ‘and to God, and to sex, and to work. ... There must be a working arrangement.’ He sighed again. ‘Everything in proportion. In proportion,’ he repeated, as though the word were magical and had power. ‘In proportion.’

‘Who’s talking about proportion?’ They turned round. In the doorway Gumbriel Senior was standing, smoothing his ruffled hair and tugging at his beard. His eyes twinkled cheerfully behind his spectacles. ‘Poaching on my architectural ground?’ he said.

‘This is Shearwater,’ Gumbriel Junior put in, and explained who he was.

The old gentleman sat down. ‘Proportion,’ he said— ‘I was just thinking about it, now, as I was walking back. You can’t help thinking about it in these London streets, where it doesn’t exist. You can’t help pining for it. There are some streets ... oh, my God!’ And Gumbriel Senior threw up his hands in horror. ‘It’s like listening to a symphony of cats to walk along them. Senseless discords and a horrible disorder all the way. And the one street that was really like a symphony by Mozart — how busily and gleefully they’re pulling it down now! Another year and there’ll be nothing left of Regent Street. There’ll only be a jumble of huge, hideous buildings at three-quarters of a million apiece. A concert of Brobdingnagian cats. Order has been turned into a disgusting chaos. We need no barbarians from outside; they’re on the premises, all the time.’

The old man paused and pulled his beard meditatively. Gumbriel Junior sat in silence, smoking; and in silence Shearwater revolved within the walls of his great round head his agonizing thoughts of Mrs Viveash.

‘It has always struck me as very curious,’ Gumbriel Senior went on, ‘that people are so little affected by the vile and discordant architecture around them. Suppose, now,

that all these brass bands of unemployed ex-soldiers that blow so mournfully at all the street corners were suddenly to play nothing but a series of senseless and devilish discords — why, the first policeman would move them on, and the second would put them under arrest, and the passers-by would try to lynch them on their way to the police station. There would be a real spontaneous outcry of indignation. But when at these same street corners the contractors run up enormous palaces of steel and stone that are every bit as stupid and ignoble and inharmonious as ten brass bandsmen each playing a different tune in a different key, there is no outcry. The police don't arrest the architect; the passing pedestrians don't throw stones at the workmen. They don't notice that anything's wrong. It's odd,' said Gumbril Senior. 'It's very odd.'

'Very odd,' Gumbril Junior echoed.

'The fact is, I suppose,' Gumbril Senior went on, smiling with a certain air of personal triumph, 'the fact is that architecture is a more difficult and intellectual art than music. Music — that's just a faculty you're born with, as you might be born with a snub nose. But the sense of plastic beauty — though that's, of course, also an inborn faculty — is something that has to be developed and intellectually ripened. It's an affair of the mind; experience and thought have to draw it out. There are infant prodigies in music; but there are no infant prodigies in architecture.' Gumbril Senior chuckled with a real satisfaction. 'A man can be an excellent musician and a perfect imbecile. But a good architect must also be a man of sense, a man who knows how to think and to profit by experience. Now, as almost none of the people who pass along the streets in London, or any other city of the world, do know how to think or to profit by experience, it follows that they cannot appreciate architecture. The innate faculty is strong enough in them to make them dislike discord in music; but they haven't the wits to develop that other innate faculty — the sense of plastic beauty — which would enable them to see and disapprove of the same barbarism in architecture. Come with me,' Gumbril Senior added, getting up from his chair, 'and I'll show you something that will illustrate what I've been saying. Something you'll enjoy, too. Nobody's seen it yet,' he said mysteriously as he led the way upstairs. 'It's only just finished — after months and years. It'll cause a stir when they see it — when I let them see it, if ever I do, that is. The dirty devils!' Gumbril Senior added good-humouredly.

On the landing of the next floor he paused, felt in his pocket, took out a key and unlocked the door of what should have been the second best bedroom. Gumbril Junior wondered, without very much curiosity, what the new toy would turn out to be. Shearwater wondered only how he could possess Mrs Viveash.

'Come on,' called Gumbril Senior from inside the room. He turned on the light. They entered.

It was a big room; but almost the whole of the floor was covered by an enormous model, twenty feet long by ten or twelve wide, of a complete city traversed from end to end by a winding river and dominated at its central point by a great dome. Gumbril Junior looked at it with surprise and pleasure. Even Shearwater was roused from his bitter ruminations of desire to look at the charming city spread out at his feet.

‘It’s exquisite,’ said Gumbril Junior. ‘What is it? The capital of Utopia, or what?’ Delighted, Gumbril Senior laughed. ‘Don’t you see something rather familiar in the dome?’ he asked.

‘Well, I had thought ...’ Gumbril Junior hesitated, afraid that he might be going to say something stupid. He bent down to look more closely at the dome. ‘I had thought it looked rather like St Paul’s — and now I see that it is St Paul’s.’

‘Quite right,’ said his father. ‘And this is London.’

‘I wish it were,’ Gumbril Junior laughed.

‘It’s London as it might have been if they’d allowed Wren to carry out his plans of rebuilding after the Great Fire.’

‘And why didn’t they allow him to?’ Shearwater asked.

‘Chiefly,’ said Gumbril Senior, ‘because, as I’ve said before, they didn’t know how to think or profit by experience. Wren offered them open spaces and broad streets; he offered them sunlight and air and cleanliness; he offered them beauty, order and grandeur. He offered to build for the imagination and the ambitious spirit of man, so that even the most bestial, vaguely and remotely, as they walked those streets, might feel that they were of the same race — or very nearly — as Michelangelo; that they too might feel themselves, in spirit at least, magnificent, strong and free. He offered them all these things; he drew a plan for them, walking in peril among the still smouldering ruins. But they preferred to re-erect the old intricate squalor; they preferred the mediæval darkness and crookedness and beastly irregular quaintness; they preferred holes and crannies and winding tunnels; they preferred foul smells, sunless, stagnant air, phthisis and rickets; they preferred ugliness and pettiness and dirt; they preferred the wretched human scale, the scale of the sickly body, not of the mind. Miserable fools! But I suppose,’ the old man continued, shaking his head, ‘we can’t blame them.’ His hair had blown loose from its insecure anchorage; with a gesture of resignation he brushed it back into place. ‘We can’t blame them. We should have done the same in the circumstances — undoubtedly. People offer us reason and beauty; but we will have none of them, because they don’t happen to square with the notions that were grafted into our souls in youth, that have grown there and become a part of us. *Experientia docet* — nothing falsier, so far as most of us are concerned, was ever said. You, no doubt, my dear Theodore, have often in the past made a fool of yourself with women. ...’

Gumbril Junior made an embarrassed gesture that half denied, half admitted the soft impeachment. Shearwater turned away, painfully reminded of what, for a moment, he had half forgotten. Gumbril Senior swept on.

‘Will that prevent you from making as great a fool of yourself again to-morrow? It will not. It will most assuredly not.’ Gumbril Senior shook his head. ‘The inconveniences and horrors of the pox are perfectly well known to every one; but still the disease flourishes and spreads. Several million people were killed in a recent war and half the world ruined; but we all busily go on in courses that make another event of the same sort inevitable. *Experientia docet*? *Experientia* doesn’t. And that is why we

must not be too hard on these honest citizens of London who, fully appreciating the inconveniences of darkness, disorder and dirt, manfully resisted any attempt to alter conditions which they had been taught from childhood onwards to consider as necessary, right and belonging inevitably to the order of things. We must not be too hard. We are doing something even worse ourselves. Knowing by a century of experience how beautiful, how graceful, how soothing to the mind is an ordered piece of town-planning, we pull down almost the only specimen of it we possess and put up in its place a chaos of Portland stone that is an offence against civilization. But let us forget about these old citizens and the labyrinth of ugliness and inconvenience which we have inherited from them, and which is called London. Let us forget the contemporaries who are making it still worse than it was. Come for a walk with me through this ideal city. Look.'

And Gumbriel Senior began expounding it to them.

In the middle, there, of that great elliptical Piazza at the eastern end of the new City, stands, four-square, the Royal Exchange. Pierced only with small dark windows, and built of rough ashlars of the silvery Portland stone, the ground floor serves as a massy foundation for the huge pilasters that slide up, between base and capital, past three tiers of pedimented windows. Upon them rest the cornice, the attic and the balustrade, and on every pier of the balustrade a statue holds up its symbol against the sky. Four great portals, rich with allegory, admit to the courtyard with its double tier of coupled columns, its cloister and its gallery. The statue of Charles the Martyr rides triumphantly in the midst, and within the windows one guesses the great rooms, rich with heavy garlands of plaster, panelled with carved wood.

Ten streets give on to the Piazza, and at either end of its ellipse the water of sumptuous fountains ceaselessly blows aloft and falls. Commerce, in that to the north of the Exchange, holds up her cornucopia, and from the midst of its grapes and apples the master jet leaps up; from the teats of all the ten Useful Arts, grouped with their symbols about the central figure, there spouts a score of fine subsidiary streams. The dolphins, the sea-horses and the Tritons sport in the basin below. To the south, the ten principal cities of the Kingdom stand in a family round the Mother London, who pours from her urn an inexhaustible Thames.

Ranged round the Piazza are the Goldsmiths' Hall, the Office of Excise, the Mint, the Post Office. Their flanks are curved to the curve of the ellipse. Between pilasters, their windows look out on to the Exchange, and the sister statues on the balustrades beckon to one another across the intervening space.

Two master roads of ninety feet from wall to wall run westwards from the Exchange. New Gate ends the more northern vista with an Arch of Triumph, whose three openings are deep, shadowy and solemn as the entries of caverns. The Guildhall and the halls of the twelve City Companies in their livery of rose-red brick, with their lacings of white stone at the coigns and round the windows, lend to the street an air of domestic and comfortable splendour. And every two or three hundred paces the line of the houses is broken, and in the indentation of a square recess there rises, conspicuous

and insular, the fantastic tower of a parish church. Spire out of dome; octagon on octagon diminishing upwards; cylinder on cylinder; round lanterns, lanterns of many sides; towers with airy pinnacles; clusters of pillars linked by incurving cornices, and above them, four more clusters and above once more; square towers pierced with pointed windows; spires uplifted on flying buttresses; spires bulbous at the base — the multitude of them beckons, familiar and friendly, on the sky. From the other shore, or sliding along the quiet river, you see them all, you tell over their names; and the great dome swells up in the midst overtopping them all.

The dome of St. Paul's.

The other master street that goes westward from the Piazza of the Exchange slants down towards it. The houses are of brick, plain-faced and square, arcaded at the base, so that the shops stand back from the street and the pedestrian walks dry-shod under the harmonious succession of the vaultings. And there at the end of the street, at the base of a triangular space formed by the coming together of this with another master street that runs eastwards to Tower Hill, there stands the Cathedral. To the north of it is the Deanery and under the arcades are the booksellers' shops.

From St Paul's the main road slopes down under the swaggering Italianate arches of Ludgate, past the wide lime-planted boulevards that run north and south within and without the city wall, to the edge of the Fleet Ditch — widened now into a noble canal, on whose paved banks the barges unload their freights of country stuff — leaps it on a single flying arch to climb again to a round circus, a little to the east of Temple Bar, from which, in a pair of diagonally superimposed crosses, eight roads radiate: three northwards towards Holborn, three from the opposite arc towards the river, one eastward to the City, and one past Lincoln's Inn Fields to the west. The piazza is all of brick and the houses that compose it are continuous above the ground-floor level; for the roads lead out under archways. To one who stands in the centre at the foot of the obelisk that commemorates the victory over the Dutch, it seems a smooth well of brickwork pierced by eight arched conduits at the base and diversified above by the three tiers of plain, unornamented windows.

Who shall describe all the fountains in the open places, all the statues and monuments? In the circus north of London Bridge, where the four roads come together, stands a pyramid of nymphs and Tritons — river goddesses of Polyolbion, sea-gods of the island beaches — bathing in a ceaseless tumble of white water. And here the city griffon spouts from its beak, the royal lion from between its jaws. St George at the foot of the Cathedral rides down a dragon whose nostrils spout, not fire, but the clear water of the New River. In front of the India House, four elephants of black marble, endorsed with towers of white, blow through their upturned trunks the copious symbol of Eastern wealth. In the gardens of the Tower sits Charles the Second, enthroned among a troop of Muses, Cardinal Virtues, Graces and Hours. The tower of the Customs-House is a pharos. A great water-gate, the symbol of naval triumph, spans the Fleet at its junction with the Thames. The river is embanked from Blackfriars to the Tower, and

at every twenty paces a grave stone angel looks out from the piers of the balustrade across the water. ...

Gumbril Senior expounded his city with passion. He pointed to the model on the ground, he lifted his arms and turned up his eyes to suggest the size and splendour of his edifices. His hair blew wispily loose and fell into his eyes, and had to be brushed impatiently back again. He pulled at his beard; his spectacles flashed, as though they were living eyes. Looking at him, Gumbril Junior could imagine that he saw before him the passionate and gesticulating silhouette of one of those old shepherds who stand at the base of Piranesi's ruins demonstrating obscurely the prodigious grandeur and the abjection of the human race.

## Chapter XII

'YOU? IS IT you?' She seemed doubtful.

Gumbril nodded. 'It's me,' he reassured her. 'I've shaved; that's all.' He had left his beard in the top right-hand drawer of the chest of drawers, among the ties and the collars.

Emily looked at him judicially. 'I like you better without it,' she decided at last. 'You look nicer. Oh no, I don't mean to say you weren't nice before,' she hastened to add. 'But — you know — gentler—' She hesitated. 'It's a silly word,' she said, 'but there it is: sweeter.'

That was the unkindest cut of all. 'Milder and more melancholy?' he suggested.

'Well, if you like to put it like that,' Emily agreed.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips. 'I forgive you,' he said.

He could forgive her anything for the sake of those candid eyes, anything for the grave, serious mouth, anything for the short brown hair that curled — oh, but never seriously, never gravely — with such a hilarious extravagance round her head. He had met her, or rather the Complete Man, flushed with his commercial triumphs as he returned from his victory over Mr Boldero, had met her at the National Gallery. 'Old Masters, young mistresses'; Coleman had recommended the National Gallery. He was walking up the Venetian Room, feeling as full of swaggering vitality as the largest composition of Veronese, when he heard, gigglingly whispered just behind him, his Open Sesame to new adventure, 'Beaver'. He spun round on his tracks and found himself face to face with two rather startled young women. He frowned ferociously: he demanded satisfaction for the impertinence. They were both, he noticed, of gratifyingly pleasing appearance and both extremely young. One of them, the elder it seemed, and the more charming, as he had decided from the first, of the two, was dreadfully taken aback; blushed to the eyes, stammered apologetically. But the other, who had obviously pronounced the word, only laughed. It was she who made easy the forming

of an acquaintance which ripened, half an hour later, over the tea-cups and to the strains of the most classy music on the fifth floor of Lyons' Strand Corner House.

Their names were Emily and Molly. Emily, it seemed, was married. It was Molly who let that out, and the other had been angry with her for what was evidently an indiscretion. The bald fact that Emily was married had at once been veiled with mysteries, surrounded and protected by silences; whenever the Complete Man asked a question about it, Emily did not answer and Molly only giggled. But if Emily was married and the elder of the two, Molly was decidedly the more knowledgeable about life; Mr Mercaptan would certainly have set her down as the more civilized. Emily didn't live in London; she didn't seem to live anywhere in particular. At the moment she was staying with Molly's family at Kew.

He had seen them the next day, and the day after, and the day after that; once at lunch, to desert them precipitately for his afternoon with Rosie; once at tea in Kew Gardens; once at dinner, with a theatre to follow and an extravagant taxi back to Kew at midnight. The tame decoy allays the fears of the shy wild birds; Molly, who was tame, who was frankly a flirting little wanton, had served the Complete Man as a decoy for the ensnaring of Emily. When Molly went away to stay with friends in the country, Emily was already inured and accustomed to the hunter's presence; she accepted the playful attitude of gallantry, which the Complete Man, at the invitation of Molly's rolling eyes and provocative giggle, had adopted from the first, as natural and belonging to the established order of things. With giggling Molly to give her a lead, she had gone in three days much further along the path of intimacy than, by herself, she would have advanced in ten times the number of meetings.

'It seems funny,' she had said the first time they met after Molly's departure, 'it seems funny to be seeing you without Molly.'

'It seemed funnier with Molly,' said the Complete Man. 'It wasn't Molly I wanted to see.'

'Molly's a very nice, dear girl,' she declared loyally. 'Besides, she's amusing and can talk. And I can't; I'm not a bit amusing.'

It wasn't difficult to retort to that sort of thing; but Emily didn't believe in compliments; oh, quite genuinely not.

He set out to make the exploration of her; and now that she was inured to him, no longer too frightened to let him approach, now, moreover, that he had abandoned the jocular insolences of the Complete Man in favour of a more native mildness, which he felt instinctively was more suitable in this particular case, she laid no difficulties in his way. She was lonely, and he seemed to understand everything so well; in the unknown country of her spirit and her history she was soon going eagerly before him as his guide.

She was an orphan. Her mother she hardly remembered. Her father had died of influenza when she was fifteen. One of his business friends used to come and see her at school, take her out for treats and give her chocolates. She used to call him Uncle Stanley. He was a leather merchant, fat and jolly with a rather red face, very white



teeth and a bald head that was beautifully shiny. When she was seventeen and a half he asked her to marry him, and she had said yes.

‘But why?’ Gumbрил asked. ‘Why on earth?’ he repeated.

‘He said he’d take me round the world; it was just when the war had come to an end. Round the world, you know; and I didn’t like school. I didn’t know anything about it and he was very nice to me; he was very pressing. I didn’t know what marriage meant.’

‘Didn’t know?’

She shook her head; it was quite true. ‘But not in the least.’

And she had been born within the twentieth century. It seemed a case for the textbooks of sexual psychology. ‘Mrs Emily X, born in 1901, was found to be in a state of perfect innocence and ignorance at the time of the Armistice, 11th November 1918,’ etc.

‘And so you married him?’

She had nodded.

‘And then?’

She had covered her face with her hands, she had shuddered. The amateur uncle, now professionally a husband, had come to claim his rights — drunk. She had fought him, she had eluded him, had run away and locked herself into another room. On the second night of her honeymoon he gave her a bruise on the forehead and a bite on the left breast which had gone on septically festering for weeks. On the fourth, more determined than ever, he seized her so violently by the throat, that a blood-vessel broke and she began coughing bright blood over the bedclothes. The amateur uncle had been reduced to send for a doctor and Emily had spent the next few weeks in a nursing home. That was four years ago; her husband had tried to induce her to come back, but Emily had refused. She had a little money of her own; she was able to refuse. The amateur uncle had consoled himself with other and more docile nieces.

‘And has nobody tried to make love to you since then?’ he asked.

‘Oh, lots of them have tried.’

‘And not succeeded?’

She shook her head. ‘I don’t like men,’ she said. ‘They’re hateful, most of them. They’re brutes.’

‘Anch’ io?’

‘What?’ she asked, puzzled.

‘Am I a brute too?’ And behind his beard, suddenly, he felt rather a brute.

‘No,’ said Emily, after a little hesitation, ‘you’re different. At least I think you are; though sometimes,’ she added candidly, ‘sometimes you do and say things which make me wonder if you really are different.’

The Complete Man laughed.

‘Don’t laugh like that,’ she said. ‘It’s rather stupid.’

‘You’re perfectly right,’ said Gumbрил. ‘It is.’

And how did she spend her time? He continued the exploration.

Well, she read a lot of books; but most of the novels she got from Boots' seemed to her rather silly.

'Too much about the same thing. Always love.'

The Complete Man gave a shrug. 'Such is life.'

'Well, it oughtn't to be,' said Emily.

And then, when she was in the country — and she was often in the country, taking lodgings here and there in little villages, weeks and months at a time — she went for long walks. Molly couldn't understand why she liked the country; but she did. She was very fond of flowers. She liked them more than people, she thought.

'I wish I could paint,' she said. 'If I could, I'd be happy for ever, just painting flowers. But I can't paint.' She shook her head. 'I've tried so often. Such dirty, ugly smudges come out on the paper; and it's all so lovely in my head, so lovely out in the fields.'

Gumbril began talking with erudition about the flora of West Surrey: where you could find butterfly orchis and green man and the bee, the wood where there was actually wild columbine growing, the best localities for butcher's broom, the outcrops of clay where you get wild daffodils. All this odd knowledge came spouting up into his mind from some underground source of memory. Flowers — he never thought about flowers nowadays from one year's end to the other. But his mother had liked flowers. Every spring and summer they used to go down to stay at their cottage in the country. All their walks, all their drives in the governess cart had been hunts after flowers. And naturally the child had hunted with all his mother's ardour. He had kept books of pressed flowers, he had mummified them in hot sand, he had drawn maps of the country and coloured them elaborately with different coloured inks to show where the different flowers grew. How long ago all that was! Horribly long ago! Many seeds had fallen in the stony places of his spirit, to spring luxuriantly up into stalky plants and wither again because they had no deepness of earth; many had been sown there and had died, since his mother scattered the seeds of the wild flowers.

'And if you want sundew,' he wound up, 'you'll find it in the Punch Bowl, under Hindhead. Or round about Frensham. The Little Pond, you know, not the Big.'

'But you know all about them,' Emily exclaimed in delight. 'I'm ashamed of my poor little knowledge. And you must really love them as much as I do.'

Gumbril did not deny it; they were linked henceforth by a chain of flowers.

But what else did she do?

Oh, of course she played the piano a great deal. Very badly; but at any rate it gave her pleasure. Beethoven: she liked Beethoven best. More or less, she knew all the sonatas, though she could never keep up anything like the right speed in the difficult parts.

Gumbril had again shown himself wonderfully at home. 'Aha!' he said. 'I bet you can't shake that low B in the last variation but one of O so that it doesn't sound ridiculous.'

And of course she couldn't, and of course she was glad that he knew all about it and how impossible it was.

In the cab, as they drove back to Kew that evening, the Complete Man had decided it was time to do something decisive. The parting kiss — more of a playful sonorous buss than a serious embracement — that was already in the protocol, as signed and sealed before her departure by giggling Molly. It was time, the Complete Man considered, that this salute should take on a character less formal and less playful. One, two, three and, decisively, as they passed through Hammersmith Broadway, he risked the gesture. Emily burst into tears. He was not prepared for that, though perhaps he should have been. It was only by imploring, only by almost weeping himself, that Gumbriel persuaded her to revoke her decision never, never to see him again.

‘I had thought you were different,’ she sobbed. ‘And now, now—’

‘Please, please,’ he entreated. He was on the point of tearing off his beard and confessing everything there and then. But that, on second thoughts, would probably only make things worse.

‘Please, I promise.’

In the end, she had consented to see him once again, provisionally, in Kew Gardens, on the following day. They were to meet at the little temple that stands on the hillock above the valley of the heathers.

And now, duly, they had met. The Complete Man had been left at home in the top right-hand drawer, along with the ties and collars. She would prefer, he guessed, the Mild and Melancholy one; he was quite right. She had thought him ‘sweeter’ at a first glimpse.

‘I forgive you,’ he said, and kissed her hand. ‘I forgive you.’

Hand in hand they walked down towards the valley of the heaths.

‘I don’t know why you should be forgiving me,’ she said, laughing. ‘It seems to me that I ought to be doing the forgiving. After yesterday.’ She shook her head at him. ‘You made me so wretched.’

‘Ah, but you’ve already done your forgiving.’

‘You seem to take it very much for granted,’ said Emily. ‘Don’t be too sure.’

‘But I am sure,’ said Gumbriel. ‘I can see—’

Emily laughed again. ‘I feel happy,’ she declared.

‘So do I.’

‘How green the grass is!’

Green, green — after these long damp months it glowed in the sunlight, as though it were lighted from inside.

‘And the trees!’

The pale, high, clot-polled trees of the English spring; the dark, symmetrical pine trees, islanded here and there on the lawns, each with its own separate profile against the sky and its own shadow, impenetrably dark or freckled with moving lights, on the grass at its feet.

They walked on in silence. Gumbriel took off his hat, breathed the soft air that smelt of the greenness of the garden.

‘There are quiet places also in the mind,’ he said meditatively. ‘But we build bandstands and factories on them. Deliberately — to put a stop to the quietness. We don’t like the quietness. All the thoughts, all the preoccupations in my head — round and round, continually.’ He made a circular motion with his hand. ‘And the jazz bands, the music-hall songs, the boys shouting the news. What’s it for? what’s it all for? To put an end to the quiet, to break it up and disperse it, to pretend at any cost it isn’t there. Ah, but it is; it is there, in spite of everything, at the back of everything. Lying awake at night, sometimes — not restlessly, but serenely, waiting for sleep — the quiet re-establishes itself, piece by piece; all the broken bits, all the fragments of it we’ve been so busily dispersing all day long. It re-establishes itself, an inward quiet, like this outward quiet of grass and trees. It fills one, it grows — a crystal quiet, a growing, expanding crystal. It grows, it becomes more perfect; it is beautiful and terrifying, yes, terrifying as well as beautiful. For one’s alone in the crystal and there’s no support from outside, there’s nothing external and important, nothing external and trivial to pull oneself up by or to stand on, superiorly, contemptuously, so that one can look down. There’s nothing to laugh at or feel enthusiastic about. But the quiet grows and grows. Beautifully and unbearably. And at last you are conscious of something approaching; it is almost a faint sound of footsteps. Something inexpressibly lovely and wonderful advances through the crystal, nearer, nearer. And, oh, inexpressibly terrifying. For if it were to touch you, if it were to seize and engulf you, you’d die; all the regular, habitual, daily part of you would die. There would be an end of bandstands and whizzing factories, and one would have to begin living arduously in the quiet, arduously in some strange, unheard-of manner. Nearer, nearer come the steps; but one can’t face the advancing thing. One daren’t. It’s too terrifying, it’s too painful to die. Quickly, before it is too late, start the factory wheels, bang the drum, blow up the saxophone. Think of the women you’d like to sleep with, the schemes for making money, the gossip about your friends, the last outrage of the politicians. Anything for a diversion. Break the silence, smash the crystal to pieces. There, it lies in bits; it is easily broken, hard to build up and easy to break. And the steps? Ah, those have taken themselves off, double quick. Double quick, they were gone at the first flawing of the crystal. And by this time the lovely and terrifying thing is three infinities away, at least. And you lie tranquilly on your bed, thinking of what you’d do if you had ten thousand pounds, and of all the fornications you’ll never commit.’ He thought of Rosie’s pink underclothes.

‘You make things very complicated,’ she said, after a silence.

Gumbril spread out his great-coat on a green bank and they sat down. Leaning back, his hands under his head, he watched her sitting there beside him. She had taken off her hat; there was a stir of wind in those childish curls, and at the nape, at the temples, where the hair had sleaved out thin and fine, the sunlight made little misty haloes of gold. Her hands clasped round her knees, she sat quite still, looking out across the green expanses, at the trees, at the white clouds on the horizon. There was quiet in her mind, he thought. She was native to that crystal world; for her, the steps came

comfortingly through the silence and the lovely thing brought with it no terrors. It was all so easy for her and simple.

Ah, so simple, so simple; like the Hire Purchase System on which Rosie had bought her pink bed. And how simple it was, too, to puddle clear waters and unpetal every flower! — every wild flower, by God! one ever passed in a governess cart at the heels of a barrel-bellied pony. How simple to spit on the floors of churches! *Si prega di non sputare*. Simple to kick one's legs and enjoy oneself — dutifully — in pink underclothing. Perfectly simple.

'It's like the Arietta, don't you think?' said Emily suddenly, 'the Arietta of O.' And she hummed the first bars of the air. 'Don't you feel it's like that?'

'What's like that?'

'Everything,' said Emily. 'To-day, I mean. You and me. These gardens—' And she went on humming.

Gumbril shook his head. 'Too simple for me,' he said.

Emily laughed. 'Ah, but then think how impossible it gets a little farther on.' She agitated her fingers wildly, as though she were trying to play the impossible passages. 'It begins easily for the sake of poor imbeciles like me; but it goes on, it goes on, more and more fully and subtly and abstrusely and embracingly. But it's still the same movement.'

The shadows stretched farther and farther across the lawns, and as the sun declined the level light picked out among the grasses innumerable stipplings of shadow; and in the paths, that had seemed under the more perpendicular rays as level as a table, a thousand little shadowy depressions and sun-touched mountains were now apparent. Gumbril looked at his watch.

'Good Lord!' he said, 'we must fly.' He jumped up. 'Quick, quick!'

'But why?'

'We shall be late.' He wouldn't tell her for what. 'Wait and see' was all that Emily could get out of him by her questioning. They hurried out of the gardens, and in spite of her protests he insisted on taking a taxi into town. 'I have such a lot of unearned increment to get rid of,' he explained. The Patent Small-Clothes seemed at the moment remoter than the farthest stars.

## Chapter XIII

IN SPITE OF the taxi, in spite of the gobbled dinner, they were late. The concert had begun.

'Never mind,' said Gumbril. 'We shall get in in time for the minuetto. It's then that the fun really begins.'

'Sour grapes,' said Emily, putting her ear to the door. 'It sounds to me simply too lovely.'

They stood outside, like beggars waiting abjectly at the doors of a banqueting-hall — stood and listened to the snatches of music that came out tantalizingly from within. A rattle of clapping announced at last that the first movement was over; the doors were thrown open. Hungrily they rushed in. The Sclopis Quartet and a subsidiary viola were bowing from the platform. There was a chirrup of tuning, then preliminary silence. Sclopis nodded and moved his bow. The minuetto of Mozart's G minor Quintet broke out, phrase after phrase, short and decisive, with every now and then a violent sforzando chord, startling in its harsh and sudden emphasis.

Minuetto — all civilization, Mr Mercaptan would have said, was implied in the delicious word, the delicate, pretty thing. Ladies and precious gentlemen, fresh from the wit and gallantry of Crebillon-haunted sofas, stepping gracefully to a pattern of airy notes. To this passion of one who cries out, to this obscure and angry argument with fate how would they, Gumbril wondered, how would they have tripped it?

How pure the passion, how unaffected, clear and without clot or pretension the unhappiness of that slow movement which followed! Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Pure and unsullied; pure and unmixed, unadulterated. 'Not passionate, thank God; only sensual and sentimental.' In the name of earwig. Amen. Pure, pure. Worshippers have tried to rape the statues of the gods; the statuary who made the images were generally to blame. And how deliciously, too, an artist can suffer! and, in the face of the whole Albert Hall, with what an effective gesture and grimace! But blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The instruments come together and part again. Long silver threads hang aerially over a murmur of waters; in the midst of muffled sobbing a cry. The fountains blow their architecture of slender pillars, and from basin to basin the waters fall; from basin to basin, and every fall makes somehow possible a higher leaping of the jet, and at the last fall the mounting column springs up into the sunlight, and from water the music has modulated up into a rainbow. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; they shall make God visible, too, to other eyes.

Blood beats in the ears. Beat, beat, beat. A slow drum in the darkness, beating in the ears of one who lies wakeful with fever, with the sickness of too much misery. It beats unceasingly, in the ears, in the mind itself. Body and mind are indivisible, and in the spirit blood painfully throbs. Sad thoughts droop through the mind. A small, pure light comes swaying down through the darkness, comes to rest, resigning itself to the obscurity of its misfortune. There is resignation, but blood still beats in the ears. Blood still painfully beats, though the mind has acquiesced. And then, suddenly, the mind exerts itself, throws off the fever of too much suffering and laughing, commands the body to dance. The introduction to the last movement comes to its suspended, throbbing close. There is an instant of expectation, and then, with a series of mounting trochees and a downward hurrying, step after tiny step, in triple time, the dance begins. Irrelevant, irreverent, out of key with all that has gone before. But man's greatest strength lies in his capacity for irrelevance. In the midst of pestilences, wars and famines, he builds cathedrals; and a slave, he can think the irrelevant and

unsuitable thoughts of a free man. The spirit is slave to fever and beating blood, at the mercy of an obscure and tyrannous misfortune. But irrelevantly, it elects to dance in triple measure — a mounting skip, a patter of descending feet.

The G minor Quintet is at an end; the applause rattles out loudly. Enthusiasts stand up and cry bravo. And the five men on the platform rise and bow their acknowledgments. Great Sclopis himself receives his share of the plaudits with a weary condescension; weary are his poached eyes, weary his disillusioned smile. It is only his due, he knows; but he has had so much clapping, so many lovely women. He has a Roman nose, a colossal brow and, though the tawny musical mane does much to conceal the fact, no back to his head. Garofalo, the second fiddle, is black, beady-eyed and pot-bellied. The convex reflections of the electroliers slide back and forth over his polished bald head, as he bends, again, again, in little military salutes. Peperkoek, two metres high, bows with a sinuous politeness. His face, his hair are all of the same greyish buff colour; he does not smile, his appearance is monolithic and grim. Not so exuberant Knoedler, who sweats and smiles and embraces his 'cello and lays his hand to his heart and bows almost to the ground as though all this hullabaloo were directed only at him. As for poor little Mr Jenkins, the subsidiary viola, he has slid away into the background, and feeling that this is really the Sclopis's show and that he, a mere intruder, has no right to any of these demonstrations, he hardly bows at all, but only smiles, vaguely and nervously, and from time to time makes a little spasmodic twitch to show that he isn't really ungrateful or haughty, as you might think, but that he feels in the circumstances — the position is a little embarrassing — it is hard to explain. ...

'Strange,' said Gumbriel, 'to think that those ridiculous creatures could have produced what we've just been hearing.'

The poached eye of Sclopis lighted on Emily, flushed and ardently applauding. He gave her, all to herself, a weary smile. He would have a letter, he guessed, to-morrow morning signed 'Your little Admirer in the Third Row'. She looked a choice little piece. He smiled again to encourage her. Emily, alas! had not even noticed. She was applauding the music.

'Did you enjoy it?' he asked, as they stepped out into a deserted Bond Street.

'Did I ... ?' Emily laughed expressively. 'No, I didn't enjoy,' she said. 'Enjoy isn't the word. You enjoy eating ices. It made me happy. It's unhappy music, but it made me happy.'

Gumbriel hailed a cab and gave the address of his rooms in Great Russell Street. 'Happy,' he repeated, as they sat there side by side in the darkness. He, too, was happy.

'Where are we going?' she asked.

'To my rooms,' said Gumbriel, 'we shall be quiet there.' He was afraid she might object to going there — after yesterday. But she made no comment.

'Some people think that it's only possible to be happy if one makes a noise,' she said, after a pause. 'I find it's too delicate and melancholy for noise. Being happy is

rather melancholy — like the most beautiful landscape, like those trees and the grass and the clouds and the sunshine to-day.'

'From the outside,' said Gumbriel, 'it even looks rather dull.' They stumbled up the dark staircase to his rooms. Gumbriel lit a pair of candles and put the kettle on the gas ring. They sat together on the divan sipping tea. In the rich, soft light of the candles she looked different, more beautiful. The silk of her dress seemed wonderfully rich and glossy, like the petals of a tulip, and on her face, on her bare arms and neck the light seemed to spread an impalpable bright bloom. On the wall behind them, their shadows ran up towards the ceiling, enormous and profoundly black.

'How unreal it is,' Gumbriel whispered. 'Not true. This remote secret room. These lights and shadows out of another time. And you out of nowhere and I, out of a past utterly remote from yours, sitting together here, together — and being happy. That's the strangest thing of all. Being quite senselessly happy. It's unreal, unreal.'

'But why,' said Emily, 'why? It's here and happening now. It is real.'

'It all might vanish, at any moment,' he said.

Emily smiled rather sadly. 'It'll vanish in due time,' she said. 'Quite naturally, not by magic; it'll vanish the way everything else vanishes and changes. But it's here now.'

They gave themselves up to the enchantment. The candles burned, two shining eyes of flame, without a wink, minute after minute. But for them there were no longer any minutes. Emily leaned against him, her body held in the crook of his arm, her head resting on his shoulder. He caressed his cheek against her hair; sometimes, very gently, he kissed her forehead or her closed eyes.

'If I had known you years ago ...' she sighed. 'But I was a silly little idiot then. I shouldn't have noticed any difference between you and anybody else.'

'I shall be very jealous,' Emily spoke again after another timeless silence. 'There must never be anybody else, never the shadow of anybody else.'

'There never will be anybody else,' said Gumbriel.

Emily smiled and opened her eyes, looked up at him. 'Ah, not here,' she said, 'not in this real unreal room. Not during this eternity. But there will be other rooms just as real as this.'

'Not so real, not so real.' He bent his face towards hers. She closed her eyes again, and the lids fluttered with a sudden tremulous movement at the touch of his light kiss.

For them there were no more minutes. But time passed, time passed flowing in a dark stream, stanchlessly, as though from some profound mysterious wound in the world's side, bleeding, bleeding for ever. One of the candles had burned down to the socket and the long, smoky flame wavered unsteadily. The flickering light troubled their eyes; the shadows twitched and stirred uneasily. Emily looked up at him.

'What's the time?' she said.

Gumbriel looked at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. 'Too late for you to get back,' he said.



‘Too late?’ Emily sat up. Ah, the enchantment was breaking, was giving way, like a film of ice beneath a weight, like a web before a thrust of the wind. They looked at one another. ‘What shall I do?’ she asked.

‘You could sleep here,’ Gumbril answered in a voice that came from a long way away.

She sat for a long time in silence, looking through half-closed eyes at the expiring candle flame. Gumbril watched her in an agony of suspense. Was the ice to be broken, the web-work finally and for ever torn? The enchantment could still be prolonged, the eternity renewed. He felt his heart beating in his breast; he held his breath. It would be terrible if she were to go now, it would be a kind of death. The flame of the candle flickered more violently, leaping up in a thin, long, smoky flare, sinking again almost to darkness. Emily got up and blew out the candle. The other still burned calmly and steadily.

‘May I stay?’ she asked. ‘Will you allow me?’

He understood the meaning of her question, and nodded. ‘Of course,’ he said.

‘Of course? Is it as much of course as all that?’

‘When I say so.’ He smiled at her. The eternity had been renewed, the enchantment prolonged. There was no need to think of anything now but the moment. The past was forgotten, the future abolished. There was only this secret room and the candle-light and the unreal, impossible happiness of being two. Now that this peril of a disenchantment had been averted, it would last for ever. He got up from the couch, crossed the room, he took her hands and kissed them.

‘Shall we sleep now?’ she asked.

Gumbril nodded.

‘Do you mind if I blow out the light?’ And without waiting for his answer, Emily turned, gave a puff, and the room was in darkness. He heard the rustling of her undressing. Hastily he stripped off his own clothes, pulled back the coverlet from the divan. The bed was made and ready; he opened it and slipped between the sheets. A dim greenish light from the gas lamp in the street below came up between the parted curtains illuminating faintly the farther end of the room. Against this tempered darkness he could see her, silhouetted, standing quite still, as if hesitating on some invisible brink.

‘Emily,’ he whispered.

‘I’m coming,’ Emily answered. She stood there, unmoving, a few seconds longer, then overstepped the brink. She came silently across the room, and sat down on the edge of the low couch. Gumbril lay perfectly still, without speaking, waiting in the enchanted timeless darkness. Emily lifted her knees, slid her feet in under the sheet, then stretched herself out beside him, her body, in the narrow bed, touching his. Gumbril felt that she was trembling; trembling, a sharp involuntary start, a little shudder, another start.

‘You’re cold,’ he said, and slipping one arm beneath her shoulders he drew her, limp and unresisting, towards him. She lay there, pressed against him. Gradually the trembling ceased. Quite still, quite still in the calm of the enchantment. The past is

forgotten, the future abolished; there is only this dark and everlasting moment. A drugged and intoxicated stupor of happiness possessed his spirit; a numbness, warm and delicious, lay upon him. And yet through the stupor he knew with a dreadful anxious certainty that the end would soon be there. Like a man on the night before his execution, he looked forward through the endless present; he foresaw the end of his eternity. And after? Everything was uncertain and unsafe.

Very gently, he began caressing her shoulder, her long slender arm, drawing his finger-tips lightly and slowly over her smooth skin; slowly from her neck, over her shoulder, lingeringly round the elbow to her hand. Again, again: he was learning her arm. The form of it was part of the knowledge, now, of his finger-tips; his fingers knew it as they knew a piece of music, as they knew Mozart's Twelfth Sonata, for example. And the themes that crowd so quickly one after another at the beginning of the first movement played themselves aerially, glitteringly in his mind; they became a part of the enchantment.

Through the silk of her shift he learned her curving side, her smooth straight back and the ridge of her spine. He stretched down, touched her feet, her knees. Under the smock he learned her warm body, lightly, slowly caressing. He knew her, his fingers, he felt, could build her up, a warm and curving statue in the darkness. He did not desire her; to desire would have been to break the enchantment. He let himself sink deeper and deeper into his dark stupor of happiness. She was asleep in his arms; and soon he too was asleep.

## Chapter XIV

MRS VIVEASH DESCENDED the steps into King Street, and standing there on the pavement looked dubiously first to the right and then to the left. Little and loud, the taxis rolled by on their white wheels, the long-snouted limousines passed with a sigh. The air smelt of watered dust, tempered in Mrs Viveash's immediate neighbourhood by those memories of Italian jasmines which were her perfume. On the opposite pavement, in the shade, two young men, looking very conscious of their grey top-hats, marched gravely along.

Life, Mrs Viveash thought, looked a little dim this morning, in spite of the fine weather. She glanced at her watch; it was one o'clock. Soon one would have to eat some lunch. But where, and with whom? Mrs Viveash had no engagements. All the world was before her, she was absolutely free, all day long. Yesterday, when she declined all those pressing invitations, the prospect had seemed delightful. Liberty, no complications, no contacts; a pre-Adamite empty world to do what she liked in.

But to-day, when it came to the point, she hated her liberty. To come out like this at one o'clock into a vacuum — it was absurd, it was appalling. The prospect of immeasurable boredom opened before her. Steppes after steppes of ennui, horizon

beyond horizon, for ever the same. She looked again to the right and again to the left. Finally she decided to go to the left. Slowly, walking along her private knife-edge between her personal abysses, she walked towards the left. She remembered suddenly one shining day like this in the summer of 1917, when she had walked along this same street, slowly, like this, on the sunny side, with Tony Lamb. All that day, that night, it had been one long good-bye. He was going back the next morning. Less than a week later he was dead. Never again, never again: there had been a time when she could make herself cry, simply by saying those two words once or twice, under her breath. Never again, never again. She repeated them softly now. But she felt no tears behind her eyes. Grief doesn't kill, love doesn't kill; but time kills everything, kills desire, kills sorrow, kills in the end the mind that feels them; wrinkles and softens the body while it still lives, rots it like a medlar, kills it too at last. Never again, never again. Instead of crying, she laughed, laughed aloud. The pigeon-breasted old gentleman who had just passed her, twirling between his finger and thumb the ends of a white military moustache, turned round startled. Could she be laughing at him?

'Never again,' murmured Mrs Viveash.

'I beg your pardon?' queried the martial gentleman, in a rich, port-winey, cigary voice.

Mrs Viveash looked at him with such wide-eyed astonishment that the old gentleman was quite taken aback. 'A thousand apologies, dear lady. Thought you were addressing ... H'm, ah'm.' He replaced his hat, squared his shoulders and went off smartly, left, right, bearing preciously before him his pigeon breast. Poor thing, he thought, poor young thing. Talking to herself. Must be cracked, must be off her head. Or perhaps she took drugs. That was more likely: that was much more likely. Most of them did nowadays. Vicious young women. Lesbians, drug-fiends, nymphomaniacs, dipsos — thoroughly vicious, nowadays, thoroughly vicious. He arrived at his club in an excellent temper.

Never again, never, never again. Mrs Viveash would have liked to be able to cry.

St James's Square opened before her. Romantically under its trees the statue pranced. The trees gave her an idea: she might go down into the country for the afternoon, take a cab and drive out, out, goodness only knew where! To the top of a hill somewhere. Box Hill, Leith Hill, Holmbury Hill, Ivinghoe Beacon — any hill where one could sit and look out over plains. One might do worse than that with one's liberty.

But not much worse, she reflected.

Mrs Viveash had turned up towards the northern side of the square and was almost at its north-western corner when, with a thrill of genuine delight, with a sense of the most profound relief she saw a familiar figure, running down the steps of the London Library.

'Theodore!' she hallooed faintly but penetratingly, from her inward death-bed. 'Gumbrill!' She waved her parasol.

Gumbril halted, looked around, came smiling to meet her. 'How delightful,' he said, 'but how unfortunate.'

'Why unfortunate?' asked Mrs Viveash. 'Am I of evil omen?'

'Unfortunate,' Gumbril explained, 'because I've got to catch a train and can't profit by this meeting.'

'Ah no, Theodore,' said Mrs Viveash, 'you're not going to catch a train. You're going to come and lunch with me. Providence has decreed it. You can't say no to Providence.'

'I must,' Gumbril shook his head. 'I've said yes to somebody else.'

'To whom?'

'Ah!' said Gumbril, with a coy and saucy mysteriousness.

'And where are you going in your famous train?'

'Ah again,' Gumbril answered.

'How intolerably tiresome and silly you are!' Mrs Viveash declared. 'One would think you were a sixteen-year-old schoolboy going out for his first assignation with a shop girl. At your age, Gumbril!' She shook her head, smiled agonizingly and with contempt. 'Who is she? What sordid pick-up?'

'Not sordid in the least,' protested Gumbril.

'But decidedly a pick-up. Eh?' A banana-skin was lying, like a bedraggled starfish, in the gutter, just in front of where they were standing. Mrs Viveash stepped forward and with the point of her parasol lifted it carefully up and offered it to her companion.

'Merci,' Gumbril bowed.

She tossed the skin back again into the gutter. 'In any case,' she said, 'the young lady can wait while we have luncheon.'

Gumbril shook his head. 'I've made the arrangement,' he said. Emily's letter was in his pocket. She had taken the loveliest cottage just out of Robertsbridge, in Sussex. Ah, but the loveliest imaginable. For the whole summer. He could come and see her there. He had telegraphed that he would come to-day, this afternoon, by the two o'clock from Charing Cross.

Mrs Viveash took him by the elbow. 'Come along,' she said. 'There's a post office in that passage going from Jermyn Street to Piccadilly. You can wire from there your infinite regrets. These things always improve with a little keeping. There will be raptures when you do go to-morrow.'

Gumbril allowed himself to be led along. 'What an insufferable woman you are,' he said, laughing.

'Instead of being grateful to me for asking you to luncheon!'

'Oh, I am grateful,' said Gumbril. 'And astonished.'

He looked at her. Mrs Viveash smiled and fixed him for a moment with her pale, untroubled eyes. ... She said nothing.

'Still,' Gumbril went on, 'I must be at Charing Cross by two, you know.'

'But we're lunching at Verrey's.'

Gumbril shook his head.

They were at the corner of Jermyn Street. Mrs Viveash halted and delivered her ultimatum, the more impressive for being spoken in that expiring voice of one who says in articulo the final and supremely important things. 'We lunch at Verrey's, Theodore, or I shall never, never speak to you again.'

'But be reasonable, Myra,' he implored. If only he'd told her that he had a business appointment. ... Imbecile, to have dropped those stupid hints — in that tone!

'I prefer not to be,' said Mrs Viveash.

Gumbril made a gesture of despair and was silent. He thought of Emily in her native quiet among the flowers; in a cottage altogether too cottagey, with honeysuckles and red ramblers and hollyhocks — though, on second thoughts, none of them would be blooming yet, would they? — happily, in white muslin, extracting from the cottage piano the easier sections of the Arietta. A little absurd, perhaps, when you considered her like that; but exquisite, but adorable, but pure of heart and flawless in her bright pellucid integrity, complete as a crystal in its faceted perfection. She would be waiting for him, expecting him; and they would walk through the twiddly lanes — or perhaps there would be a governess cart for hire, with a fat pony like a tub on legs to pull it — they would look for flowers in the woods and perhaps he would still remember what sort of noise a whitethroat makes; or even if he didn't remember, he could always magisterially say he did. 'That's a whitethroat, Emily. Do you hear? The one that goes "Tweedly, weedly, weedledy dee".'

'I'm waiting,' said Mrs Viveash. 'Patiently, however.'

Gumbril looked at her and found her smiling like a tragic mask. After all, he reflected, Emily would still be there if he went down to-morrow. It would be stupid to quarrel with Myra about something that was really, when he came to think of it, not of enormous importance. It was stupid to quarrel with any one about anything; and with Myra and about this, particularly so. In this white dress patterned with flowing arabesques of black she looked, he thought, more than ever enchanting. There had been times in the past. ... The past leads on to the present. ... No; but in any case she was excellent company.

'Well,' he said, sighing decisively, 'let's go and send my wire.'

Mrs Viveash made no comment, and traversing Jermyn Street they walked up the narrow passage under the lee of Wren's bald barn of St James's, to the post office.

'I shall pretext a catastrophe,' said Gumbril, as they entered; and going to the telegraph desk he wrote: 'Slight accident on way to station not serious at all but a little indisposed come same train to-morrow.' He addressed the form and handed it in.

'A little what?' asked the young lady behind the bars, as she read it through, prodding each successive word with the tip of her blunt pencil.

'A little indisposed,' said Gumbril, and he felt suddenly very much ashamed of himself. 'A little indisposed,' — no, really, that was too much. He'd withdraw the telegram, he'd go after all.

'Ready?' asked Mrs Viveash, coming up from the other end of the counter where she had been buying stamps.

Gumbril pushed a florin under the bars.

‘A little indisposed,’ he said, hooting with laughter, and he walked towards the door leaning heavily on his stick and limping. ‘Slight accident,’ he explained.

‘What is the meaning of this clownery?’ Mrs Viveash inquired.

‘What indeed?’ Gumbril had limped up to the door and stood there, holding it open for her. He was taking no responsibility for himself. It was the clown’s doing, and the clown, poor creature, was non compos, not entirely there, and couldn’t be called to account for his actions. He limped after her towards Piccadilly.

‘Giudicato guarabile in cinque giorni,’ Mrs Viveash laughed. ‘How charming that always is in the Italian papers. The fickle lady, the jealous lover, the stab, the colpo di rivoltella, the mere Anglo-Saxon black eye — all judged by the house surgeon at the Misericordia curable in five days. And you, my poor Gumbril, are you curable in five days?’

‘That depends,’ said Gumbril. ‘There may be complications.’

Mrs Viveash waved her parasol; a taxi came swerving to the pavement’s edge in front of them. ‘Meanwhile,’ she said, ‘you can’t be expected to walk.’

At Verrey’s they lunched off lobsters and white wine. ‘Fish suppers,’ Gumbril quoted jovially from the Restoration, ‘fish suppers will make a man hop like a flea.’ Through the whole meal he clowned away in the most inimitable style. The ghost of a governess cart rolled along the twiddly lanes of Robertsbridge. But one can refuse to accept responsibility; a clown cannot be held accountable. And besides, when the future and the past are abolished, when it is only the present instant, whether enchanted or unenchanted, that counts, when there are no causes or motives, no future consequences to be considered, how can there be responsibility, even for those who are not clowns? He drank a great deal of hock, and when the clock struck two and the train had begun to snort out of Charing Cross, he could not refrain from proposing the health of Viscount Lascelles. After that he began telling Mrs Viveash about his adventure as a Complete Man.

‘You should have seen me,’ he said, describing his beard.

‘I should have been bowled over.’

‘You shall see me, then,’ said Gumbril. ‘Ah, what a Don Giovanni. La ci darem la mano, La mi dirai di si, Vieni, non e lontano, Partiam, ben mio, da qui. And they came, they came. Without hesitation. No “vorrei e non vorrei”, no “mi trema un poco il cor.” Straight away.’

‘Felice, io so, sarei,’ Mrs Viveash sang very faintly under her breath, from a remote bed of agony.

Ah, happiness, happiness; a little dull, some one had wisely said, when you looked at it from outside. An affair of duets at the cottage piano, of collecting specimens, hand in hand, for the hortus siccus. A matter of integrity and quietness.

‘Ah, but the history of the young woman who was married four years ago,’ exclaimed Gumbril with clownish rapture, ‘and remains to this day a virgin — what an episode in my memoirs!’ In the enchanted darkness he had learned her young body. He looked

at his fingers; her beauty was a part of their knowledge. On the tablecloth he drummed out the first bars of the Twelfth Sonata of Mozart. 'And even after singing her duet with the Don,' he continued, 'she is still virgin. There are chaste pleasures, sublimated sensualities. More thrillingly voluptuous,' with the gesture of a restaurant-keeper who praises the speciality of the house, he blew a treacly kiss, 'than any of the grosser deliriums.'

'What is all this about?' asked Mrs Viveash.

Gumbril finished off his glass. 'I am talking esoterically,' he said, 'for my own pleasure, not yours.'

'But tell me more about the beard,' Mrs Viveash insisted. 'I liked the beard so much.'

'All right,' said Gumbril, 'let us try to be unworthy with coherence.'

They sat for a long time over their cigarettes; it was half past three before Mrs Viveash suggested they should go.

'Almost time,' she said, looking at her watch, 'to have tea. One damned meal after another. And never anything new to eat. And every year one gets bored with another of the old things. Lobster, for instance, how I used to adore lobster once! But to-day — well, really, it was only your conversation, Theodore, that made it tolerable.'

Gumbril put his hand to his heart and bowed. He felt suddenly extremely depressed.

'And wine: I used to think Orvieto so heavenly. But this spring, when I went to Italy, it was just a bad muddy sort of Vouvray. And those soft caramels they call Fiats; I used to eat those till I was sick. I was at the sick stage before I'd finished one of them, this time in Rome.' Mrs Viveash shook her head. 'Disillusion after disillusion.'

They walked down the dark passage into the street.

'We'll go home,' said Mrs Viveash. 'I really haven't the spirit to do anything else this afternoon.' To the commissionaire who opened the door of the cab she gave the address of her house in St James's.

'Will one ever recapture the old thrills?' she asked rather fatiguedly as they drove slowly through the traffic of Regent Street.

'Not by chasing after them,' said Gumbril, in whom the clown had quite evaporated. 'If one sat still enough they might perhaps come back of their own accord. ...' There would be the faint sound as it were of feet approaching through the quiet.

'It isn't only food,' said Mrs Viveash, who had closed her eyes and was leaning back in her corner.

'So I can well believe.'

'It's everything. Nothing's the same now. I feel it never will be.'

'Never more,' croaked Gumbril.

'Never again,' Mrs Viveash echoed. 'Never again.' There were still no tears behind her eyes. 'Did you ever know Tony Lamb?' she asked.

'No,' Gumbril answered from his corner. 'What about him?'

Mrs Viveash did not answer. What, indeed, about him? She thought of his very clear blue eyes and the fair, bright hair that had been lighter than his brown face.

Brown face and neck, red-brown hands; and all the rest of his skin was as white as milk. 'I was very fond of him,' she said at last. 'That's all. He was killed in 1917, just about this time of the year. It seems a very long time ago, don't you think?'

'Does it?' Gumbril shrugged his shoulders. 'I don't know. The past is abolished. Vivamus, mea Lesbia. If I weren't so horribly depressed, I'd embrace you. That would be some slight compensation for my' — he tapped his foot with the end of his walking-stick — 'my accident.'

'You're depressed too?'

'One should never drink at luncheon,' said Gumbril. 'It wrecks the afternoon. One should also never think of the past and never for one moment consider the future. These are treasures of ancient wisdom. But perhaps after a little tea—' He leaned forward to look at the figures on the taximeter, for the cab had come to a standstill — 'after a nip of the tannin stimulant' — he threw open the door — 'we may feel rather better.'

Mrs Viveash smiled excruciatingly. 'For me,' she said, as she stepped out on to the pavement, 'even tannin has lost its virtues now.'

Mrs Viveash's drawing-room was tastefully in the movement. The furniture was upholstered in fabrics designed by Dufy — racehorses and roses, little tennis players clustering in the midst of enormous flowers, printed in grey and ochre on a white ground. There were a couple of lamp-shades by Balla. On the pale rose-stippled walls hung three portraits of herself by three different and entirely incongruous painters, a selection of the usual oranges and lemons, and a rather forbidding contemporary nude painted in two tones of green.

'And how bored I am with this room and all these beastly pictures!' exclaimed Mrs Viveash as she entered. She took off her hat and, standing in front of the mirror above the mantelpiece, smoothed her coppery hair.

'You should take a cottage in the country,' said Gumbril, 'buy a pony and a governess cart and drive along the twiddly lanes looking for flowers. After tea you open the cottage piano,' and suiting his action to the words, Gumbril sat down at the long-tailed Blüthner, 'and you play, you play.' Very slowly and with parodied expressiveness he played the opening theme of the Arietta. 'You wouldn't be bored then,' he said, turning round to her, when he had finished.

'Ah, wouldn't I!' said Mrs Viveash. 'And with whom do you propose that I should share my cottage?'

'Any one you like,' said Gumbril. His fingers hung, as though meditating over the keys.

'But I don't like any one,' cried Mrs Viveash with a terrible vehemence from her death-bed. ... Ah, now it had been said, the truth. It sounded like a joke. Tony had been dead five years now. Those bright blue eyes — ah, never again. All rotted away to nothing.

'Then you should try,' said Gumbril, whose hands had begun to creep softly forward into the Twelfth Sonata. 'You should try.'



‘But I do try,’ said Mrs Viveash. Her elbows propped on the mantelpiece, her chin resting on her clasped hands, she was looking fixedly at her own image in the glass. Pale eyes looked unwaveringly into pale eyes. The red mouth and its reflection exchanged their smiles of pain. She had tried; it revolted her now to think how often she had tried; she had tried to like someone, any one, as much as Tony. She had tried to recapture, to re-evoke, to revivify. And there had never been anything, really, but a disgust. ‘I haven’t succeeded,’ she added, after a pause.

The music had shifted from F major to D minor; it mounted in leaping anapæsts to a suspended chord, ran down again, mounted once more, modulating to C minor, then, through a passage of trembling notes to A flat major, to the dominant of D flat, to the dominant of C, to C minor, and at last, to a new clear theme in the major.

‘Then I’m sorry for you,’ said Gumbriel, allowing his fingers to play on by themselves. He felt sorry, too, for the subjects of Mrs Viveash’s desperate experiments. She mightn’t have succeeded in liking them — for their part, poor devils, they in general only too agonizingly liked her. ... Only too ... He remembered the cold, damp spots on his pillow, in the darkness. Those hopeless, angry tears. ‘You nearly killed me once,’ he said.

‘Only time kills,’ said Mrs Viveash, still looking into her own pale eyes. ‘I have never made any one happy,’ she added, after a pause. ‘Never any one,’ she thought, except Tony, and Tony they had killed, shot him through the head. Even the bright eyes had rotted, like any other carrion. She too had been happy then. Never again.

A maid came in with the tea-things.

‘Ah, the tannin!’ exclaimed Gumbriel with enthusiasm, and broke off his playing. ‘The one hope of salvation.’ He poured out two cups, and picking up one of them he came over to the fireplace and stood behind her, sipping slowly at the pale brewage and looking over her shoulder at their two reflections in the mirror.

‘La ci darem,’ he hummed. ‘If only I had my beard!’ He stroked his chin and with the tip of his forefinger brushed up the drooping ends of his moustache. ‘You’d come trembling like Zerlina, in under its golden shadow.’

Mrs Viveash smiled. ‘I don’t ask for anything better,’ she said. ‘What more delightful part! Felice, io so, sarei: Batti, batti, o bel Mazetto. Enviabile Zerlina!’

The servant made another silent entry.

‘A gentleman,’ she said, ‘called Mr Shearwater would like—’

‘Tell him I’m not at home,’ said Mrs Viveash, without looking round.

There was a silence. With raised eyebrows Gumbriel looked over Mrs Viveash’s shoulder at her reflection. Her eyes were calm and without expression, she did not smile or frown. Gumbriel still questioningly looked. In the end he began to laugh.

## Chapter XV

THEY WERE PLAYING that latest novelty from across the water ‘What’s he to Hecuba?’ Sweet, sweet and piercing, the saxophone pierced into the very bowels of compassion and tenderness, pierced like a revelation from heaven, pierced like the angel’s treacly dart into the holy Teresa’s quivering and ecstasiated flank. More ripely and roundly, with a kindly and less agonizing voluptuousness, the ‘cello meditated those Mohammedan ecstasies that last, under the green palms of Paradise, six hundred inenarrable years apiece. Into this charged atmosphere the violin admitted refreshing draughts of fresh air, cool and thin like the breath from a still damp squirt. And the piano hammered and rattled away unmindful of the sensibilities of the other instruments, banged away all the time, reminding every one concerned, in a thoroughly business-like way, that this was a cabaret where people came to dance the fox-trot; not a baroque church for female saints to go into ecstasies in, not a mild, happy valley of tumbling hours.

At each recurrence of the refrain the four negroes of the orchestra, or at least the three of them who played with their hands alone — for the saxophonist always blew at this point with a redoubled sweetness, enriching the passage with a warbling contrapuntal soliloquy that fairly wrung the entrails and transported the pierced heart — broke into melancholy and drawling song:

‘What’s he to Hecuba?’

Nothing at all.

That’s why there’ll be no wedding on Wednesday week,

Way down in old Bengal.’

‘What unspeakable sadness,’ said Gumbriil, as he stepped, stepped through the intricacies of the trot. ‘Eternal passion, eternal pain. *Les chants désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux, Et j’en sais d’immortels qui sont de purs sanglots. Rum tiddle-um-tum, pom-pom. Amen. What’s he to Hecuba? Nothing at all. Nothing, mark you. Nothing, nothing.*’

‘Nothing,’ repeated Mrs Viveash. ‘I know all about that.’ She sighed.

‘I am nothing to you,’ said Gumbriil, gliding with skill between the wall and the Charybdis of a couple dangerously experimenting with a new step. ‘You are nothing to me. Thank God. And yet here we are, two bodies with but a single thought, a beast with two backs, a perfectly united centaur trotting, trotting.’ They trotted.

‘What’s he to Hecuba?’ The grinning blackamoors repeated the question, reiterated the answer on a tone of frightful unhappiness. The saxophone warbled on the verge of anguish. The couples revolved, marked time, stepped and stepped with an habitual precision, as though performing some ancient and profoundly significant rite. Some were in fancy dress, for this was a gala night at the cabaret. Young women disguised as callipygous Florentine pages, blue-breeched Gondoliers, black-breeched Toreadors circulated, moon-like, round the hall, clasped sometimes in the arms of Arabs, or white

clowns, or more often of untravestied partners. The faces reflected in the mirrors were the sort of faces one feels one ought to know by sight; the cabaret was 'Artistic'.

'What's he to Hecuba?'

Mrs Viveash murmured the response, almost piously, as though she were worshipping almighty and omnipresent Nil. 'I adore this tune,' she said, 'this divine tune.' It filled up a space, it moved, it jigged, it set things twitching in you, it occupied time, it gave you a sense of being alive. 'Divine tune, divine tune,' she repeated with emphasis, and she shut her eyes, trying to abandon herself, trying to float, trying to give Nil the slip.

'Ravishing little Toreador, that,' said Gumbriel, who had been following the black-breeched travesty with affectionate interest.

Mrs Viveash opened her eyes. Nil was unescapable. 'With Piers Cotton, you mean? Your tastes are a little common, my dear Theodore.'

'Green-eyed monster!'

Mrs Viveash laughed. 'When I was being "finished" in Paris,' she said, 'Mademoiselle always used to urge me to take fencing lessons. C'est un exercice très gracieux. Et puis,' Mrs Viveash mimicked a passionate earnestness, 'et puis, ça développe le bassin. Your Toreador, Gumbriel, looks as though she must be a champion with the foils. Quel bassin!'

'Hush,' said Gumbriel. They were abreast of the Toreador and her partner. Piers Cotton turned his long greyhound's nose in their direction.

'How are you?' he asked across the music.

They nodded. 'And you?'

'Ah, writing such a book,' cried Piers Cotton, 'such a brilliant, brilliant, flashing book.' The dance was carrying them apart. 'Like a smile of false teeth,' he shouted across the widening gulf, and disappeared in the crowd.

'What's he to Hecuba?' Lachrymously, the hilarious blackamoors chanted their question, mournfully pregnant with its foreknown reply.

Nil, omnipresent nil, world-soul, spiritual informer of all matter. Nil in the shape of a black-breeched moon-basined Toreador. Nil, the man with the greyhound's nose. Nil, as four blackamoors. Nil in the form of a divine tune. Nil, the faces, the faces one ought to know by sight, reflected in the mirrors of the hall. Nil this Gumbriel whose arm is round one's waist, whose feet step in and out among one's own. Nothing at all.

That's why there'll be no wedding. No wedding at St George's, Hanover Square, — oh, desperate experiment! — with Nil Viveash, that charming boy, that charming nothing at all, engaged at the moment in hunting elephants, hunting fever and carnivores among the Tikki-tikki pygmies. That's why there'll be no wedding on Wednesday week. For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime. For the light strawy hair (not a lock left), the brown face, the red-brown hands and the smooth boy's body, milk-white, milk-warm, are nothing at all, nothing, now, at all — nil these five years — and the shining blue eyes as much nil as the rest.

‘Always the same people,’ complained Mrs Viveash, looking round the room. ‘The old familiar faces. Never any one new. Where’s the younger generation, Gumbрил? We’re old, Theodore. There are millions younger than we are. Where are they?’

‘I’m not responsible for them,’ said Gumbрил. ‘I’m not even responsible for myself.’ He imagined a cottagey room, under a roof, with a window near the floor and a sloping ceiling where you were always bumping your head; and in the candle-light Emily’s candid eyes, her grave and happy mouth; in the darkness, the curve, under his fingers, of her firm body.

‘Why don’t they come and sing for their supper?’ Mrs Viveash went on petulantly. ‘It’s their business to amuse us.’

‘They’re probably thinking of amusing themselves,’ Gumbрил suggested.

‘Well, then, they should do it where we can see them.’

‘What’s he to Hecuba?’

‘Nothing at all,’ Gumbрил clownishly sang. The room, in the cottage, had nothing to do with him. He breathed Mrs Viveash’s memories of Italian jasmines, laid his cheek for a moment against her smooth hair. ‘Nothing at all.’ Happy clown!

Way down in old Bengal, under the green Paradisiac palms, among the ecstatic mystagogues and the saints who scream beneath the divine caresses, the music came to an end. The four negroes wiped their glistening faces. The couples fell apart. Gumbрил and Mrs Viveash sat down and smoked a cigarette.

## Chapter XVI

THE BLACKAMOORS HAD left the platform at the end of the hall. The curtains looped up at either side had slid down, cutting it off from the rest of the room—‘making two worlds,’ Gumbрил elegantly and allusively put it, ‘where only one grew before — and one of them a better world,’ he added too philosophically, ‘because unreal.’ There was the theatrical silence, the suspense. The curtains parted again.

On a narrow bed — on a bier perhaps — the corpse of a woman. The husband kneels beside it. At the foot stands the doctor, putting away his instruments. In a beribboned pink cradle reposes a monstrous baby.

The HusbandMargaret! Margaret! :

The DoctorShe is dead. :

The HusbandMargaret! :

The DoctorOf septicæmia, I tell you. :

The HusbandI wish that I too were dead! :

The DoctorBut you won’t to-morrow. :

The HusbandTo-morrow! But I don’t want to live to see : to-morrow.

The DoctorYou will to-morrow. :

The Husband Margaret! Margaret! Wait for me there; I shall : not fail to meet you in that hollow vale.

The Doctor You will not be slow to survive her. :

The Husband Christ have mercy upon us! :

The Doctor You would do better to think of the child. :

The Husband ( rising and standing menacingly over the cradle): Is that the monster?

The Doctor No worse than others. :

The Husband Begotten in a night of immaculate pleasure, : monster, may you live loveless, in dirt and impurity!

The Doctor Conceived in lust and darkness, may your own : impurity always seem heavenly, monster, in your own eyes!

The Husband Murderer, slowly the all your life long! :

The Doctor The child must be fed. :

The Husband Fed? With what? :

The Doctor With milk. :

The Husband Her milk is cold in her breasts. :

The Doctor There are still cows. :

The Husband Tubercular shorthorns. ( :Calling.) Let Short-i'-the-horn be brought!

Voices( off): Short-i'-the-horn! Short-i'-the-horn! (Fadingly.) Short-i'the ...

The Doctor In nineteen hundred and twenty-one, twenty-seven : thousand nine hundred and thirteen women died in childbirth.

The Husband But none of them belonged to my harem. :

The Doctor Each of them was somebody's wife. :

The Husband Doubtless. But the people we don't know are : only characters in the human comedy. We are the tragedians.

The Doctor Not in the spectator's eyes. :

The Husband Do I think of the spectators? Ah, Margaret! : Margaret! ...

The Doctor The twenty-seven thousand nine hundred and : fourteenth.

The Husband The only one! :

The Doctor But here comes the cow. :

(Short-i'-the-horn is led in by a Yokel.)

The Husband Ah, good Short-i'-the-horn! ( :He pats the animal.) She was tested last week, was she not?

The Yokel Ay, sir. :

The Husband And found tubercular. N :o?

The Yokel Even in the udders, may it please you. :

The Husband Excellent! Milk me the cow, sir, into this dirty : wash-pot.

The Yokel I will, sir. ( :He milks the cow.)

The Husband Her milk — her milk is cold already. All the : woman in her chilled and curdled within her breasts. Ah, Jesus! what miraculous galactagogue will make it flow again?

The Yokel The wash-pot is full, sir. :

The Husband Then take the cow away. :

The Yokel Come, Short-i'-the-horn; come up, good Short-i'-the-horn. : (He goes out with the cow.)

The Husband (pouring the milk into a long-tubed feeding-bottle): Here's for you, monster, to drink your own health in. (He gives the bottle to the child.)

Curtain.

'A little ponderous, perhaps,' said Gumbriel, as the curtain came down.

'But I liked the cow,' Mrs Viveash opened her cigarette-case and found it empty. Gumbriel offered her one of his. She shook her head. 'I don't want it in the least,' she said.

'Yes, the cow was in the best pantomime tradition,' Gumbriel agreed. Ah! but it was a long time since he had been to a Christmas pantomime. Not since Dan Leno's days. All the little cousins, the uncles and aunts on both sides of the family, dozens and dozens of them — every year they filled the best part of a row in the dress circle at Drury Lane. And buns were stickily passed from hand to hand, chocolates circulated; the grown-ups drank tea. And the pantomime went on and on, glory after glory, under the shining arch of the stage. Hours and hours; and the grown-ups always wanted to go away before the harlequinade. And the children felt sick from eating too much chocolate, or wanted with such extreme urgency to go to the W.C. that they had to be led out, trampling and stumbling over everybody else's feet — and every stumble making the need more agonizingly great — in the middle of the transformation scene. And there was Dan Leno, inimitable Dan Leno, dead now as poor Yorick, no more than a mere skull like anybody else's skull. And his mother, he remembered, used to laugh at him sometimes till the tears ran down her cheeks. She used to enjoy things thoroughly, with a whole heart.

'I wish they'd hurry up with the second scene,' said Mrs Viveash. 'If there's anything that bores me, it's entr'actes.'

'Most of one's life is an entr'acte,' said Gumbriel, whose present mood of hilarious depression seemed favourable to the enunciation of apophthegms.

'None of your cracker mottoes, please,' protested Mrs Viveash. All the same, she reflected, what was she doing now but waiting for the curtain to go up again, waiting, with what unspeakable weariness of spirit, for the curtain that had rung down, ten centuries ago, on those blue eyes, that bright strawy hair and the weathered face?

'Thank God,' she said with an expiring earnestness, 'here's the second scene!'

The curtain went up. In a bald room stood the Monster, grown now from an infant into a frail and bent young man with bandy legs. At the back of the stage a large window giving on to a street along which people pass.

The Monster [solus]: The young girls of Sparta, they say, used to wrestle naked with naked Spartan boys. The sun caressed their skins till they were brown and transparent like amber or a flask of olive oil. Their breasts were hard, their bellies flat. They were pure with the chastity of beautiful animals. Their thoughts were clear, their minds cool and untroubled. I spit blood into my handkerchief and sometimes I feel in my mouth

something slimy, soft and disgusting, like a slug — and I have coughed up a shred of my lung. The rickets from which I suffered in childhood have bent my bones and made them old and brittle. All my life I have lived in this huge town, whose domes and spires are wrapped in a cloud of stink that hides the sun. The slug-dank tatters of lung that I spit out are black with the soot I have been breathing all these years. I am now come of age. Long-expected one-and-twenty has made me a fully privileged citizen of this great realm of which the owners of the Daily Mirror, the News of the World and the Daily Express are noble peers. Somewhere, I must logically infer, there must be other cities, built by men for men to live in. Somewhere, in the past, in the future, a very long way off. ... But perhaps the only street improvement schemes that ever really improve the streets are schemes in the minds of those who live in them: schemes of love mostly. Ah! here she comes.

[The Young Lady enters. She stands outside the window, in the street, paying no attention to the Monster; she seems to be waiting for somebody.]

She is like a pear tree in flower. When she smiles, it is as though there were stars. Her hair is like the harvest in an eclogue, her cheeks are all the fruits of summer. Her arms and thighs are as beautiful as the soul of St Catherine of Siena. And her eyes, her eyes are plumbless with thought and limpidly pure like the water of the mountains.

The Young Lady If I wait till the summer sale, the : crêpe de Chine will be reduced by at least two shillings a yard, and on six camisoles that will mean a lot of money. But the question is: can I go from May till the end of July with the underclothing I have now?

The Monster If I knew her, I should know the universe! :

The Young Lady My present ones are so dreadfully middle-class. : And if Roger should ... by any chance. ...

The Monster Or, rather, I should be able to ignore it, having : a private universe of my own.

The Young Lady If — if he did — well, it might be rather : humiliating with these I have ... like a servant's almost. ...

The Monster Love makes you accept the world; it puts an end : to criticism.

The Young Lady His hand already ... :

The Monster Dare I, dare I tell her how beautiful she is? :

The Young Lady On the whole, I think I'd better get it now, : though it will cost more.

The Monster [desperately advancing to the window as though to assault a battery]: Beautiful! beautiful!

The Young Lady [looking at him]: Ha, ha, ha!

The Monster But I love you, flowering : pear tree; I love you, golden harvest; I love you, fruitage of summer; I love you, body and limbs, with the shape of a saint's thought.

The Young Lady [redoubles her laughter]: Ha, ha, ha!

The Monster[ taking her hand]: You cannot be cruel! [He is seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing which doubles him up, which shakes and torments him. The handkerchief he holds to his mouth is spotted with blood.]

The Young LadyYou disgust me! [ :She draws away her skirts so that they shall not come in contact with him.]

The MonsterBut I swear to you, I love — I — [ :He is once more interrupted by his cough.]

The Young LadyPlease go away. [ :In a different voice.] Ah, Roger! [She advances to meet a snub-nosed lubber with curly hair and a face like a groom's, who passes along the street at this moment.]

RogerI've got the motor-bike waiting at the corner. :

The Young LadyLet's go, then. :

Roger [pointing to the Monster]: What's that?

The Young LadyOh, it's nothing in particular. : [Both roar with laughter. Roger escorts her out, patting her familiarly on the back as they walk along.]

The Monster[ looking after her]: There is a wound under my left pap. She has deflowered all women. I cannot ...

'Lord!' whispered Mrs Viveash, 'how this young man bores me!'

'I confess,' replied Gumbril, 'I have rather a taste for moralities. There is a pleasant uplifting vagueness about these symbolical generalized figures which pleases me.'

'You were always charmingly simple-minded,' said Mrs Viveash. 'But who's this? As long as the young man isn't left alone on the stage, I don't mind.'

Another female figure has appeared in the street beyond the window. It is the Prostitute. Her face, painted in two tones of red, white, green, blue and black, is the most tasteful of nature-mortes.

The ProstituteHullo, duckie! :

The MonsterHullo! :

The ProstituteAre you lonely? :

The MonsterYes. :

The ProstituteWould you like me to come in to see : you?

The MonsterVery well. :

The ProstituteShall we say thirty bob? :

The MonsterAs you like. :

The ProstituteCome along then. :

[She climbs through the window and they go off together through the door on the left of the stage. The curtains descend for a moment, then rise again. The Monster and the Prostitute are seen issuing from the door at which they went out.]

The Monster[ taking out a cheque-book and a fountain-pen]: Thirty shillings ...

The ProstituteThank you. Not a cheque. I don't want any : cheques. How do I know it isn't a dud one that they'll refuse payment for at the bank? Ready money for me, thanks.

The MonsterBut I haven't got any cash on me at the moment. :



The ProstituteWell, I won't take a cheque. Once bitten, twice : shy, I can tell you.

The MonsterBut I tell you I haven't got any cash. :

The ProstituteWell, all I can say is, here I stay till I get : it. And, what's more, if I don't get it quick, I'll make a row.

The MonsterBut this is absurd. I offer you a perfectly good : cheque ...

The ProstituteAnd I won't take it. So there! :

The MonsterWell then, take my watch. It's worth more than : thirty bob. [He pulls out his gold half-hunter.]

The ProstituteThank you, and get myself arrested as soon I : take it to the pop-shop! No, I want cash, I tell you.

The MonsterBut where the devil do you expect me to get it : at this time of night?

The ProstituteI don't know. But you've got to get it pretty : quick.

The MonsterYou're unreasonable. :

The ProstituteAren't there any servants in this house? :

The MonsterYes. :

The ProstituteWell, go and borrow it from one of them. :

The MonsterBut really, that would be too low, too humiliating. :

The ProstituteAll right, I'll begin kicking up a noise. I'll go : to the window and yell till all the neighbours are woken up and the police come to see what's up. You can borrow it from the copper then.

The MonsterYou really won't take my cheque? I swear to : you it's perfectly all right. There's plenty of money to meet it.

The ProstituteOh, shut up! No more dilly-dallying. Get me : my money at once, or I'll start the row. One, two, three ... [She opens her mouth wide as if to yell.]

The MonsterAll right. [ :He goes out.]

The ProstituteNice state of things we're coming to, when : young rips try and swindle us poor girls out of our money! Mean, stinking skunks! I'd like to slit the throats of some of them.

The Monster[ coming back again]: Here you are. [He hands her money.]

The Prostitute[ examining it]: Thank you, dearie. Any other time you're lonely ...

The MonsterNo, no! :

The ProstituteWhere did you get it finally? :

The MonsterI woke the cook. :

The Prostitute[ goes off into a peal of laughter]: Well, so long, duckie. [She goes out.]

The Monster[ solus]: Somewhere there must be love like music. Love harmonious and ordered: two spirits, two bodies moving contrapuntally together. Somewhere, the stupid brutish act must be made to make sense, must be enriched, must be made significant. Lust, like Diabelli's waltz, a stupid air, turned by a genius into three-and-thirty fabulous variations. Somewhere ...

'Oh dear!' sighed Mrs Viveash.

'Charming!' Gumbriel protested.

... love like sheets of silky flame; like landscapes brilliant in the sunlight against a background of purple thunder; like the solution of a cosmic problem; like faith ...

‘Crikey!’ said Mrs Viveash.

... Somewhere, somewhere. But in my veins creep the maggots of the pox ...

‘Really, really!’ Mrs Viveash shook her head. ‘Too medical!’

... crawling towards the brain, crawling into the mouth, burrowing into the bones. Insatiably.

The Monster threw himself to the ground, and the curtain came down.

‘And about time too!’ declared Mrs Viveash.

‘Charming!’ Gumbriel stuck to his guns. ‘Charming! charming!’

There was a disturbance near the door. Mrs Viveash looked round to see what was happening. ‘And now on top of it all,’ she said, ‘here comes Coleman, raving, with an unknown drunk.’

‘Have we missed it?’ Coleman was shouting. ‘Have we missed all the lovely bloody farce?’

‘Lovely bloody!’ his companion repeated with drunken raptures, and he went into fits of uncontrollable laughter. He was a very young boy with straight dark hair and a face of Hellenic beauty, now distorted with tipsiness.

Coleman greeted his acquaintances in the hall, shouting a jovial obscenity to each. ‘And Gumbriel-Gumbriel,’ he exclaimed, catching sight of him at last in the front row. ‘And Hetaira-Myra!’ He pushed his way through the crowd, followed unsteadily by his young disciple. ‘So you’re here,’ he said, standing over them and looking down with an enigmatic malice in his bright blue eyes. ‘Where’s the physiologue?’

‘Am I the physiologue’s keeper?’ asked Gumbriel. ‘He’s with his glands and his hormones, I suppose. Not to mention his wife.’ He smiled to himself.

‘Where the hormones, there moan I,’ said Coleman, skidding off sideways along the slippery word. ‘I hear, by the way, that there’s a lovely prostitute in this play.’

‘You’ve missed her,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘What a misfortune,’ said Coleman. ‘We’ve missed the delicious trull,’ he said, turning to the young man.

The young man only laughed.

‘Let me introduce, by the way,’ said Coleman. ‘This is Dante,’ he pointed to the dark-haired boy; ‘and I am Virgil. We’re making a round tour — or, rather, a descending spiral tour of hell. But we’re only at the first circle so far. These, Alighieri, are two damned souls, though not, as you might suppose, Paolo and Francesca.’

The boy continued to laugh, happily and uncomprehendingly.

‘Another of these interminable entr’actes,’ complained Mrs Viveash. ‘I was just saying to Theodore here that if there’s one thing I dislike more than another, it’s a long entr’acte.’ Would hers ever come to an end?

‘And if there’s one thing I dislike more than another,’ said the boy, breaking silence for the first time, with an air of the greatest earnestness, ‘it’s ... it’s one thing more than another.’

‘And you’re perfectly right in doing so,’ said Coleman. ‘Perfectly right.’

‘I know,’ the boy replied modestly.

When the curtain rose again it was on an aged Monster, with a black patch over the left side of his nose, no hair, no teeth, and sitting harmlessly behind the bars of an asylum.

The MonsterAsses, apes and dogs! Milton called them that; : he should have known. Somewhere there must be men, however. The variations on Diabelli prove it. Brunelleschi’s dome is more than the magnification of Cléo de Mérode’s breast. Somewhere there are men with power, living reasonably. Like our mythical Greeks and Romans. Living cleanly. The images of the gods are their portraits. They walk under their own protection. [The Monster climbs on to a chair and stands in the posture of a statue.] Jupiter, father of gods, a man, I bless myself, I throw bolts at my own disobedience, I answer my own prayers, I pronounce oracles to satisfy the questions I myself propound. I abolish all tetter, poxes, blood-spitting, rotting of bones. With love I recreate the world from within. Europa puts an end to squalor, Leda does away with tyranny, Danae tempers stupidity. After establishing these reforms in the social sewer, I climb, I climb, up through the manhole, out of the manhole, beyond humanity. For the manhole, even the manhole, is dark; though not so dingy as the doghole it was before I altered it. Up through the manhole, towards the air. Up, up! [And the Monster, suiting the action to his words, climbs up the runged back of his chair and stands, by a miraculous feat of acrobacy, on the topmost bar.] I begin to see the stars through other eyes than my own. More than dog already, I become more than man. I begin to have inklings of the shape and sense of things. Upwards, upwards I strain, I peer, I reach aloft. [The balanced Monster reaches, strains and peers.] And I seize, I seize! [As he shouts these words, the Monster falls heavily, head foremost, to the floor. He lies there quite still. After a little time the door opens and the Doctor of the first scene enters with a Warder.]

The WarderI heard a crash. :

The Doctor[ who has by this time become immensely old and has a beard like Father Thames]: It looks as though you were right. [He examines the Monster.]

The WarderHe was for ever climbing on to his chair. :

The DoctorWell, he won’t any more. His neck’s broken. :

The WarderYou don’t say so? :

The DoctorI do. :

The WarderWell, I never! :

The DoctorHave it carried down to the dissecting-room. :

The WarderI’ll send for the porters at once. :

[Exeunt severally, and Curtain.]

‘Well,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘I’m glad that’s over.’

The music struck up again, saxophone and ‘cello, with the thin draught of the violin to cool their ecstasies and the thumping piano to remind them of business. Gumbriel and Mrs Viveash slid out into the dancing crowd, revolving as though by force of habit.

‘These substitutes for the genuine copulative article,’ said Coleman to his disciple, ‘are beneath the dignity of hell-hounds like you and me.’

Charmed, the young man laughed; he was attentive as though at the feet of Socrates. Coleman had found him in a night club, where he had gone in search of Zoe, found him very drunk in the company of two formidable women fifteen or twenty years his senior, who were looking after him, half maternally out of pure kindness of heart, half professionally; for he seemed to be carrying a good deal of money. He was incapable of looking after himself. Coleman had pounced on him at once, claimed an old friendship which the youth was too tipsy to be able to deny, and carried him off. There was something, he always thought, peculiarly interesting about the spectacle of children tobogganing down into the cesspools.

‘I like this place,’ said the young man.

‘Tastes differ!’ Coleman shrugged his shoulders. ‘The German professors have catalogued thousands of people whose whole pleasure consists of eating dung.’

The young man smiled and nodded, rather vaguely. ‘Is there anything to drink here?’ he asked.

‘Too respectable,’ Coleman answered, shaking his head.

‘I think this is a bloody place,’ said the young man.

‘Ah! but some people like blood. And some like boots. And some like long gloves and corsets. And some like birch-rods. And some like sliding down slopes and can’t look at Michelangelo’s “Night” on the Medici Tombs without dying the little death, because the statue seems to be sliding. And some ...’

‘But I want something to drink,’ insisted the young man.

Coleman stamped his feet, waved his arms. ‘À boire! à boire!’ he shouted, like the newborn Gargantua. Nobody paid any attention.

The music came to an end. Gumbril and Mrs Viveash reappeared.

‘Dante,’ said Coleman, ‘calls for drink. We must leave the building.’

‘Yes. Anything to get out of this,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘What’s the time?’

Gumbril looked at his watch. ‘Half-past one.’

Mrs Viveash sighed. ‘Can’t possibly go to bed,’ she said, ‘for another hour at least.’

They walked out into the street. The stars were large and brilliant overhead. There was a little wind that almost seemed to come from the country. Gumbril thought so, at any rate; he thought of the country.

‘The question is, where?’ said Coleman. ‘You can come to my bordello, if you like; but it’s a long way off and Zoe hates us all so much, she’ll probably set on us with the meat-chopper. If she’s back again, that is. Though she may be out all night. Zoe mou, sas agapo. Shall we risk it?’

‘To me it’s quite indifferent,’ said Mrs Viveash faintly, as though wholly preoccupied with expiring.

‘Or there’s my place,’ Gumbril said abruptly, as though shaking himself awake out of some dream.

‘But you live still farther, don’t you?’ said Coleman. ‘With venerable parents, and so forth. One foot in the grave and all that. Shall we mingle hornpipes with funerals?’ He began to hum Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ at three times its proper speed, and seizing the young stranger in his arms, two-stepped two or three turns on the pavement, then released his hold and let him go reeling against the area railings.

‘No, I don’t mean the family mansion,’ said Gumbriel. ‘I mean my own rooms. They’re quite near. In Great Russell Street.’

‘I never knew you had any rooms, Theodore,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Nobody did.’ Why should they know now? Because the wind seemed almost a country wind? ‘There’s drink there,’ he said.

‘Splendid!’ cried the young man. They were all splendid people.

‘There’s some gin,’ said Gumbriel.

‘Capital aphrodisiac!’ Coleman commented.

‘Some light white wine.’

‘Diuretic.’

‘And some whisky.’

‘The great emetic,’ said Coleman. ‘Come on.’ And he struck up the March of the Fascisti. ‘Giovinezza, giovinezza, primavera di bellezza. ...’ The noise went fading down the dark, empty streets.

The gin, the white wine, and even, for the sake of the young stranger, who wanted to sample everything, the emetic whisky, were produced.

‘I like your rooms,’ said Mrs Viveash, looking round her. ‘And I resent your secrecy about them, Theodore.’

‘Drink, puppy!’ Coleman refilled the boy’s glass.

‘Here’s to secrecy,’ Gumbriel proposed. Shut it tightly, keep it dark, cover it up. Be silent, prevaricate, lie outright. He laughed and drank. ‘Do you remember,’ he went on, ‘those instructive advertisements of Eno’s Fruit Salts they used to have when we were young? There was one little anecdote about a doctor who advised the hypochondriacal patient who had come to consult him, to go and see Grimaldi, the clown; and the patient answered, “I am Grimaldi.” Do you remember?’

‘No,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘And why do you?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Or rather, I do know,’ Gumbriel corrected himself, and laughed again.

The young man suddenly began to boast. ‘I lost two hundred pounds yesterday playing chemin de fer,’ he said, and looked round for applause.

Coleman patted his curly head. ‘Delicious child!’ he said. ‘You’re positively Hogarthian.’

Angrily, the boy pushed him away. ‘What are you doing?’ he shouted; then turned and addressed himself once more to the others. ‘I couldn’t afford it, you know — not a bloody penny of it. Not my money, either.’ He seemed to find it exquisitely humorous. ‘And that two hundred wasn’t all,’ he added, almost expiring with mirth.

‘Tell Coleman how you borrowed his beard, Theodore.’

Gumbril was looking intently into his glass, as though he hoped to see in its pale mixture of gin and Sauterne visions, as in a crystal, of the future. Mrs Viveash touched him on the arm and repeated her injunction.

‘Oh, that!’ said Gumbril rather irritably. ‘No. It isn’t an interesting story.’

‘Oh yes, it is! I insist,’ said Mrs Viveash, commanding peremptorily from her death-bed.

Gumbril drank his gin and Sauterne. ‘Very well then,’ he said reluctantly, and began.

‘I don’t know what my governor will say,’ the young man put in once or twice. But nobody paid any attention to him. He relapsed into a sulky and, it seemed to him, very dignified silence. Under the warm, jolly tipsiness he felt a chill of foreboding. He poured out some more whisky.

Gumbril warmed to his anecdote. Expiringly Mrs Viveash laughed from time to time, or smiled her agonizing smile. Coleman whooped like a Redskin.

‘And after the concert to these rooms,’ said Gumbril.

Well, let everything go. Into the mud. Leave it there, and let the dogs lift their hind legs over it as they pass.

‘Ah! the genuine platonic fumblers,’ commented Coleman.

‘I am Grimaldi,’ Gumbril laughed. Further than this it was difficult to see where the joke could go. There, on the divan, where Mrs Viveash and Coleman were now sitting, she had lain sleeping in his arms.

‘Towsing, in Elizabethan,’ said Coleman.

Unreal, eternal in the secret darkness. A night that was an eternal parenthesis among the other nights and days.

‘I feel I’m going to be sick,’ said the young man suddenly. He had wanted to go on silently and haughtily sulking; but his stomach declined to take part in the dignified game.

‘Good Lord!’ said Gumbril, and jumped up. But before he could do anything effective, the young man had fulfilled his own prophecy.

‘The real charm about debauchery,’ said Coleman philosophically, ‘is its total pointlessness, futility, and above all its incredible tediousness. If it really were all roses and exhilaration as these poor children seem to imagine, it would be no better than going to church or studying the higher mathematics. I should never touch a drop of wine or another harlot again. It would be against my principles. I told you it was emetic,’ he called to the young man.

‘And what are your principles?’ asked Mrs Viveash.

‘Oh, strictly ethical,’ said Coleman.

‘You’re responsible for this creature,’ said Gumbril, pointing to the young man, who was sitting on the floor near the fireplace, cooling his forehead against the marble of the mantelpiece. ‘You must take him away. Really, what a bore!’ His nose and mouth were all wrinkled up with disgust.

‘I’m sorry,’ the young man whispered. He kept his eyes shut and his face was exceedingly pale.

‘But with pleasure,’ said Coleman. ‘What’s your name?’ he asked the young man, ‘and where do you live?’

‘My name is Porteous,’ murmured the young man.

‘Good lord!’ cried Gumbril, letting himself fall on to the divan beside Mrs Viveash. ‘That’s the last straw!’

## Chapter XVII

THE TWO O’CLOCK snorted out of Charing Cross, but no healths were drunk, this time, to Viscount Lascelles. A desiccating sobriety made arid the corner of the third-class carriage in which Gumbril was sitting. His thoughts were an interminable desert of sand, with not a palm in sight, not so much as a comforting mirage. Once again he fumbled in his breast-pocket, brought out and unfolded the flimsy paper. Once more he read. How many times had he read it before?

‘Your telegram made me very unhappy. Not merely because of the accident — though it made me shudder to think that something terrible might have happened, poor darling — but also, selfishly, my own disappointment. I had looked forward so much. I had made a picture of it all so clearly. I should have met you at the station with the horse and trap from the Chequers, and we’d have driven back to the cottage — and you’d have loved the cottage. We’d have had tea and I’d have made you eat an egg with it after your journey. Then we’d have gone for a walk; through the most heavenly wood I found yesterday to a place where there’s a wonderful view — miles and miles of it. And we’d have wandered on and on, and sat down under the trees, and the sun would have set, and the twilight would slowly have come to an end, and we’d have gone home again and found the lamps lighted and supper ready — not very grand, I’m afraid, for Mrs Vole isn’t the best of cooks. And then the piano; for there is a piano, and I had the tuner come specially from Hastings yesterday, so that it isn’t so bad now. And you’d have played; and perhaps I would have made my noises on it. And at last it would have been time for candles and bed. When I heard you were coming, Theodore, I told Mrs Vole a lie about you. I said you were my husband, because she’s fearfully respectable, of course; and it would dreadfully disturb her if you weren’t. But I told myself that, too. I meant that you should be. You see, I tell you everything. I’m not ashamed. I wanted to give you everything I could, and then we should always be together, loving one another. And I should have been your slave, I should have been your property and lived inside your life. But you would always have had to love me.

‘And then, just as I was getting ready to go and call at the Chequers for the horse and trap, your telegram came. I saw the word “accident”, and I imagined you all bleeding and smashed — oh, dreadful, dreadful. But then, when you seemed to make rather a joke of it — why did you say “a little indisposed”? that seemed, somehow, so stupid, I thought — and said you were coming to-morrow, it wasn’t that which upset me; it

was the dreadful, dreadful disappointment. It was like a stab, that disappointment; it hurt so terribly, so unreasonably much. It made me cry and cry, so that I thought I should never be able to stop. And then, gradually, I began to see that the pain of the disappointment wasn't unreasonably great. It wasn't merely a question of your coming being put off for a day; it was a question of its being put off for ever, of my never seeing you again. I saw that that accident had been something really arranged by Providence. It was meant to warn me and show me what I ought to do. I saw how hopelessly impracticable the happiness I had been imagining really was. I saw that you didn't, you couldn't love me in anything like the same way as I loved you. I was only a curious adventure, a new experience, a means to some other end. Mind, I'm not blaming you in the least. I'm only telling you what is true, what I gradually came to realize as true. If you'd come — what then? I'd have given you everything, my body, my mind, my soul, my whole life. I'd have twisted myself into the threads of your life. And then, when in due course you wanted to make an end to this curious little adventure, you would have had to cut the tangle and it would have killed me; it would also have hurt you. At least I think it would. In the end, I thanked God for the accident which had prevented you coming. In this way, Providence lets us off very lightly — you with a bruise or two (for I do hope it really is nothing, my precious darling), and me with a bruise inside, round the heart. But both will get well quite soon. And all our lives, we shall have an afternoon under the trees, an evening of music and in the darkness, a night, an eternity of happiness, to look back on. I shall go away from Robertsbridge at once. Good-bye, Theodore. What a long letter! The last you'll ever get from me. The last — what a dreadful hurting word that is. I shall take it to post at once, for fear, if I leave it, I may be weak enough to change my mind and let you come to-morrow. I shall take it at once, then I shall come home again and pack up and tell some new fib to Mrs Vole. And after that, perhaps I shall allow myself to cry again. Good-bye.'

Aridly, the desert of sand stretched out with not a tree and not even a mirage, except perhaps the vague and desperate hope that he might get there before she started, that she might conceivably have changed her mind. Ah, if only he'd read the letter a little earlier! But he hadn't woken up before eleven, he hadn't been down before half-past. Sitting at the breakfast-table, he had read the letter through.

The eggs and bacon had grown still colder, if that was possible, than they were. He had read it through, he had rushed to the A.B.C. There was no practicable train before the two o'clock.

If he had taken the seven-twenty-seven he would certainly have got there before she started. Ah, if only he had woken up a little earlier! But then he would have had to go to bed a little earlier. And in order to go to bed earlier, he would have had to abandon Mrs Viveash before she had bored herself to that ultimate point of fatigue at which she did at last feel ready for repose. And to abandon Mrs Viveash — ah, that was really impossible, she wouldn't allow herself to be left alone. If only he hadn't gone to the London Library yesterday! A wanton, unnecessary visit it had been. For after all, the journey was short; he didn't need a book for the train. And the Life of Beckford, for



which he had asked, proved, of course, to be out — and he had been utterly incapable of thinking of any other book, among the two or three hundred thousand on the shelves, that he wanted to read. And, in any case, what the devil did he want with a *Life of Beckford*? Hadn't he his own life, the life of Gumbriel, to attend to? Wasn't one life enough, without making superfluous visits to the London Library in search of other lives? And then what a stroke of bad luck to have run into Mrs Viveash at that very moment! What an abject weakness to have let himself be bullied into sending that telegram. 'A little indisposed. ...' Oh, my God! Gumbriel shut his eyes and ground his teeth together; he felt himself blushing with a retrospective shame.

And of course it was quite useless taking the train, like this, to Robertsbridge. She'd be gone, of course. Still, there was always the desperate hope. There was the mirage across the desiccated plains, the mirage one knew to be deceptive and which, on a second glance, proved not even to be a mirage, but merely a few livery spots behind the eyes. Still, it was amply worth doing — as a penance, and to satisfy the conscience and to deceive oneself with an illusion of action. And then the fact that he was to have spent the afternoon with Rosie and had put her off — that too was highly satisfying. And not merely put her off, but — ultimate clownery in the worst of deliriously bad taste — played a joke on her. 'Impossible come to you, meet me 213 Sloane Street, second floor, a little indisposed.' He wondered how she'd get on with Mr Mercaptan; for it was to his rococo boudoir and Cr billon-souled sofa that he had on the spur of the clownish moment, as he dashed into the post office on the way to the station, sent her.

Aridly, the desiccated waste extended. Had she been right in her letter? Would it really have lasted no more than a little while and ended as she prophesied, with an agonizing cutting of the tangle? Or could it be that she had held out the one hope of happiness? Wasn't she perhaps the one unique being with whom he might have learned to await in quietness the final coming of that lovely terrible thing, from before the sound of whose secret footsteps more than once and oh! ignobly he had fled? He could not decide, it was impossible to decide until he had seen her again, till he had possessed her, mingled his life with hers. And now she had eluded him; for he knew very well that he would not find her. He sighed and looked out of the window.

The train pulled up at a small suburban station. Suburban, for though London was already some way behind, the little sham half-timbered houses near the station, the newer tile and rough-cast dwellings farther out on the slope of the hill proclaimed with emphasis the presence of the business man, the holder of the season ticket. Gumbriel looked at them with a pensive disgust which must have expressed itself on his features; for the gentleman sitting in the corner of the carriage facing him, suddenly leaned forward, tapped him on the knee, and said, 'I see you agree with me, sir, that there are too many people in the world.'

Gumbriel, who up till now had merely been aware that somebody was sitting opposite him, now looked with more attention at the stranger. He was a large, square old gentleman of robust and flourishing appearance, with a face of wrinkled brown

parchment and a white moustache that merged, in a handsome curve, with a pair of side whiskers, in a manner which reminded one of the photographs of the Emperor Francis Joseph.

‘I perfectly agree with you, sir,’ Gumbril answered. If he had been wearing his beard, he would have gone on to suggest that loquacious old gentlemen in trains are among the supernumeraries of the planet. As it was, however, he spoke with courtesy, and smiled in his most engaging fashion.

‘When I look at all these revolting houses,’ the old gentleman continued, shaking his fist at the snuggeries of the season-ticket holders, ‘I am filled with indignation. I feel my spleen ready to burst, sir, ready to burst.’

‘I can sympathize with you,’ said Gumbril. ‘The architecture is certainly not very soothing.’

‘It’s not the architecture I mind so much,’ retorted the old gentleman, ‘that’s merely a question of art, and all nonsense so far as I’m concerned. What disgusts me is the people inside the architecture, the number of them, sir. And the way they breed. Like maggots, sir, like maggots. Millions of them, creeping about the face of the country, spreading blight and dirt wherever they go; ruining everything. It’s the people I object to.’

‘Ah well,’ said Gumbril, ‘if you will have sanitary conditions that don’t allow plagues to flourish properly; if you will tell mothers how to bring up their children, instead of allowing nature to kill them off in her natural way; if you will import unlimited supplies of corn and meat: what can you expect? Of course the numbers go up.’

The old gentleman waved all this away. ‘I don’t care what the causes are,’ he said. ‘That’s all one to me. What I do object to, sir, is the effects. Why sir, I am old enough to remember walking through the delicious meadows beyond Swiss Cottage, I remember seeing the cows milked in West Hampstead, sir. And now, what do I see now, when I go there? Hideous red cities pullulating with Jews, sir. Pullulating with prosperous Jews. Am I right in being indignant, sir? Do I do well, like the prophet Jonah, to be angry?’

‘You do, sir,’ said Gumbril, with growing enthusiasm, ‘and the more so since this frightful increase in population is the world’s most formidable danger at the present time. With populations that in Europe alone expand by millions every year, no political foresight is possible. A few years of this mere bestial propagation will suffice to make nonsense of the wisest schemes of to-day — or would suffice,’ he hastened to correct himself, ‘if any wise schemes were being matured at the present.’

‘Very possibly, sir,’ said the old gentleman, ‘but what I object to is seeing good cornland being turned into streets, and meadows, where cows used to graze, covered with houses full of useless and disgusting human beings. I resent seeing the country parcelled out into back gardens.’

‘And is there any prospect,’ Gumbril earnestly asked, ‘of our ever being able in the future to support the whole of our population? Will unemployment ever decrease?’

'I don't know, sir,' the old gentleman replied. 'But the families of the unemployed will certainly increase.'

'You are right, sir,' said Gumbril, 'they will. And the families of the employed and the prosperous will as steadily grow smaller. It is regrettable that birth control should have begun at the wrong end of the scale. There seems to be a level of poverty below which it doesn't seem worth while practising birth control, and a level of education below which birth control is regarded as morally wrong. Strange, how long it has taken for the ideas of love and procreation to dissociate themselves in the human mind. In the majority of minds they are still, even in this so-called twentieth century, indivisibly wedded. Still,' he continued hopefully, 'progress is being made, progress is certainly, though slowly, being made. It is gratifying to find, for example, in the latest statistics, that the clergy, as a class, are now remarkable for the smallness of their families. The old jest is out of date. Is it too much to hope that these gentlemen may bring themselves in time to preach what they already practise?'

'It is too much to hope, sir,' the old gentleman answered with decision.

'You are probably right,' said Gumbril.

'If we were all to preach all the things we all practise,' continued the old gentleman, 'the world would soon be a pretty sort of bear-garden, I can tell you. Yes, and a monkey-house. And a wart-hogger. As it is, sir, it is merely a place where there are too many human beings. Vice must pay its tribute to virtue, or else we are all undone.'

'I admire your wisdom, sir,' said Gumbril.

The old gentleman was delighted. 'And I have been much impressed by your philosophical reflections,' he said. 'Tell me, are you at all interested in old brandy?'

'Well, not philosophically,' said Gumbril. 'As a mere empiric only.'

'As a mere empiric!' The old gentleman laughed. 'Then let me beg you to accept a case. I have a cellar which I shall never drink dry, alas! before I die. My only wish is that what remains of it shall be distributed among those who can really appreciate it. In you, sir, I see a fitting recipient of a case of brandy.'

'You overwhelm me,' said Gumbril. 'You are too kind, and, I may add, too flattering.' The train, which was a mortally slow one, came grinding for what seemed the hundredth time to a halt.

'Not at all,' said the old gentleman. 'If you have a card, sir.'

Gumbril searched his pockets. 'I have come without one.'

'Never mind,' said the old gentleman. 'I think I have a pencil. If you will give me your name and address, I will have the case sent to you at once.'

Leisurely, he hunted for the pencil, he took out a notebook. The train gave a jerk forward.

'Now, sir,' he said.

Gumbril began dictating. 'Theodore,' he said slowly.

'The — o — dore,' the old gentleman repeated, syllable by syllable.

The train crept on, with slowly gathering momentum, through the station. Happening to look out of the window at this moment, Gumbril saw the name of the place

painted across a lamp. It was Robertsbridge. He made a loud, inarticulate noise, flung open the door of the compartment, stepped out on to the footboard and jumped. He landed safely on the platform, staggered forward a few paces with his acquired momentum and came at last to a halt. A hand reached out and closed the swinging door of his compartment and, an instant afterwards, through the window, a face that, at a distance, looked more than ever like the face of the Emperor Francis Joseph, looked back towards the receding platform. The mouth opened and shut; no words were audible. Standing on the platform, Gumbriel made a complicated pantomime, signifying his regret by shrugging his shoulders and placing his hand on his heart; urging in excuse for his abrupt departure the necessity under which he laboured of alighting at this particular station — which he did by pointing at the name on the boards and lamps, then at himself, then at the village across the fields. The old gentleman waved his hand, which still held, Gumbriel noticed, the notebook in which he had been writing. Then the train carried him out of sight. There went the only case of old brandy he was ever likely to possess, thought Gumbriel sadly, as he turned away. Suddenly, he remembered Emily again; for a long time he had quite forgotten her.

The cottage, when at last he found it, proved to be fully as picturesque as he had imagined. And Emily, of course, had gone, leaving, as might have been expected, no address. He took the evening train back to London. The aridity was now complete, and even the hope of a mirage had vanished. There was no old gentleman to make a diversion. The size of clergymen's families, even the fate of Europe, seemed unimportant now, were indeed perfectly indifferent to him.

## Chapter XVIII

TWO HUNDRED AND thirteen Sloane Street. The address, Rosie reflected, as she vaporized synthetic lilies of the valley over all her sinuous person, was decidedly a good one. It argued a reasonable prosperity, attested a certain distinction. The knowledge of his address confirmed her already high opinion of the bearded stranger who had so surprisingly entered her life, as though in fulfilment of all the fortune-tellers' prophecies that ever were made; had entered, yes, and intimately made himself at home. She had been delighted, when the telegram came that morning, to think that at last she was going to find out something more about this man of mystery. For dark and mysterious he had remained, remote even in the midst of the most intimate contacts. Why, she didn't even know his name. 'Call me Toto,' he had suggested, when she asked him what it was. And Toto she had had to call him, for lack of anything more definite or committal. But to-day he was letting her further into his secret. Rosie was delighted. Her pink underclothing, she decided, as she looked in the long glass, was really ravishing. She examined herself, turning first one way, then the other, looking over her shoulder to see the effect from behind. She pointed a toe, bent and straightened a knee, applauding

the length of her legs ('Most women,' Toto had said, 'are like dachshunds'), their slenderness and plump suavity of form. In their white stockings of Milanese silk they looked delicious; and how marvellously, by the way, those Selfridge people had mended those stockings by their new patent process! Absolutely like new, and only charged four shillings. Well, it was time to dress. Good-bye, then, to the pink underclothing and the long white legs. She opened the wardrobe door. The moving glass reflected, as it swung through its half-circle, pink bed, rose-wreathed walls, little friends of her own age, and the dying saint at his last communion. Rosie selected the frock she had bought the other day at one of those little shops in Soho, where they sell such smart things so cheaply to a clientage of minor actresses and cocottes. Toto hadn't seen it yet. She looked extremely distinguished in it. The little hat, with its inch of veil hanging like a mask, unconcealing and inviting, from the brim, suited her to perfection. One last dab of powder, one last squirt of synthetic lilies of the valley, and she was ready. She closed the door behind her. St Jerome was left to communicate in the untenanted pinkness.

Mr Mercaptan sat at his writing-table — an exquisitely amusing affair in papier mâché, inlaid with floral decorations in mother-of-pearl and painted with views of Windsor Castle and Tintern in the romantic manner of Prince Albert's later days — polishing to its final and gem-like perfection one of his middle articles. It was on a splendid subject — the 'Jus Primæ Noctis, or Droit du Seigneur' — 'that delicious droit,' wrote Mr Mercaptan, 'on which, one likes to think, the Sovereigns of England insist so firmly in their motto, Dieu et mon Droit — de Seigneur.' That was charming, Mr Mercaptan thought, as he read it through. And he liked that bit which began elegiacally: 'But, alas! the Right of the First Night belongs to a Middle Age as mythical, albeit happily different, as those dismal epochs invented by Morris or by Chesterton. The Lord's right, as we prettily imagine it, is a figment of the baroque imagination of the seventeenth century. It never existed. Or at least it did exist, but as something deplorably different from what we love to picture it.' And he went on, eruditely, to refer to that Council of Carthage which, in 398, demanded of the faithful that they should be continent on their wedding-night. It was the Lord's right — the droit of a heavenly Seigneur. On this text of fact, Mr Mercaptan went on to preach a brilliant sermon on that melancholy sexual perversion known as continence. How much happier we all should be if the real historical droit du Seigneur had in fact been the mythical right of our 'pretty prurient imaginations'! He looked forward to a golden age when all should be seigneurs possessing rights that should have broadened down into universal liberty. And so on. Mr Mercaptan read through his creation with a smile of satisfaction on his face. Every here and there he made a careful correction in red ink. Over 'pretty prurient imaginations' his pen hung for a full minute in conscientious hesitation. Wasn't it perhaps a little too strongly alliterative, a shade, perhaps, cheap? Perhaps 'pretty lascivious' or 'delicate prurient' would be better. He repeated the alternatives several times, rolling the sound of them round his tongue, judicially, like a tea-taster. In the

end, he decided that 'pretty prurient' was right. 'Pretty prurient' — they were the mots justes, decidedly, without a question.

Mr Mercaptan had just come to this decision and his poised pen was moving farther down the page, when he was disturbed by the sound of arguing voices in the corridor, outside his room.

'What is it, Mrs Goldie?' he called irritably, for it was not difficult to distinguish his housekeeper's loud and querulous tones. He had given orders that he was not to be disturbed. In these critical moments of correction one needed such absolute tranquillity.

But Mr Mercaptan was to have no tranquillity this afternoon. The door of his sacred boudoir was thrown rudely open, and there strode in, like a Goth into the elegant marble vomitorium of Petronius Arbiter, a haggard and dishevelled person whom Mr Mercaptan recognized, with a certain sense of discomfort, as Casimir Lypiatt.

'To what do I owe the pleasure of this unexpected ... ?' Mr Mercaptan began with an essay in offensive courtesy.

But Lypiatt, who had no feeling for the finer shades, coarsely interrupted him. 'Look here, Mercaptan,' he said. 'I want to have a talk with you.'

'Delighted, I'm sure,' Mr Mercaptan replied. 'And what, may I ask, about?' He knew, of course, perfectly well; and the prospect of the talk disturbed him.

'About this,' said Lypiatt; and he held out what looked like a roll of paper.

Mr Mercaptan took the roll and opened it out. It was a copy of the Weekly World. 'Ah!' said Mr Mercaptan, in a tone of delighted surprise, 'The World. You have read my little article?'

'That was what I wanted to talk to you about,' said Lypiatt.

Mr Mercaptan modestly laughed. 'It hardly deserves it,' he said.

Preserving a calm of expression which was quite unnatural to him, and speaking in a studiously quiet voice, Lypiatt pronounced with careful deliberation: 'It is a disgusting, malicious, ignoble attack on me,' he said.

'Come, come!' protested Mr Mercaptan. 'A critic must be allowed to criticize.'

'But there are limits,' said Lypiatt.

'Oh, I quite agree,' Mr Mercaptan eagerly conceded. 'But, after all, Lypiatt, you can't pretend that I have come anywhere near those limits. If I had called you a murderer, or even an adulterer — then, I admit, you would have some cause to complain. But I haven't. There's nothing like a personality in the whole thing.'

Lypiatt laughed derisively, and his face went all to pieces, like a pool of water into which a stone is suddenly dropped.

'You've merely said I was insincere, an actor, a mountebank, a quack, raving fustian, spouting mock heroics. That's all.'

Mr Mercaptan put on the expression of one who feels himself injured and misunderstood. He shut his eyes, he flapped deprecatingly with his hand. 'I merely suggested,' he said, 'that you protest too much. You defeat your own ends; you lose emphasis by trying to be over-emphatic. All this folie de grandeur, all this hankering after terribiltà—' sagely Mr Mercaptan shook his head, 'it's led so many people astray. And, in any case,

you can't really expect me to find it very sympathetic.' Mr Mercaptan uttered a little laugh and looked affectionately round his boudoir, his retired and perfumed poutery within whose walls so much civilization had finely flowered. He looked at his magnificent sofa, gilded and carved, upholstered in white satin, and so deep — for it was a great square piece of furniture, almost as broad as it was long — that when you sat right back, you had of necessity to lift your feet from the floor and recline at length. It was under the white satin that Crébillon's spirit found, in these late degenerate days, a sympathetic home. He looked at his exquisite Condor fans over the mantelpiece; his lovely Marie Laurencin of two young girls, pale-skinned and berry-eyed, walking embraced in a shallow myopic landscape amid a troop of bounding heraldic dogs. He looked at his cabinet of bibelots in the corner where the nigger mask and the superb Chinese phallus in sculptured rock crystal contrasted so amusingly with the Chelsea china, the little ivory Madonna, which might be a fake, but in any case was quite as good as any mediæval French original, and the Italian medals. He looked at his comical writing-desk in shining black papier mâché and mother-of-pearl; he looked at his article on the 'Jus Primæ Noctis', black and neat on the page, with the red corrections attesting his tireless search for, and his, he flattered himself, almost invariable discovery of, the inevitable word. No, really, one couldn't expect him to find Lypiatt's notions very sympathetic.

'But I don't expect you to,' said Lypiatt, 'and, good God! I don't want you to. But you call me insincere. That's what I can't and won't stand. How dare you do that?' His voice was growing louder.

Once more Mr Mercaptan deprecatingly flapped. 'At the most,' he corrected, 'I said that there was a certain look of insincerity about some of the pictures. Hardly avoidable, indeed, in work of this kind.'

Quite suddenly, Lypiatt lost his self-control. All the accumulated anger and bitterness of the last days burst out. His show had been a hopeless failure. Not a picture sold, a press that was mostly bad, or, when good, that had praised for the wrong, the insulting reasons. 'Bright and effective work.' 'Mr Lypiatt would make an excellent stage designer.' Damn them! damn them! And then, when the dailies had all had their yelp, here was Mercaptan in the Weekly World taking him as a text for what was practically an essay on insincerity in art. 'How dare you?' he furiously shouted. 'You — how dare you talk about sincerity? What can you know about sincerity, you disgusting little bug!' And avenging himself on the person of Mr Mercaptan against the world that had neglected him, against the fate that had denied him his rightful share of talent, Lypiatt sprang up and, seizing the author of the 'Jus Primæ Noctis' by the shoulders, he shook him, he bumped him up and down in his chair, he cuffed him over the head. 'How can you have the impudence,' he asked, letting go of his victim, but still standing menacingly over him, 'to touch anything that even attempts to be decent and big?' All these years, these wretched years of poverty and struggle and courageous hope and failure and repeated disappointment; and now this last failure,

more complete than all. He was trembling with anger; at least one forgot unhappiness while one was angry.

Mr Mercaptan had recovered from his first terrified surprise. 'Really, really,' he repeated, 'too barbarous. Scuffling like hobbledehoys.'

'If you knew,' Lypiatt began; but he checked himself. If you knew, he was going to say, what those things had cost me, what they meant, what thought, what passion — But how could Mercaptan understand? And it would sound as though he were appealing to this creature's sympathy. 'Bug!' he shouted instead, 'bug!' And he struck out again with the flat of his hand. Mr Mercaptan put up his hands and ducked away from the slaps, blinking.

'Really,' he protested, 'really. ...'

Insincere? Perhaps it was half true. Lypiatt seized his man more furiously than before and shook him, shook him. 'And then that vile insult about the vermouthe advertisement,' he cried out. That had rankled. Those flaring, vulgar posters! 'You thought you could mock me and spit at me with impunity, did you? I've stood it so long, you thought I'd always stand it? Was that it? But you're mistaken.' He lifted his fist. Mr Mercaptan cowered away, raising his arm to protect his head. 'Vile bug of a coward,' said Lypiatt, 'why don't you defend yourself like a man? You can only be dangerous with words. Very witty and spiteful and cutting about those vermouthe posters, wasn't it? But you wouldn't dare to fight me if I challenged you.'

'Well, as a matter of fact,' said Mr Mercaptan, peering up from under his defences, 'I didn't invent that particular piece of criticism. I borrowed the *apéritif*.' He laughed feebly, more canary than bull.

'You borrowed it, did you?' Lypiatt contemptuously repeated. 'And who from, may I ask?' Not that it interested him in the least to know.

'Well, if you really want to know,' said Mr Mercaptan, 'it was from our friend Myra Viveash.'

Lypiatt stood for a moment without speaking, then putting his menacing hand in his pocket, he turned away. 'Oh!' he said non-committally, and was silent again.

Relieved, Mr Mercaptan sat up in his chair; with the palm of his right hand he smoothed his dishevelled head.

Airily, outside in the sunshine, Rosie walked down Sloane Street, looking at the numbers on the doors of the houses. A hundred and ninety-nine, two hundred, two hundred and one — she was getting near now. Perhaps all the people who passed, strolling so easily and elegantly and disengagedly along, perhaps they all of them carried behind their eyes a secret, as delightful and amusing as hers. Rosie liked to think so; it made life more exciting. How nonchalantly distinguished, Rosie reflected, she herself must look. Would any one who saw her now, sauntering along like this, would any one guess that, ten houses farther down the street, a young poet, or at least very nearly a young poet, was waiting, on the second floor, eagerly for her arrival? Of course they wouldn't and couldn't guess! That was the fun and the enormous excitement of the whole thing. Formidable in her light-hearted detachment, formidable



in the passion which at will she could give rein to and check again, the great lady swam beautifully along through the sunlight to satisfy her caprice. Like Diana, she stooped over the shepherd boy. Eagerly the starving young poet waited, waited in his garret. Two hundred and twelve, two hundred and thirteen. Rosie looked at the entrance and was reminded that the garret couldn't after all be very sordid, nor the young poet absolutely starving. She stepped in and, standing in the hall, looked at the board with the names. Ground floor: Mrs Budge. First floor: F. de M. Rowbotham. Second floor: P. Mercaptan.

P. Mercaptan. ... But it was a charming name, a romantic name, a real young poet's name! Mercaptan — she felt more than ever pleased with her selection. The fastidious lady could not have had a happier caprice. Mercaptan ... Mercaptan. ... She wondered what the P. stood for. Peter, Philip, Patrick, Pendennis even? She could hardly have guessed that Mr Mercaptan's father, the eminent bacteriologist, had insisted, thirty-four years ago, on calling his first-born 'Pasteur'.

A little tremulous, under her outward elegant calm, Rosie mounted the stairs. Twenty-five steps to the first floor — one flight of thirteen, which was rather disagreeably ominous, and one of twelve. Then two flights of eleven, and she was on the second landing, facing a front door, a bell-push like a round eye, a brass name-plate. For a great lady thoroughly accustomed to this sort of thing, she felt her heart beating rather unpleasantly fast. It was those stairs, no doubt. She halted a moment, took two deep breaths, then pushed the bell.

The door was opened by an aged servant of the most forbiddingly respectable appearance.

'Mr Mercaptan at home?'

The person at the door burst at once into a long, rambling, angry complaint, but precisely about what Rosie could not for certain make out. Mr Mercaptan had left orders, she gathered, that he wasn't to be disturbed. But some one had come and disturbed him, 'fairly shoved his way in, so rude and inconsiderate,' all the same. And now he'd been once disturbed, she didn't see why he shouldn't be disturbed again. But she didn't know what things were coming to if people fairly shoved their way in like that. Bolshevism, she called it.

Rosie murmured her sympathies, and was admitted into a dark hall. Still querulously denouncing the Bolsheviks who came shoving in, the person led the way down a corridor and, throwing open a door, announced, in a tone of grievance: 'A lady to see you, Master Paster' — for Mrs Goldie was an old family retainer, and one of the few who knew the secret of Mr Mercaptan's Christian name, one of the fewer still who were privileged to employ it. Then, as soon as Rosie had stepped across the threshold, she cut off her retreat with a bang and went off, muttering all the time, towards her kitchen.

It certainly wasn't a garret. Half a glance, the first whiff of potpourri, the feel of the carpet beneath her feet, had been enough to prove that. But it was not the room which occupied Rosie's attention, it was its occupants. One of them, thin, sharp-featured and, in Rosie's very young eyes, quite old, was standing with an elbow on the mantelpiece.

The other, sleeker and more genial in appearance, was sitting in front of a writing-desk near the window. And neither of them — Rosie glanced desperately from one to the other, hoping vainly that she might have overlooked a blond beard — neither of them was Toto.

The sleek man at the writing-desk got up, advanced to meet her.

‘An unexpected pleasure,’ he said, in a voice that alternately boomed and fluted. ‘Too delightful! But to what do I owe — ? Who, may I ask — ?’

He had held out his hand; automatically Rosie proffered hers. The sleek man shook it with cordiality, almost with tenderness.

‘I ... I think I must have made a mistake,’ she said. ‘Mr Mercaptan ... ?’

The sleek man smiled. ‘I am Mr Mercaptan.’

‘You live on the second floor?’

‘I never laid claims to being a mathematician,’ said the sleek man, smiling as though to applaud himself, ‘but I have always calculated that ...’ he hesitated ... ‘enfin, que ma demeure se trouve, en effet, on the second floor. Lypiatt will bear me out, I’m sure.’ He turned to the thin man, who had not moved from the fireplace, but had stood all the time motionlessly, his elbow on the mantelpiece, looking gloomily at the ground.

Lypiatt looked up. ‘I must be going,’ he said abruptly. And he walked towards the door. Like vermouth posters, like vermouth posters! — so that was Myra’s piece of mockery! All his anger had sunk like a quenched flame. He was altogether quenched, put out with unhappiness.

Politely Mr Mercaptan hurried across the room and opened the door for him. ‘Good-bye, then,’ he said airily.

Lypiatt did not speak, but walked out into the hall. The front door banged behind him.

‘Well, well,’ said Mr Mercaptan, coming back across the room to where Rosie was still irresolutely standing. ‘Talk about the furor poeticus! But do sit down, I beg you. On Crébillon.’ He indicated the vast white satin sofa. ‘I call it Crébillon,’ he explained, ‘because the soul of that great writer undoubtedly tenants it, undoubtedly. You know his book, of course? You know Le Sopha?’

Sinking into Crébillon’s soft lap, Rosie had to admit that she didn’t know Le Sopha. She had begun to recover her self-possession. If this wasn’t the young poet, it was certainly a young poet. And a very peculiar one, too. As a great lady she laughingly accepted the odd situation.

‘Not know Le Sopha?’ exclaimed Mr Mercaptan. ‘Oh! but, my dear and mysterious young lady, let me lend you a copy of it at once. No education can be called complete without a knowledge of that divine book.’ He darted to the bookshelf and came back with a small volume bound in white vellum. ‘The hero’s soul,’ he explained, handing her the volume, ‘passes, by the laws of metempsychosis, into a sofa. He is doomed to remain a sofa until such time as two persons consummate upon his bosom their reciprocal and equal loves. The book is the record of the poor sofa’s hopes and disappointments.’

‘Dear me!’ said Rosie, looking at the title-page.

‘But now,’ said Mr Mercaptan, sitting down beside her on the edge of Crébillon, ‘won’t you please explain? To what happy quiproquo do I owe this sudden and altogether delightful invasion of my privacy?’

‘Well,’ said Rosie, and hesitated. It was really rather difficult to explain. ‘I was to meet a friend of mine.’

‘Quite so,’ said Mr Mercaptan encouragingly.

‘Who sent me a telegram,’ Rosie went on.

‘He sent you a telegram!’ Mr Mercaptan echoed.

‘Changing the — the place we had fixed and telling me to meet him at this address.’

‘Here?’

Rose nodded. ‘On the s — second floor,’ she made it more precise.

‘But I live on the second floor,’ said Mr Mercaptan. ‘You don’t mean to say your friend is also called Mercaptan and lives here too?’

Rosie smiled. ‘I don’t know what he’s called,’ she said with a cool ironical carelessness that was genuinely grande dame.

‘You don’t know his name?’ Mr Mercaptan gave a roar and a squeal of delighted laughter. ‘But that’s too good,’ he said.

‘S — second floor, he wrote in the telegram.’ Rosie was now perfectly at her ease. ‘When I saw your name, I thought it was his name. I must say,’ she added, looking sideways at Mr Mercaptan and at once dropping the magnolia petals of her eyelids, ‘it seemed to me a very charming name.’

‘You overwhelm me,’ said Mr Mercaptan, smiling all over his cheerful, snouty face. ‘As for your name — I am too discreet a galantuomo to ask. And, in any case, what does it matter? A rose by any other name ...’

‘But, as a matter of fact,’ she said, raising and lowering once again her smooth, white lids, ‘my name does happen to be Rose; or, at any rate, Rosie.’

‘So you are sweet by right!’ exclaimed Mr Mercaptan, with a pretty gallantry which he was the first to appreciate. ‘Let’s order tea on the strength of it.’ He jumped up and rang the bell. ‘How I congratulate myself on this astonishing piece of good fortune!’

Rosie said nothing. This Mr Mercaptan, she thought, seemed to be even more a man of the great artistic world than Toto.

‘What puzzles me,’ he went on, ‘is why your anonymous friend should have chosen my address out of all the millions of others. He must know me, or, at any rate, know about me.’

‘I should imagine,’ said Rosie, ‘that you have a lot of friends.’

Mr Mercaptan laughed — the whole orchestra, from bassoon to piccolo. ‘Des amis, des amies — with and without the mute “e”,’ he declared.

The aged and forbidding servant appeared at the door.

‘Tea for two, Mrs Goldie.’

Mrs Goldie looked round the room suspiciously. ‘The other gentleman’s gone, has he?’ she asked. And having assured herself of his absence, she renewed her complaint. ‘Shoving in like that,’ she said. ‘Bolshevism, that’s what I—’

‘All right, all right, Mrs Goldie. Let’s have our tea as quickly as possible.’ Mr Mercaptan held up his hand, authoritatively, with the gesture of a policeman controlling the traffic.

‘Very well, Master Paster.’ Mrs Goldie spoke with resignation and departed.

‘But tell me,’ Mr Mercaptan went on, ‘if it isn’t indiscreet — what does your friend look like?’

‘W — well,’ Rosie answered, ‘he’s fair, and though he’s quite young he wears a beard.’ With her two hands she indicated on her own unemphatic bosom the contours of Toto’s broad blond fan.

‘A beard! But, good heavens,’ Mr Mercaptan slapped his thigh, ‘it’s Coleman, it’s obviously and undoubtedly Coleman!’

‘Well, whoever it was,’ said Rosie severely, ‘he played a very stupid sort of joke.’

‘For which I thank him. De tout mon cœur.’

Rosie smiled and looked sideways. ‘All the same,’ she said, ‘I shall give him a piece of my mind.’

Poor Aunt Aggie! Oh, poor Aunt Aggie, indeed! In the light of Mr Mercaptan’s boudoir her hammered copper and her leadless glaze certainly did look a bit comical.

After tea Mr Mercaptan played cicerone in a tour of inspection round the room. They visited the papier mâché writing-desk, the Condor fans, the Marie Laurencin, the 1914 edition of *Du Côté de chez Swann*, the Madonna that probably was a fake, the nigger mask, the Chelsea figures, the Chinese object of art in sculptured crystal, the scale model of Queen Victoria in wax under a glass bell. Toto, it became clear, had been no more than a forerunner; the definitive revelation was Mr Mercaptan’s. Yes, poor Aunt Aggie! And indeed, when Mr Mercaptan began to read her his little middle on the ‘*Droit du Seigneur*’, it was poor everybody. Poor mother, with her absurd, old-fashioned, prudish views; poor, earnest father, with his Unitarianism, his Hibbert Journal, his letters to the papers about the necessity for a spiritual regeneration.

‘Bravo!’ she cried from the depths of Crébillon. She was leaning back in one corner, languid, serpentine, and at ease, her feet in their mottled snake’s leather tucked up under her. ‘Bravo!’ she cried as Mr Mercaptan finished his reading and looked up for his applause.

Mr Mercaptan bowed.

‘You express so exquisitely what we—’ and waving her hand in a comprehensive gesture, she pictured to herself all the other fastidious ladies, all the marchionesses of fable, reclining, as she herself at this moment reclined, on upholstery of white satin, ‘what we all only feel and aren’t clever enough to say.’

Mr Mercaptan was charmed. He got up from before his writing-desk, crossed the room and sat down beside her on Crébillon. ‘Feeling,’ he said, ‘is the important thing.’

Rosie remembered that her father had once remarked, in blank verse: ‘The things that matter happen in the heart.’

‘I quite agree,’ she said.

Like movable raisins in the suet of his snouty face, Mr Mercaptan's brown little eyes rolled amorous avowals. He took Rosie's hand and kissed it. Crébillon creaked discreetly as he moved a little nearer.

It was on the evening of the same day. Rosie lay on her sofa — a poor, hire-purchase thing indeed, compared with Mr Mercaptan's grand affair in white satin and carved and gilded wood, but still a sofa — lay with her feet on the arm of it and her long suave legs exposed, by the slipping of the kimono, to the top of her stretched stockings. She was reading the little vellum-jacketed volume of Crébillon, which Mr Mercaptan had given her when he said 'good-bye' (or rather, 'À bientôt, mon amie'); given, not lent, as he had less generously offered at the beginning of their afternoon; given with the most graceful of allusive dedications inscribed on the fly-leaf:

To  
BY-NO-OTHER-NAME-AS-SWEET,  
With Gratitude,  
FROM  
CRÉBILLON DELIVERED.

À bientôt — she had promised to come again very soon. She thought of the essay on the 'Jus Primæ Noctis' — ah! what we've all been feeling and none of us clever enough to say. We on the sofas, ruthless, lovely and fastidious. ...

'I am proud to constitute myself' — Mr Mercaptan had said of it — 'l'esprit d'escalier des dames galantes.'

Rosie was not quite sure what he meant; but it certainly sounded very witty indeed.

She read the book slowly. Her French, indeed, wasn't good enough to permit her to read it anyhow else. She wished it were better. Perhaps if it were better she wouldn't be yawning like this. It was disgraceful: she pulled herself together. Mr Mercaptan had said that it was a masterpiece.

In his study, Shearwater was trying to write his paper on the regulative functions of the kidneys. He was not succeeding.

Why wouldn't she see me yesterday? he kept wondering. With anguish he suspected other lovers; desired her, in consequence, the more. Gumbril had said something, he remembered, that night they had met her by the coffee-stall. What was it? He wished now that he had listened more attentively.

She's bored with me. Already. It was obvious.

Perhaps he was too rustic for her. Shearwater looked at his hands. Yes, the nails were dirty. He took an orange stick out of his waistcoat pocket and began to clean them. He had bought a whole packet of orange sticks that morning.

Determinedly he took up his pen. 'The hydrogen ion concentration in the blood ...' he began a new paragraph. But he got no further than the first seven words.

If, he began thinking with a frightful confusion, if — if — if — Past conditionals, hopelessly past. He might have been brought up more elegantly; his father, for example, might have been a barrister instead of a barrister's clerk. He mightn't have had to work so hard when he was young; might have been about more, danced more, seen more

young women. If he had met her years ago — during the war, should one say, dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Guards. ...

He had pretended that he wasn't interested in women; that they had no effect on him; that, in fact, he was above that sort of thing. Imbecile! He might as well have said that he was above having a pair of kidneys. He had only consented to admit, graciously, that they were a physiological necessity.

O God, what a fool he had been!

And then, what about Rosie? What sort of a life had she been having while he was being above that sort of thing? Now he came to think of it, he really knew nothing about her, except that she had been quite incapable of learning correctly, even by heart, the simplest facts about the physiology of frogs. Having found that out, he had really given up exploring further. How could he have been so stupid?

Rosie had been in love with him, he supposed. Had he been in love with her? No. He had taken care not to be. On principle. He had married her as a measure of intimate hygiene; out of protective affection, too, certainly out of affection; and a little for amusement, as one might buy a puppy.

Mrs Viveash had opened his eyes; seeing her, he had also begun to notice Rosie. It seemed to him that he had been a loutish cad as well as an imbecile.

What should he do about it? He sat for a long time wondering.

In the end he decided that the best thing would be to go and tell Rosie all about it, all about everything.

About Mrs Viveash too? Yes, about Mrs Viveash too. He would get over Mrs Viveash more easily and more rapidly if he did. And he would begin to try and find out about Rosie. He would explore her. He would discover all the other things besides an incapacity to learn physiology that were in her. He would discover her, he would quicken his affection for her into something livelier and more urgent. And they would begin again; more satisfactorily this time; with knowledge and understanding; wise from their experience.

Shearwater got up from his chair before the writing-table, lurched pensively towards the door, bumping into the revolving bookcase and the arm-chair as he went, and walked down the passage to the drawing-room. Rosie did not turn her head as he came in, but went on reading without changing her position, her slippered feet still higher than her head, her legs still charmingly avowing themselves.

Shearwater came to a halt in front of the empty fireplace. He stood there with his back to it, as though warming himself before an imaginary flame. It was, he felt, the safest, the most strategic point from which to talk.

'What are you reading?' he asked.

'Le Sopha,' said Rosie.

'What's that?'

'What's that?' Rosie scornfully echoed. 'Why, it's one of the great French classics.'

'Who by?'

'Crébillon the younger.'

‘Never heard of him,’ said Shearwater.

There was a silence. Rosie went on reading.

‘It just occurred to me,’ Shearwater began again in his rather ponderous, infelicitous way, ‘that you mightn’t be very happy, Rosie.’

Rosie looked up at him and laughed. ‘What put that into your head?’ she asked. ‘I’m perfectly happy.’

Shearwater was left a little at a loss. ‘Well, I’m very glad to hear it,’ he said. ‘I only thought ... that perhaps you might think ... that I rather neglected you.’

Rosie laughed again. ‘What is all this about?’ she said.

‘I have it rather on my conscience,’ said Shearwater. ‘I begin to see ... something has made me see ... that I’ve not. ... I don’t treat you very well ...’

‘But I don’t n — notice it, I assure you,’ put in Rosie, still smiling.

‘I leave you out too much,’ Shearwater went on with a kind of desperation, running his fingers through his thick black hair. ‘We don’t share enough together. You’re too much outside my life.’

‘But after all,’ said Rosie, ‘we are a civ — vilized couple. We don’t want to live in one another’s pockets, do we?’

‘No, but we’re really no more than strangers,’ said Shearwater. ‘That isn’t right. And it’s my fault. I’ve never tried to get into touch with your life. But you did your best to understand mine ... at the beginning of our marriage.’

‘Oh, then — n!’ said Rosie, laughing. ‘You found out what a little idiot I was.’

‘Don’t make a joke of it,’ said Shearwater. ‘It isn’t a joke. It’s very serious. I tell you, I’ve come to see how stupid and inconsiderate and un-understanding I’ve been with you. I’ve come to see quite suddenly. The fact is,’ he went on with a rush, like an uncorked fountain, ‘I’ve been seeing a woman recently whom I like very much, and who doesn’t like me.’ Speaking of Mrs Viveash, unconsciously he spoke her language. For Mrs Viveash people always euphemistically ‘liked’ one another rather a lot, even when it was a case of the most frightful and excruciating passion, the most complete abandonments. ‘And somehow that’s made me see a lot of things which I’d been blind to before — blind deliberately, I suppose. It’s made me see, among other things, that I’ve really been to blame towards you, Rosie.’

Rosie listened with an astonishment which she perfectly disguised. So James was embarking on his little affairs, was he? It seemed incredible, and also, as she looked at her husband’s face — the face, behind its bristlingly manly mask, of a harassed baby — also rather pathetically absurd. She wondered who it could be. But she displayed no curiosity. She would find out soon enough.

‘I’m sorry you should have been unhappy about it,’ she said.

‘It’s finished now.’ Shearwater made a decided little gesture.

‘Ah, no!’ said Rosie. ‘You should persevere.’ She looked at him, smiling.

Shearwater was taken aback by this display of easy detachment. He had imagined the conversation so very differently, as something so serious, so painful and, at the same time, so healing and soothing, that he did not know how to go on. ‘But I thought,’

he said hesitatingly, 'that you ... that we ... after this experience ... I would try to get closer to you ...' (Oh, it sounded ridiculous!) ... 'We might start again, from a different place, so to speak.'

'But, cher ami,' protested Rosie, with the inflection and in the preferred tongue of Mr Mercaptan, 'you can't seriously expect us to do the Darby and Joan business, can you? You're distressing yourself quite unnecessarily on my account. I don't find you neglect me or anything like it. You have your life — naturally. And I have mine. We don't get in one another's way.'

'But do you think that's the ideal sort of married life?' asked Shearwater.

'It's obviously the most civ — vilized,' Rosie answered, laughing.

Confronted by Rosie's civilization, Shearwater felt helpless.

'Well, if you don't want,' he said. 'I'd hoped ... I'd thought ...'

He went back to his study to think things over. The more he thought them over, the more he blamed himself. And incessantly the memory of Mrs Viveash tormented him.

## Chapter XIX

AFTER LEAVING MR Mercaptan, Lypiatt had gone straight home. The bright day seemed to deride him. With its shining red omnibuses, its parasols, its muslin girls, its young-leaved trees, its bands at the street corners, it was too much of a garden party to be tolerable. He wanted to be alone. He took a cab back to the studio. He couldn't afford it, of course; but what did that matter, what did that matter now?

The cab drove slowly and as though with reluctance down the dirty mews. He paid it off, opened his little door between the wide stable doors, climbed the steep ladder of his stairs and was at home. He sat down and tried to think.

'Death, death, death, death,' he kept repeating to himself, moving his lips as though he were praying. If he said the word often enough, if he accustomed himself completely to the idea, death would come almost by itself; he would know it already, while he was still alive, he would pass almost without noticing out of life into death. Into death, he thought, into death. Death like a well. The stone falls, falls, second after second; and at last there is a sound, a far-off, horrible sound of death and then nothing more. The well at Carisbrooke, with a donkey to wind the wheel that pulls up the bucket of water, of icy water ... He thought for a long time of the well of death.

Outside in the mews a barrel-organ struck up the tune of 'Where do flies go in the winter-time?' Lypiatt lifted his head to listen. He smiled to himself. 'Where do flies go?' The question asked itself with a dramatic, a tragical appositeness. At the end of everything — the last ludicrous touch. He saw it all from outside. He pictured himself sitting there alone, broken. He looked at his hand lying limp on the table in front of him. It needed only the stigma of the nail to make it the hand of a dead Christ.



There, he was making literature of it again. Even now. He buried his face in his hands. His mind was full of twisted darkness, of an unspeakable, painful confusion. It was too difficult, too difficult.

The inkpot, he found when he wanted to begin writing, contained nothing but a parched black sediment. He had been meaning for days past to get some more ink; and he had always forgotten. He would have to write in pencil.

‘Do you remember,’ he wrote, ‘do you remember, Myra, that time we went down into the country — you remember — under the Hog’s Back at that little inn they were trying to make pretentious? “Hotel Bull” — do you remember? How we laughed over the Hotel Bull! And how we liked the country outside its doors! All the world in a few square miles. Chalk-pits and blue butterflies on the Hog’s Back. And at the foot of the hill, suddenly, the sand; the hard, yellow sand with those queer caves, dug when and by what remote villains at the edge of the Pilgrims’ Way? the fine grey sand on which the heather of Puttenham Common grows. And the flagstaff and the inscription marking the place where Queen Victoria stood to look at the view. And the enormous sloping meadows round Compton and the thick, dark woods. And the lakes, the heaths, the Scotch firs at Cutt Mill. The forests of Shackleford. There was everything. Do you remember how we enjoyed it all? I did, in any case. I was happy during those three days. And I loved you, Myra. And I thought you might, you might perhaps, some day, love me. You didn’t. And my love has only brought me unhappiness. Perhaps it has been my fault. Perhaps I ought to have known how to make you give me happiness. You remember that wonderful sonnet of Michelangelo’s, where he says that the loved woman is like a block of marble from which the artist knows how to cut the perfect statue of his dreams. If the statue turns out a bad one, if it’s death instead of love that the lover gets — why, the fault lies in the artist and in the lover, not in the marble, not in the beloved.

Amor dunque non ha, nè tua beltate,  
O fortuna, o durezza, o gran disdegno,  
Del mio mal colpa, o mio destino, o sorte,  
Se dentro del tuo cor morte è pietate  
Porti in un tempo, e ch’l mio basso ingegno  
Non sappia ardendo trarne altro che morte.

Yes, it was my basso ingegno: my low genius which did not know how to draw love from you, nor beauty from the materials of which art is made. Ah, now you’ll smile to yourself and say: Poor Casimir, he has come to admit that at last? Yes, yes, I have come to admit everything. That I couldn’t paint, I couldn’t write, I couldn’t make music. That I was a charlatan and a quack. That I was a ridiculous actor of heroic parts who deserved to be laughed at — and was laughed at. But then every man is ludicrous if you look at him from outside, without taking into account what’s going on in his heart and mind. You could turn Hamlet into an epigrammatic farce with an inimitable scene when he takes his adored mother in adultery. You could make the wittiest Guy de Maupassant short story out of the life of Christ, by contrasting the mad rabbi’s

pretensions with his abject fate. It's a question of the point of view. Every one's a walking farce and a walking tragedy at the same time. The man who slips on a banana-skin and fractures his skull describes against the sky, as he falls, the most richly comical arabesque. And you, Myra — what do you suppose the unsympathetic gossips say of you? What sort of a farce of the Boulevards is your life in their eyes? For me, Myra, you seem to move all the time through some nameless and incomprehensible tragedy. For them you are what? Merely any sort of a wanton, with amusing adventures. And what am I? A charlatan, a quack, a pretentious, boasting, rhodo-montading imbecile, incapable of painting anything but vermouth posters. (Why did that hurt so terribly? I don't know. There was no reason why you shouldn't think so if you wanted to.) I was all that — and grotesquely laughable. And very likely your laughter was justified, your judgment was true. I don't know. I can't tell. Perhaps I am a charlatan. Perhaps I'm insincere; boasting to others, deceiving myself. I don't know, I tell you. Everything is confusion in my mind now. The whole fabric seems to have tumbled to pieces; it lies in a horrible chaos. I can make no order within myself. Have I lied to myself? have I acted and postured the Great Man to persuade myself that I am one? have I something in me, or nothing? have I ever achieved anything of worth, anything that rhymed with my conceptions, my dreams (for those were fine; of that, I am certain)? I look into the chaos that is my soul and, I tell you, I don't know, I don't know. But what I do know is that I've spent nearly twenty years now playing the charlatan at whom you all laugh. That I've suffered, in mind and in body too — almost from hunger, sometimes — in order to play it. That I've struggled, that I've exultantly climbed to the attack, that I've been thrown down — ah, many times! — that I've picked myself up and started again. Well, I suppose all that's ludicrous, if you like to think of it that way. It is ludicrous that a man should put himself to prolonged inconvenience for the sake of something which doesn't really exist at all. It's exquisitely comic, I can see. I can see it in the abstract, so to speak. But in this particular case, you must remember I'm not a dispassionate observer. And if I am overcome now, it is not with laughter. It is with an indescribable unhappiness, with the bitterness of death itself. Death, death, death. I repeat the word to myself, again and again. I think of death, I try to imagine it, I hang over it, looking down, where the stones fall and fall and there is one horrible noise, and then silence again; looking down into the well of death. It is so deep that there is no glittering eye of water to be seen at the bottom. I have no candle to send down. It is horrible, but I do not want to go on living. Living would be worse than ...'

Lypiatt was reaching out for another sheet of paper when he was startled to hear the sound of feet on the stairs. He turned towards the door. His heart beat with violence. He was filled with a strange sense of apprehension. In terror he awaited the approach of some unknown and terrible being. The feet of the angel of death were on the stairs. Up, up, up. Lypiatt felt himself trembling as the sound came nearer. He knew for certain that in a few seconds he was going to die. The hangmen had already pinioned him; the soldiers of the firing squad had already raised their rifles. One, two, ... he thought of Mrs Viveash standing, bare-headed, the wind blowing in her hair, at the foot of

the flagstaff from the site of which Queen Victoria had admired the distant view of Selborne; he thought of her dolorously smiling; he remembered that once she had taken his head between her two hands and kissed him: 'Because you're such a golden ass,' she had said, laughing. Three ... There was a little tap at the door. Lypiatt pressed his hand over his heart. The door opened.

A small, bird-like man with a long, sharp nose and eyes as round and black and shining as buttons stepped into the room.

'Mr Lydgate, I presume?' he began. Then looked at a card on which a name and address were evidently written. 'Lypiatt, I mean. A thousand pardons. Mr Lypiatt, I presume?'

Lypiatt leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. His face was as white as paper. He breathed hard and his temples were wet with sweat, as though he had been running.

'I found the door down below open, so I came straight up. I hope you'll excuse ...' The stranger smiled apologetically.

'Who are you?' Lypiatt asked, reopening his eyes. His heart was still beating hard; after the storm it calmed itself slowly. He drew back from the brink of the fearful well; the time had not yet come to plunge.

'My name,' said the stranger, 'is Boldero, Herbert Boldero. Our mutual friend Mr Gumbril, Mr Theodore Gumbril, junior,' he made it more precise, 'suggested that I might come and see you about a little matter in which he and I are interested and in which perhaps you, too, might be interested.'

Lypiatt nodded, without saying anything.

Mr Boldero, meanwhile, was turning his bright, bird-like eyes about the studio. Mrs Viveash's portrait, all but finished now, was clamped to the easel. He approached it, a connoisseur.

'It reminds me very much,' he said, 'of Bacosso. Very much indeed, if I may say so. Also a little of ...' he hesitated, trying to think of the name of that other fellow Gumbril had talked about. But being unable to remember the unimpressive syllables of Derain he played for safety and said— 'of Orpen.' Mr Boldero looked inquiringly at Lypiatt to see if that was right.

Lypiatt still spoke no word and seemed, indeed, not to have heard what had been said.

Mr Boldero saw that it wasn't much good talking about modern art. This chap, he thought, looked as though something were wrong with him. He hoped he hadn't got influenza. There was a lot of the disease about. 'This little affair I was speaking of,' he pursued, in another tone, 'is a little business proposition that Mr Gumbril and I have gone into together. A matter of pneumatic trousers,' he waved his hand airily.

Lypiatt suddenly burst out laughing, an embittered Titan. Where do flies go? Where do souls go? The barrel-organ, and now pneumatic trousers! Then, as suddenly, he was silent again. More literature? Another piece of acting? 'Go on,' he said, 'I'm sorry.'

'Not at all, not at all,' said Mr Boldero indulgently. 'I know the idea does seem a little humorous, if I may say so, at first. But I assure you, there's money in it, Mr

Lydgate — Mr Lypiatt. Money!’ Mr Boldero paused a moment dramatically. ‘Well,’ he went on, ‘our idea was to launch the new product with a good swingeing publicity campaign. Spend a few thousands in the papers and then get it good and strong into the Underground and on the hoardings, along with Owbridge’s and John Bull and the Golden Ballot. Now, for that, Mr Lypiatt, we shall need, as you can well imagine, a few good striking pictures. Mr Gumbril mentioned your name and suggested I should come and see you to find out if you would perhaps be agreeable to lending us your talent for this work. And I may add, Mr Lypiatt,’ he spoke with real warmth, ‘that having seen this example of your work’ — he pointed to the portrait of Mrs Viveash — ‘I feel that you would be eminently capable of ...’

He did not finish the sentence; for at this moment Lypiatt leapt up from his chair and, making a shrill, inarticulate, animal noise, rushed on the financier, seized him with both hands by the throat, shook him, threw him to the floor, then picked him up again by the coat collar and pushed him towards the door, kicking him as he went. A final kick sent Mr Boldero tobogganing down the steep stairs. Lypiatt ran down after him; but Mr Boldero had picked himself up, had opened the front door, slipped out, slammed it behind him, and was running up the mews before Lypiatt could get to the bottom of the stairs.

Lypiatt opened the door and looked out. Mr Boldero was already far away, almost at the Piranesian arch. He watched him till he was out of sight, then went upstairs again and threw himself face downwards on his bed.

## Chapter XX

ZOE ENDED THE discussion by driving half an inch of penknife into Coleman’s left arm and running out of the flat, slamming the door behind her. Coleman was used to this sort of thing; this sort of thing, indeed, was what he was there for. Carefully he pulled out the penknife which had remained sticking in his arm. He looked at the blade and was relieved to see that it wasn’t so dirty as might have been expected. He found some cotton wool, mopped up the blood as it oozed out, and dabbed the wound with iodine. Then he set himself to bandage it up. But to tie a bandage round one’s own left arm is not easy. Coleman found it impossible to keep the lint in place, impossible to get the bandage tight enough. At the end of a quarter of an hour he had only succeeded in smearing himself very copiously with blood, and the wound was still unbound. He gave up the attempt and contented himself with swabbing up the blood as it came out.

‘And forthwith came there out blood and water,’ he said aloud, and looked at the red stain on the cotton wool. He repeated the words again and again, and at the fiftieth repetition burst out laughing.

The bell in the kitchen suddenly buzzed. Who could it be? He went to the front door and opened it. On the landing outside stood a tall slender young woman with slanting Chinese eyes and a wide mouth, elegantly dressed in a black frock piped with white. Keeping the cotton wool still pressed to his bleeding arm. Coleman bowed as gracefully as he could.

‘Do come in,’ he said. ‘You are just in the nick of time. I am on the point of bleeding to death. And forthwith came there out blood and water. Enter, enter,’ he added, seeing the young woman still standing irresolutely on the threshold.

‘But I wanted to see Mr Coleman,’ she said, stammering a little and showing her embarrassment by blushing.

‘I am Mr Coleman.’ He took the cotton wool for a moment from his arm and looked with the air of a connoisseur at the blood on it. ‘But I shall very soon cease to be that individual unless you come and tie up my wounds.’

‘But you’re not the Mr Coleman I thought you were,’ said the young lady, still more embarrassed. ‘You have a beard, it is true; but ...’

‘Then I must resign myself to quit this life, must I?’ He made a gesture of despair, throwing out both hands. ‘Out, out, brief Coleman. Out, damned spot,’ and he made as though to close the door.

The young lady checked him. ‘If you really need tying up,’ she said, ‘I’ll do it, of course. I passed my First-Aid Exam in the war.’

Coleman reopened the door. ‘Saved!’ he said. ‘Come in.’

It had been Rosie’s original intention yesterday to go straight on from Mr Mercaptan’s to Toto’s. She would see him at once, she would ask him what he meant by playing that stupid trick on her. She would give him a good talking to. She would even tell him that she would never see him again. But, of course, if he showed himself sufficiently contrite and reasonably explanatory, she would consent — oh, very reluctantly — to take him back into favour. In the free, unprejudiced circles in which she now moved, this sort of joke, she imagined, was a mere trifle. It would be absurd to quarrel seriously about it. But still, she was determined to give Toto a lesson.

When, however, she did finally leave Mr Mercaptan’s delicious boudoir, it was too late to think of going all the way to Pimlico, to the address which Mr Mercaptan had given her. She decided to put it off till the next day.

And so the next day, duly, she had set out for Pimlico — to Pimlico, and to see a man called Coleman! It seemed rather dull and second-rate after Sloane Street and Mr Mercaptan. Poor Toto! — the sparkle of Mr Mercaptan had made him look rather tarnished. That essay on the ‘Jus Primæ Noctis’ — ah! Walking through the unsavoury mazes of Pimlico, she thought of it, and, thinking of it, smiled. Poor Toto! And also, she mustn’t forget, stupid, malicious, idiotic Toto! She had made up her mind exactly what she should say to him; she had even made up her mind what Toto would say to her. And when the scene was over they would go and dine at the Café Royal — upstairs, where she had never been. And she would make him rather jealous by telling him how much she had liked Mr Mercaptan; but not too jealous. Silence is golden,

as her father used to say when she used to fly into tempers and wanted to say nasty things to everybody within range. Silence, about some things, is certainly golden.

In the rather gloomy little turning off Lupus Street to which she had been directed, Rosie found the number, found, in the row of bells and cards, the name. Quickly and decidedly she mounted the stairs.

‘Well,’ she was going to say as soon as she saw him, ‘I thought you were a civilized being.’ Mr Mercaptan had dropped a hint that Coleman wasn’t really civilized; a hint was enough for Rosie. ‘But I see,’ she would go on, ‘that I was mistaken. I don’t like to associate with boors.’ The fastidious lady had selected him as a young poet, not as a ploughboy.

Well rehearsed, Rosie rang the bell. And then the door had opened on this huge bearded Cossack of a man, who smiled, who looked at her with bright, dangerous eyes, who quoted the Bible and who was bleeding like a pig. There was blood on his shirt, blood on his trousers, blood on his hands, bloody fingermarks on his face; even the blond fringe of his beard, she noticed, was dabbled here and there with blood. It was too much, at first, even for her aristocratic equanimity.

In the end, however, she followed him across a little vestibule into a bright, white-washed room empty of all furniture but a table, a few chairs and a large box-spring and mattress, which stood like an island in the middle of the floor and served as bed or sofa as occasion required. Over the mantelpiece was pinned a large photographic reproduction of Leonardo’s study of the anatomy of love. There were no other pictures on the walls.

‘All the apparatus is here,’ said Coleman, and he pointed to the table. ‘Lint, bandages, cotton wool, iodine, gauze, oiled silk. I have them all ready in preparation for these little accidents.’

‘But do you often manage to cut yourself in the arm?’ asked Rosie. She took off her gloves and began to undo a fresh packet of lint.

‘One gets cut,’ Coleman explained. ‘Little differences of opinion, you know. If your eye offend you, pluck it out; love your neighbour as yourself. Argal: if his eye offend you — you see? We live on Christian principles here.’

‘But who are “we”?’ asked Rosie, giving the cut a last dressing of iodine and laying a big square of lint over it.

‘Merely myself and — how shall I put it? — my helpmate,’ Coleman answered. ‘Ah! you’re wonderfully skilful at this business,’ he went on. ‘You’re the real hospital-nurse type; all maternal instincts. When pain and anguish wring the brow, an interesting mangle thou, as we used to say in the good old days when the pun and the Spoonerismus were in fashion.’

Rosie laughed. ‘Oh, I don’t spend all my time tying up wounds,’ she said, and turned her eyes for an instant from the bandage. After the first surprise she was feeling her cool self again.

‘Brava!’ cried Coleman. ‘You make them too, do you? Make them first and cure them afterwards in the grand old homœopathic way. Delightful! You see what Leonardo has to say about it.’ With his free hand he pointed to the photograph over the mantelpiece.

Rosie, who had noticed the picture when she came into the room, preferred not to look at it too closely a second time. ‘I think it’s rather revolting,’ she said, and was very busy with the bandage.

‘Ah! but that’s the point, that’s the whole point,’ said Coleman, and his clear blue eyes were alive with dancing lights. ‘That’s the beauty of the grand passion. It is revolting. You read what the Fathers of the Church have to say about love. They’re the men. It was Odo of Cluny, wasn’t it, who called woman a *saccus stercoris*, a bag of muck. *Si quis enim considerat quæ intra nares et quæ intra fauces et quæ intra ventrem lateant, sordes ubique reperiet.*’ The Latin rumbled like eloquent thunder in Coleman’s mouth. ‘*Et si nec extremis digitis flegma vel stercus tangere patimur, quomodo ipsum stercoris saccum amplecti desideramus.*’ He smacked his lips. ‘Magnificent!’ he said.

‘I don’t understand Latin,’ said Rosie, ‘and I’m glad of it. And your bandage is finished. Look.’

‘Interesting mangle!’ Coleman smiled his thanks. ‘But Bishop Odo, I fear, wouldn’t even have spared you; not even for your good works. Still less for your good looks, which would only have provoked him to dwell with the more insistency on the visceral secrets which they conceal.’

‘Really,’ Rosie protested. She would have liked to get up and go away, but the Cossack’s blue eyes glittered at her with such a strange expression and he smiled so enigmatically, that she found herself still sitting where she was, listening with a disgusted pleasure to his quick talk, his screams of deliberate and appalling laughter.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed, throwing up his hands, ‘what sensualists these old fellows were! What a real voluptuous feeling they had for dirt and gloom and sordidness and boredom, and all the horrors of vice. They pretended they were trying to dissuade people from vice by enumerating its horrors. But they were really only making it more spicy by telling the truth about it. *O esca vermium, O massa pulveris!* What nauseating embraces! To conjugate the copulative verb, boringly, with a sack of tripe — what could be more exquisitely and piercingly and deliriously vile?’ And he threw back his head and laughed; the blood-dabbled tips of his blond beard shook. Rosie looked at them, fascinated with disgust.

‘There’s blood on your beard,’ she felt compelled to say.

‘What of it? Why shouldn’t there be?’ Coleman asked.

Confused, Rosie felt herself blushing. ‘Only because it’s rather unpleasing — pleasant. I don’t know why. But it is.’

‘What a reason for immediately falling into my arms!’ said Coleman. ‘To be kissed by a beard is bad enough at any time. But by a bloody beard — imagine!’

Rosie shuddered.

‘After all,’ he said, ‘what interest or amusement is there in doing the ordinary things in the obvious way? Life au naturel.’ He shook his head. ‘You must have garlic and saffron. Do you believe in God?’

‘Not m — much,’ said Rosie, smiling.

‘I pity you. You must find existence dreadfully dull. As soon as you do, everything becomes a thousand times life-size. Phallic symbols five hundred feet high,’ he lifted his hand. ‘A row of grinning teeth you could run the hundred yards on.’ He grinned at her through his beard. ‘Wounds big enough to let a coach-and-six drive into their purulent recesses. Every slightest act eternally significant. It’s only when you believe in God, and especially in hell, that you can really begin enjoying life. For instance, when in a few moments you surrender yourself to the importunities of my bloody beard, how prodigiously much more you’d enjoy it if you could believe you were committing the sin against the Holy Ghost — if you kept thinking calmly and dispassionately all the time the affair was going on: All this is not only a horrible sin, it is also ugly, grotesque, a mere defecation, a—’

Rosie held up her hand. ‘You’re really horrible,’ she said. Coleman smiled at her. Still, she did not go.

‘He who is not with me is against me,’ said Coleman. ‘If you can’t make up your mind to be with, it’s surely better to be positively against than merely negatively indifferent.’

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed Rosie feebly.

‘When I call my lover a nymphomaniacal dog, she runs the penknife into my arm.’

‘Well, do you enjoy it?’ asked Rosie.

‘Piercingly,’ he answered. ‘It is at once sordid to the last and lowest degree and infinitely and eternally significant.’

Coleman was silent and Rosie too said nothing. Futilely she wished it had been Toto instead of this horrible, dangerous Cossack. Mr Mercaptan ought to have warned her. But then, of course, he supposed that she already knew the creature. She looked up at him and found his bright eyes fixed upon her; he was silently laughing.

‘Don’t you want to know who I am?’ she asked. ‘And how I got here?’

Coleman blandly shook his head. ‘Not in the very least,’ he said.

Rosie felt more helpless, somehow, than ever. ‘Why not?’ she asked as bravely and impertinently as she could.

Coleman answered with another question. ‘Why should I?’

‘It would be natural curiosity.’

‘But I know all I want to know,’ he said. ‘You are a woman, or, at any rate, you have all the female stigmata. Not too sumptuously well-developed, let me add. You have no wooden legs. You have eyelids that flutter up and down over your eyes like a moving shutter in front of a signalling lamp, spelling out in a familiar code the letters: A.M.O.R., and not, unless I am very much mistaken, those others: C.A.S.T.I.T.A.S. You have a mouth that looks as though it knew how to taste and how to bite. You ...’

Rosie jumped up. ‘I’m going away,’ she said.



Coleman leaned back in his chair and hallooed with laughter. 'Bite, bite, bite,' he said. 'Thirty-two times.' And he opened and shut his mouth as fast as he could, so that his teeth clicked against one another with a little dry, bony noise. 'Every mouthful thirty-two times. That's what Mr Gladstone said. And surely Mr Gladstone' — he rattled his sharp, white teeth again— 'surely Mr Gladstone should know.'

'Good-bye,' said Rosie from the door.

'Good-bye,' Coleman called back; and immediately afterwards jumped to his feet and made a dash across the room towards her.

Rosie uttered a cry, slipped through the door and, slamming it behind her, ran across the vestibule and began fumbling with the latches of the outer door. It wouldn't open, it wouldn't open. She was trembling; fear made her feel sick. There was a rattling at the door behind her. There was a whoop of laughter, and then the Cossack's hands were on her arms, his face came peering over her shoulder, and the blond beard dabbled with blood prickled against her neck and face.

'Oh, don't, don't, don't!' she implored, turning away her head. Then all at once she began violently crying.

'Tears!' exclaimed Coleman in rapture, 'genuine tears!' He bent eagerly forward to kiss them away, to drink them as they fell. 'What an intoxication,' he said, looking up to the ceiling like a chicken that has taken a sip of water; he smacked his lips.

Sobbing uncontrollably, Rosie had never in all her life felt less like a great, fastidious lady.

## Chapter XXI

'WELL,' SAID GUMBRIL, 'here I am again.'

'Already?' Mrs Viveash had been reduced, by the violence of her headache, to coming home after her luncheon with Piers Cotton for a rest. She had fed her hungry pain on Pyramidon and now she was lying down on the Dufy-upholstered sofa at the foot of her full-length portrait by Jacques-Emile Blanche. Her head was not much better, but she was bored. When the maid had announced Gumbriel, she had given word that he was to be let in. 'I'm very ill,' she went on expiringly. 'Look at me,' she pointed to herself, 'and me again.' She waved her hand towards the sizzling brilliance of the portrait. 'Before and after. Like the advertisements, you know. Every picture tells a story.' She laughed faintly, then made a little grimace and, sucking in the breath between her lips, she put her hand to her forehead.

'My poor Myra.' Gumbriel pulled up a chair to the sofa and sat there like a doctor at his patient's bedside. 'But before and after what?' he asked, almost professionally.

Mrs Viveash gave an all but imperceptible shrug. 'I don't know,' she said.

'Not influenza, I hope?'

'No, I don't think so.'

‘Not love, by any chance?’

Mrs Viveash did not venture another laugh; she contented herself with smiling agonizingly.

‘That would have been a just retribution,’ Gumbril went on, ‘after what you’ve done to me.’

‘What have I done to you?’ Mrs Viveash asked, opening wide her pale-blue eyes.

‘Merely wrecked my existence.’

‘But you’re being childish, Theodore. Say what you mean without these grand, silly phrases.’ The dying voice spoke with impatience.

‘Well, what I mean,’ said Gumbril, ‘is merely this. You prevented me from going to see the only person I ever really wanted to see in my life. And yesterday, when I tried to see her, she was gone. Vanished. And here am I left in the vacuum.’

Mrs Viveash shut her eyes. ‘We’re all in the vacuum,’ she said. ‘You’ll still have plenty of company, you know.’ She was silent for a moment. ‘Still, I’m sorry,’ she added. ‘Why didn’t you tell me? And why didn’t you just pay no attention to me and go all the same?’

‘I didn’t tell you,’ Gumbril answered, ‘because, then, I didn’t know. And I didn’t go because I didn’t want to quarrel with you.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mrs Viveash, and patted his hand. ‘But what are you going to do about it now? Not quarrelling with me is only a rather negative satisfaction, I’m afraid.’

‘I propose to leave the country to-morrow morning,’ said Gumbril.

‘Ah, the classical remedy ... But not to shoot big game, I hope?’ She thought of Viveash among the Tikki-tikkis and the tsetses. He was a charming creature; charming, but ... but what?

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Gumbril. ‘What do you take me for? Big game!’ He leaned back in his chair and began to laugh, heartily, for the first time since he had returned from Robertsbridge, yesterday evening. He had felt then as though he would never laugh again. ‘Do you see me in a pith helmet, with an elephant gun?’

Mrs Viveash put her hand to her forehead. ‘I see you, Theodore,’ she said, ‘but I try to think you would look quite normal; because of my head.’

‘I go to Paris first,’ said Gumbril. ‘After that, I don’t know. I shall go wherever I think people will buy pneumatic trousers. I’m travelling on business.’

This time, in spite of her head, Mrs Viveash laughed.

‘I thought of giving myself a farewell banquet,’ Gumbril went on. ‘We’ll go round before dinner, if you’re feeling well enough, that is, and collect a few friends. Then, in profoundest gloom, we’ll eat and drink. And in the morning, unshaved, exhausted and filled with disgust, I shall take the train from Victoria, feeling thankful to get out of England.’

‘We’ll do it,’ said Mrs Viveash faintly and indomitably from the sofa that was almost genuinely a death-bed. ‘And, meanwhile, we’ll have a second brew of tea and you shall talk to me.’

The tannin was brought in. Gumbрил settled down to talk and Mrs Viveash to listen — to listen and from time to time to dab her brows with eau-de-Cologne, to take a sniff of hartshorn.

Gumbрил talked. He talked of the marriage ceremonies of octopuses, of the rites intricately consummated in the submarine green grottos of the Indian Ocean. Given a total of sixteen arms, how many permutations and combinations of caresses? And in the middle of each bunch of arms a mouth like the beak of a macaw.

On the backside of the moon, his friend Umbilikoff, the mystic, used to assure him, the souls of the dead in the form of little bladders — like so much swelled sago — are piled up and piled up till they squash and squeeze one another with an excruciating and ever-growing pressure. In the exoteric world this squeezing on the moon's backside is known, erroneously, as hell. And as for the constellation, Scorpio — he was the first of all constellations to' have a proper sort of backbone. For by an effort of the will he ingurgitated his external armour, he compressed and rebuilt it within his body and so became the first vertebrate. This, you may well believe, was a notable day in cosmic history.

The rents in these new buildings in Regent Street and Piccadilly run to as much as three or four pounds a square foot. Meanwhile, all the beauty imagined by Nash has departed, and chaos and barbarism once more reign supreme, even in Regent Street. The ghost of Gumbрил Senior stalked across the room.

Who lives longer: the man who takes heroin for two years and dies, or the man who lives on roast beef, water and potatoes till ninety-five? One passes his twenty-four months in eternity. All the years of the beef-eater are lived only in time. 'I can tell you all about heroin,' said Mrs Viveash.

Lady Capricorn, he understood, was still keeping open bed. How Rubens would have admired those silk cushions, those gigantic cabbage roses, those round pink pearls of hers, vaster than those that Captain Nemo discovered in the immemorial oyster! And the warm dry rustle of flesh over flesh as she walks, moving first one leg, then advancing the other.

Talking of octopuses, the swim-bladders of deep-sea fishes are filled with almost absolutely pure oxygen. C'est la vie — Gumbрил shrugged his shoulders.

In Alpine pastures the grasshoppers start their flight, whizzing like clockwork grasshoppers. And these brown invisible ones reveal themselves suddenly as they skim above the flowers — a streak of blue lightning, a trailing curve of scarlet. Then the overwing shuts down over the coloured wing below and they are once more invisible fiddlers rubbing their thighs, like Lady Capricorn, at the foot of the towering flowers.

Forgers give patina to their mediæval ivories by lending them to stout young Jewesses to wear for a few months hanging, like an amulet, between their breasts.

In Italian cemeteries the family vaults are made of glass and iron, like greenhouses. Sir Henry Griddle has finally married the hog-faced gentlewoman.

Piero della Francesca's fresco of the Resurrection at San Sepolcro is the most beautiful picture in the world, and the hotel there is far from bad. Scriabine = le Tschaikovsky de nos jours. The dullest landscape painter is Marchand. The best poet ...

'You bore me,' said Mrs Viveash.

'Must I talk of love, then?' asked Gumbriel.

'It looks like it,' Mrs Viveash answered, and closed her eyes.

Gumbriel told the anecdote about Jo Peters, Connie Asticot and Jim Baum. The anecdote of Lola Knopf and the Baroness Gnomon. Of Margherita Radicofani, himself, and the Pastor Meyer. Of Lord Cavey and little Toby Nobes. When he had finished these, he saw that Mrs Viveash had gone to sleep.

He was not flattered. But a little sleep would do her headache, he reflected, a world of good. And knowing that if he ceased to speak, she would probably be woken by the sudden blankness of the silence, he went on quietly talking to himself.

'When I'm abroad this time,' he soliloquized, 'I shall really begin writing my autobiography. There's nothing like a hotel bedroom to work in.' He scratched his head thoughtfully and even picked his nose, which was one of his bad habits, when he was alone. 'People who know me,' he went on, 'will think that what I write about the governess cart and my mother and the flowers and so on is written merely because I know in here,' he scratched his head a little harder to show himself that he referred to his brain, 'that that's the sort of thing one ought to write about. They'll think I'm a sort of dingy Romain Rolland, hopelessly trying to pretend that I feel the emotions and have the great spiritual experiences, which the really important people do feel and have. And perhaps they'll be right. Perhaps the Life of Gumbriel will be as manifestly an ersatz as the Life of Beethoven. On the other hand, they may be astonished to find that it's the genuine article. We shall see.' Gumbriel nodded his head slowly, while he transferred two pennies from his right-hand trouser pocket to his left-hand trouser pocket. He was somewhat distressed to find that these coppers had been trespassing among the silver. Silver was for the right-hand, copper for the left. It was one of the laws which it was extremely unlucky to infringe. 'I have a premonition,' he went on, 'that one of these days I may become a saint. An unsuccessful flickering sort of saint, like a candle beginning to go out. As for love — m'yes, m'yes. And as for the people I have met — I shall point out that I have known most of the eminent men in Europe, and that I have said of all of them what I said after my first love affair: Is that all?'

'Did you really say that about your first love affair?' asked Mrs Viveash, who had woken up again.

'Didn't you?'

'No. I said: This is all — everything, the universe. In love, it's either all or nothing at all.' She shut her eyes and almost immediately went to sleep again.

Gumbriel continued his lullaby-soliloquy.

' "This charming little book." ... The Scotsman. "This farrago of obscenity, slander and false psychology." ... Darlington Echo. "Mr Gumbriel's first cousin is St Francis Xavier, his second cousin is the Earl of Rochester, his third cousin is the Man of Feeling,

his fourth cousin is David Hume.” ... Court Journal.’ Gumbril was already tired of this joke. ‘When I consider how my light is spent,’ he went on, ‘when I consider! ... Herr Jesu, as Fraulein Nimmernein used to exclaim at the critical moment. Consider, dear cow, consider. This is not the time of year for grass to grow. Consider, dear cow, consider, consider.’ He got up from his chair and tiptoed across the room to the writing-table. An Indian dagger lay next to the blotting-pad; Mrs Viveash used it as a paper-knife. Gumbril picked it up, executed several passes with it. ‘Thumb on the blade,’ he said, ‘and strike upwards. On guard. Lunge. To the hilt it penetrates. Poniard at the tip’ — he ran the blade between his fingers— ‘caress by the time it reaches the hilt. Z-zip.’ He put down the knife and stopping for a moment to make a grimace at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, he went back to his chair.

At seven o’clock Mrs Viveash woke up. She shook her head to feel if the pain were still rolling about loose inside her skull.

‘I really believe I’m all right,’ she said. She jumped up. ‘Come on,’ she cried. ‘I feel ready for anything.’

‘And I feel like so much food for worms,’ said Gumbril. ‘Still, Versiam’ a tazza piena il generoso umor.’ He hummed the Drinking Song out of Robert the Devil, and to that ingenuously jolly melody they left the house.

Their taxi that evening cost them several pounds. They made the man drive back and forth, like a shuttle, from one end of London to the other. Every time they passed through Piccadilly Circus Mrs Viveash leant out of the window to look at the sky signs dancing their unceasing St Vitus’s dance above the monument to the Earl of Shaftesbury.

‘How I adore them!’ she said the first time they passed them. ‘Those wheels that whizz round till the sparks fly out from under them: that rushing motor, and that lovely bottle of port filling the glass and then disappearing and reappearing and filling it again. Too lovely.’

‘Too revolting,’ Gumbril corrected her. ‘These things are the epileptic symbol of all that’s most bestial and idiotic in contemporary life. Look at those beastly things and then look at that.’ He pointed to the County Fire Office on the northern side of the Circus. ‘There stands decency, dignity, beauty, repose. And there flickers, there gibbers and twitches — what? Restlessness, distraction, refusal to think, anything for an unquiet life ...’

‘What a delicious pedant you are!’ She turned away from the window, put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him. ‘Too exquisitely ridiculous!’ And she kissed him.

‘You won’t force me to change my opinion.’ Gumbril smiled at her. ‘Eppur’ si muove — I stick to my guns like Galileo. They move and they’re horrible.’

‘They’re me,’ said Mrs Viveash emphatically. ‘Those things are me.’

They drove first to Lypiatt’s mews. Under the Piranesian arch. The clothes-lines looped from window to window across the street might have been those ropes which form so essential and so mysterious a part of the furniture of the Prisons. The place smelt, the children were shouting; the hyena-like laughter of the flappers reverberated

between the close-set walls. All Gumbriľ's sense of social responsibility was aroused in a moment.

Shut up in his room all day, Lypiatt had been writing — writing his whole life, all his ideas and ideals, all for Myra. The pile of scribbled sheets grew higher and higher. Towards evening he made an end; he had written all that he wanted to write. He ate the remains of yesterday's loaf of bread and drank some water; for he realized suddenly that he had been fasting the whole day. Then he composed himself to think; he stretched himself out on the brink of the well and looked down into the eyeless darkness.

He still had his Service revolver. Taking it out of the drawer in which it was kept, he loaded it, he laid it on the packing-case which served him as a table at his bed's head, and stretched himself out on the bed. He lay quite still, his muscles all relaxed, hardly breathing. He imagined himself dead. Derision! there was still the plunge into the well.

He picked up the pistol, looked down the barrel. Black and deep as the well. The muzzle against his forehead was a cold mouth.

There was nothing new to be thought about death. There was not even the possibility of a new thought. Only the old thoughts, the horrible old questions returned.

The cold mouth to his forehead, his finger pressing on the trigger. Already he would be falling, falling. And the annihilating crash would be the same as the far-away sound of death at the bottom of the well. And after that, in the silence? The old question was still the same.

After that, he would lie bleeding. The flies would drink his blood as though it were red honey. In the end the people would come and fetch him away, and the coroner's jury would look at him in the mortuary and pronounce him temporarily insane. Then he would be buried in a black hole, would be buried and decay.

And meanwhile, would there be anything else? There was nothing new to be thought or asked. And there was still no answer.

In the room it began to grow dark; colours vanished, forms ran together. The easel and Myra's portrait were now a single black silhouette against the window. Near and far were fused, become one and continuous in the darkness, became a part of the darkness. Outside the window the pale twilight grew more sombre. The children shouted shrilly, playing their games under the green gas lamps. The mirthless, ferocious laughter of young girls mocked and invited. Lypiatt stretched out his hand and fingered the pistol.

Down below, at his door, he heard a sharp knocking. He lifted his head and listened, caught the sound of two voices, a man's and a woman's. Myra's voice he recognized at once; the other, he supposed, was Gumbriľ's.

'Hideous to think that people actually live in places like this,' Gumbriľ was saying. 'Look at those children. It ought to be punishable by law to produce children in this street.'

'They always take me for the Pied Piper,' said Mrs Viveash. Lypiatt got up and crept to the window. He could hear all they said.

'I wonder if Lypiatt's in. I don't see any sign of a light.'

'But he has heavy curtains,' said Mrs Viveash, 'and I know for a fact that he always composes his poetry in the dark. He may be composing poetry.'

Gumbril laughed.

'Knock again,' said Mrs Viveash. 'Poets are always absorbed, you know. And Casimir's always the poet.'

'Il Poeta — capital P. Like d'Annunzio in the Italian papers,' said Gumbril. 'Did you know that d'Annunzio has books printed on mackintosh for his bath?' He rapped again at the door. 'I saw it in the *Corriere della Sera* the other day at the club. He reads the *Little Flowers of St Francis* by preference in his bath. And he has a fountain-pen with waterproof ink in the soap-dish, so that he can add a few *Fioretti* of his own whenever he feels like it. We might suggest that to Casimir.'

Lypiatt stood with folded arms by the window, listening. How lightly they threw his life, his heart, from hand to hand, as though it were a ball and they were playing a game! He thought suddenly of all the times he had spoken lightly and maliciously of other people. His own person had always seemed, on those occasions, sacred. One knew in theory very well that others spoke of one contemptuously — as one spoke of them. In practice — it was hard to believe.

'Poor Casimir!' said Mrs Viveash. 'I'm afraid his show was a failure.'

'I know it was,' said Gumbril. 'Complete and absolute. I told my tame capitalist that he ought to employ Lypiatt for our advertisements. He'd be excellent for those. And it would mean some genuine money in his pocket.'

'But the worst of it is,' said Mrs Viveash, 'that he'll only feel insulted by the suggestion.' She looked up at the window.

'I don't know why,' she went on, 'this house looks most horribly dead. I hope nothing's happened to poor Casimir. I have a most disagreeable feeling that it may have.'

'Ah, this famous feminine intuition,' laughed Gumbril. He knocked again.

'I can't help feeling that he may be lying there dead, or delirious, or something.'

'And I can't help feeling that he must have gone out to dinner. We shall have to give him up, I'm afraid. It's a pity. He's so good with Mercaptan. Like bear and mastiff. Or rather, like bear and poodle, bear and King Charles's spaniel — or whatever those little dogs are that you see ladies in eighteenth-century French engravings taking to bed with them. Let's go.'

'Just knock once again,' said Mrs Viveash. 'He might really be preoccupied, or asleep, or ill.' Gumbril knocked. 'Now listen. Hush.'

They were silent; the children still went on hallooing in the distance. There was a great clop-clopping of horse's feet as a van was backed into a stable door near by. Lypiatt stood motionless, his arms still crossed, his chin on his breast. The seconds passed.

'Not a sound,' said Gumbril. 'He must have gone out.'

'I suppose so,' said Mrs Viveash.

‘Come on, then. We’ll go and look for Mercaptan.’

He heard their steps in the street below, heard the slamming of the taxi door. The engine was started up. Loud on the first gear, less loud on the second, whisperingly on the third, it moved away, gathering speed. The noise of it was merged with the general noise of the town. They were gone.

Lypiatt walked slowly back to his bed. He wished suddenly that he had gone down to answer the last knock. These voices — at the well’s edge he had turned to listen to them; at the well’s extreme verge. He lay quite still in the darkness; and it seemed to him at last that he had floated away from the earth, that he was alone, no longer in a narrow dark room, but in an illimitable darkness outside and beyond. His mind grew calmer; he began to think of himself, of all that he had known, remotely, as though from a great way off.

‘Adorable lights!’ said Mrs Viveash, as they drove once more through Piccadilly Circus.

Gumbril said nothing. He had said all that he had to say last time.

‘And there’s another,’ exclaimed Mrs Viveash, as they passed, near Burlington House, a fountain of Sandeman’s port. ‘If only they had an automatic jazz band attached to the same mechanism!’ she said regretfully.

The Green Park remained solitary and remote under the moon. ‘Wasted on us,’ said Gumbril, as they passed. ‘One should be happily in love to enjoy a summer night under the trees.’ He wondered where Emily could be now. They sat in silence; the cab drove on.

Mr Mercaptan, it seemed, had left London. His housekeeper had a long story to tell. A regular Bolshevik had come yesterday, pushing in. And she had heard him shouting at Mr Mercaptan in his own room. And then, luckily, a lady had come and the Bolshevik had gone away again. And this morning Mr Mercaptan had decided, quite sudden like, to go away for two or three days. And it wouldn’t surprise her at all if it had something to do with that horrible Bolshevik fellow. Though of course Master Paster hadn’t said anything about it. Still, as she’d known him when he was so high and seen him grow up like, she thought she could say she knew him well enough to guess why he did things. It was only brutally that they contrived to tear themselves away.

Secure, meanwhile, behind a whole troop of butlers and footmen, Mr Mercaptan was dining comfortably at Oxhanger with the most faithful of his friends and admirers, Mrs Speegle. It was to Mrs Speegle that he had dedicated his coruscating little ‘Loves of the Pachyderms’; for Mrs Speegle it was who had suggested, casually one day at luncheon, that the human race ought to be classified in two main species — the pachyderms, and those whose skin, like her own, like Mr Mercaptan’s and a few others, was fine and ‘responsive,’ as Mr Mercaptan himself put it, ‘to all caresses, including those of pure reason.’ Mr Mercaptan had taken the casual hint and had developed it, richly. The barbarous pachyderms he divided up into a number of subspecies: *steatocephali*, *acephali*, *theolaters*, *industrious Judæorhynci* — busy, compact and hard as dung-



beetles — Peabodies, Russians and so on. It was all very witty and delicately savage. Mr Mercaptan had a standing invitation at Oxhanger. With dangerous pachyderms like Lypiatt ranging loose about the town, he thought it best to avail himself of it. Mrs Speegle, he knew, would be delighted to see him. And indeed she was. He arrived just at lunch-time. Mrs Speegle and Maisie Furlonger were already at the fish.

‘Mercaptan!’ Mrs Speegle’s soul seemed to be in the name. ‘Sit down,’ she went on, cooing as she talked, like a ring-dove. There seemed to be singing in every word she spoke. She pointed to a chair next to hers. ‘N’you’re n’just in time to tell us all about n’your Lesbian experiences.’

And Mercaptan, giving vent to his fully orchestrated laugh — squeal and roar together — had sat down and, speaking in French partly, he nodded towards the butler and the footman, ‘à cause des valets,’ and partly because the language lent itself more deliciously to this kind of confidences, he had begun there and then, interrupted and spurred on by the cooing of Mrs Speegle and the happy shrieks of Maisie Furlonger, to recount at length and with all the wit in the world his experience among the Isles of Greece. How delicious it was, he said to himself, to be with really civilized people! In this happy house it seemed scarcely possible to believe that such a thing as a pachyderm existed.

But Lypiatt still lay, face upwards, on his bed, floating, it seemed to himself, far out into the dark emptinesses between the stars. From those distant abstract spaces he seemed to be looking impersonally down upon his own body stretched out by the brink of the hideous well; to be looking back over his own history. Everything, even his own unhappiness, seemed very small and beautiful; every frightful convulsion had become no more than a ripple, and only the fine musical ghost of sound came up to him from all the shouting.

‘We have no luck,’ said Gumbril, as they climbed once more into the cab.

‘I’m not sure,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘that we haven’t really had a great deal. Did you genuinely want very much to see Mercaptan?’

‘Not in the least,’ said Gumbril. ‘But do you genuinely want to see me?’

Mrs Viveash drew the corners of her mouth down into a painful smile and did not answer. ‘Aren’t we going to pass through Piccadilly Circus again?’ she asked. ‘I should like to see the lights again. They give one temporarily the illusion of being cheerful.’

‘No, no,’ said Gumbril, ‘we are going straight to Victoria.’

‘We couldn’t tell the driver to ... ?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Ah, well,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘Perhaps one’s better without stimulants. I remember when I was very young, when I first began to go about at all, how proud I was of having discovered champagne. It seemed to me wonderful to get rather tipsy. Something to be exceedingly proud of. And, at the same time, how much I really disliked wine! Loathed the taste of it. Sometimes, when Calliope and I used to dine quietly together, tête-à-tête, with no awful men about, and no appearances to keep up, we used to treat

ourselves to the luxury of a large lemon-squash, or even raspberry syrup and soda. Ah, I wish I could recapture the deliciousness of raspberry syrup.'

Coleman was at home. After a brief delay he appeared himself at the door. He was wearing pyjamas, and his face was covered with red-brown smears, the tips of his beard were clotted with the same dried pigment.

'What have you been doing to yourself?' asked Mrs Viveash.

'Merely washing in the blood of the Lamb,' Coleman answered, smiling, and his eyes sparkling blue fire, like an electric machine.

The door on the opposite side of the little vestibule was open. Looking over Coleman's shoulder, Gumbril could see through the opening a brightly lighted room and, in the middle of it, like a large rectangular island, a wide divan. Reclining on the divan an odalisque by Ingres — but slimmer, more serpentine, more like a lithe pink length of boa — presented her back. That big, brown mole on the right shoulder was surely familiar. But when, startled by the loudness of the voices behind her, the odalisque turned round — to see in a horribly embarrassing instant that the Cossack had left the door open and that people could look in, were looking in, indeed — the slanting eyes beneath their heavy white lids, the fine aquiline nose, the wide, full-lipped mouth, though they presented themselves for only the fraction of a second, were still more recognizable and familiar. For only the fraction of a second did the odalisque reveal herself definitely as Rosie. Then a hand pulled feverishly at the counterpane, the section of buff-coloured boa wriggled and rolled; and, in a moment, where an odalisque had been, lay only a long packet under a white sheet, like a jockey with a fractured skull when they carry him from the course.

Well, really ... Gumbril felt positively indignant, not jealous, but astonished and righteously indignant.

'Well, when you've finished bathing,' said Mrs Viveash, 'I hope you'll come and have dinner with us.' Coleman was standing between her and the farther door; Mrs Viveash had seen nothing in the room beyond the vestibule.

'I'm busy,' said Coleman.

'So I see.' Gumbril spoke as sarcastically as he could.

'Do you see?' asked Coleman, and looked round. 'So you do!' He stepped back and closed the door.

'It's Theodore's last dinner,' pleaded Mrs Viveash.

'Not even if it were his last supper,' said Coleman, enchanted to have been given the opportunity to blaspheme a little. 'Is he going to be crucified? Or what?'

'Merely going abroad,' said Gumbril.

'He has a broken heart,' Mrs Viveash explained.

'Ah, the genuine platonic towsers?' Coleman uttered his artificial demon's laugh.

'That's just about it,' said Gumbril, grimly.

Relieved by the shutting of the door from her immediate embarrassment, Rosie threw back a corner of the counterpane and extruded her head, one arm and the shoulder with the mole on it. She looked about her, opening her slanting eyes as wide

as she could. She listened with parted lips to the voices that came, muffled now, through the door. It seemed to her as though she were waking up; as though now, for the first time, she were hearing that shattering laugh, were looking now for the first time on these blank, white walls and the one lovely and horrifying picture. Where was she? What did it all mean? Rosie put her hand to her forehead, tried to think. Her thinking was always a series of pictures; one after another the pictures swam up before her eyes, melted again in an instant.

Her mother taking off her pince-nez to wipe them — and at once her eyes were tremulous and vague and helpless. ‘You should always let the gentleman get over the stile first,’ she said, and put on her glasses again. Behind the glasses her eyes immediately became clear, piercing, steady and efficient. Rather formidable eyes. They had seen Rosie getting over the stile in front of Willie Hoskyns, and there was too much leg.

James reading at his desk; his heavy, round head propped on his hand. She came up behind him and threw her arms round his neck. Very gently, and without turning his eyes from the page, he undid her embrace and, with a little push that was no more than a hint, an implication, signified that he didn’t want her. She had gone to her pink room, and cried.

Another time James shook his head and smiled patiently under his moustache. ‘You’ll never learn,’ he said. She had gone to her room and cried that time too.

Another time they were lying in bed together, in the pink bed; only you couldn’t see it was pink because there was no light. They were lying very quietly. Warm and happy and remote she felt. Sometimes as it were the physical memory of pleasure plucked at her nerves, making her start, making her suddenly shiver. James was breathing as though he were asleep. All at once he stirred. He patted her shoulder two or three times in a kindly and business-like way. ‘I know what that means,’ she said, ‘when you pat me like that.’ And she patted him — pat-pat-pat, very quickly. ‘It means you’re going to bed.’ ‘How do you know?’ he asked. ‘Do you think I don’t know you after all this time? I know that pat by heart.’ And suddenly all her warm, quiet happiness evaporated; it was all gone. ‘I’m only a machine for going to bed with,’ she said. ‘That’s all I am for you.’ She felt she would like to cry. But James only laughed and said, ‘Nonsense!’ and pulled his arm clumsily from underneath her. ‘You go to sleep,’ he said, and kissed her on the forehead. Then he got out of bed, and she heard him bumping clumsily about in the darkness. ‘Damn!’ he said once. Then he found the door, opened, and was gone.

She thought of those long stories she used to make up when she went shopping. The fastidious lady; the poets; all the adventures.

Toto’s hands were wonderful.

She saw, she heard Mr Mercaptan reading his essay. Poor father, reading aloud from the Hibbert Journal!

And now the Cossack, covered with blood. He, too, might read aloud from the Hibbert Journal — only backwards, so to speak. She had a bruise on her arm. ‘You think there’s nothing inherently wrong and disgusting in it?’ he had asked. ‘There is,

I tell you.' He had laughed and kissed her and stripped off her clothes and caressed her. And she had cried, she had struggled, she had tried to turn away; and in the end she had been overcome by a pleasure more piercing and agonizing than anything she had ever felt before. And all the time Coleman had hung over her, with his blood-stained beard, smiling into her face, and whispering, 'Horrible, horrible, infamous and shameful.' She lay in a kind of stupor. Then, suddenly there had been that ringing. The Cossack had left her. And now she was awake again, and it was horrible, it was shameful. She shuddered; she jumped out of bed and began as quickly as she could to put on her clothes.

'Really, really, won't you come?' Mrs Viveash was insisting. She was not used to people saying no when she asked, when she insisted. She didn't like it.

'No.' Coleman shook his head. 'You may be having the last supper. But I have a date here with the Magdalen.'

'Oh, a woman,' said Viveash. 'But why didn't you say so before?'

'Well, as I'd left the door open,' said Coleman, 'I thought it was unnecessary.'

'Fie,' said Mrs Viveash. 'I find this very repulsive. Let's go away.' She plucked Gumbril by the sleeve.

'Good-bye,' said Coleman, politely. He shut the door after them and turned back across the little hall.

'What! Not thinking of going?' he exclaimed, as he came in. Rosie was sitting down on the edge of the bed pulling on her shoes.

'Go away,' she said. 'You disgust me.'

'But that's splendid,' Coleman declared. 'That's all as it should be, all as I intended.' He sat down beside her on the divan. 'Really,' he said, admiringly, 'what exquisite legs!'

Rosie would have given anything in the world to be back again in Bloxam Gardens. Even if James did live in his books all the time ... Anything in the world.

'This time,' said Mrs Viveash, 'we simply must go through Piccadilly Circus.'

'It'll only be about two miles farther.'

'Well, that isn't much.'

Gumbril leaned out and gave the word to the driver.

'And besides, I like driving about like this,' said Mrs Viveash. 'I like driving for driving's sake. It's like the Last Ride Together. Dear Theodore!' She laid her hand on his.

'Thank you,' said Gumbril, and kissed it.

The little cab buzzed along down the empty Mall. They were silent. Through the thick air one could see the brightest of the stars. It was one of those evenings when men feel that truth, goodness and beauty are one. In the morning, when they commit their discovery to paper, when others read it written there, it looks wholly ridiculous. It was one of those evenings when love is once more invented for the first time. That, too, seems a little ridiculous, sometimes, in the morning.

'Here are the lights again,' said Mrs Viveash. 'Hop, twitch, flick — yes, genuinely an illusion of jollity, Theodore. Genuinely.'

Gumbril stopped the cab. 'It's after half-past eight,' he said. 'At this rate we shall never get anything to eat. Wait a minute.'

He ran into Appenrodt's, and came back in a moment with a packet of smoked salmon sandwiches, a bottle of white wine and a glass.

'We have a long way to go,' he explained, as he got into the taxi.

They ate their sandwiches, they drank their wine. The taxi drove on and on.

'This is positively exhilarating,' said Mrs Viveash, as they turned into the Edgware Road.

Polished by the wheels and shining like an old and precious bronze, the road stretched before them, reflecting the lamps. It had the inviting air of a road which goes on for ever.

'They used to have such good peep-shows in this street,' Gumbril tenderly remembered: 'Little back shops where you paid twopence to see the genuine mermaid, which turned out to be a stuffed walrus, and the tattooed lady, and the dwarf, and the living statuery, which one always hoped, as a boy, was really going to be rather naked and thrilling, but which was always the most pathetic of unemployed barmaids, dressed in the thickest of pink Jaeger.'

'Do you think there'd be any of those now?' asked Mrs Viveash.

Gumbril shook his head. 'They've moved on with the march of civilization. But where?' He spread out his hands interrogatively. 'I don't know which direction civilization marches — whether north towards Kilburn and Golders Green, or over the river to the Elephant, to Clapham and Sydenham and all those other mysterious places. But, in any case, high rents have marched up here; there are no more genuine mermaids in the Edgware Road. What stories we shall be able to tell our children!'

'Do you think we shall ever have any?' Mrs Viveash asked.

'One can never tell.'

'I should have thought one could,' said Mrs Viveash. Children — that would be the most desperate experiment of all. The most desperate, and perhaps the only one having any chance of being successful. History recorded cases ... On the other hand, it recorded other cases that proved the opposite. She had often thought of this experiment. There were so many obvious reasons for not making it. But some day, perhaps — she always put it off, like that.

The cab had turned off the main road into quieter and darker streets.

'Where are we now?' asked Mrs Viveash.

'Penetrating into Maida Vale. We shall soon be there. Poor old Shearwater!' He laughed. Other people in love were always absurd.

'Shall we find him in, I wonder?' It would be fun to see Shearwater again. She liked to hear him talking, learnedly, and like a child. But when the child is six feet high and three feet wide and two feet thick, when it tries to plunge head first into your life — then, really, no ... 'But what did you want with me?' he had asked. 'Just to look at you,' she answered. Just to look; that was all. Music hall, not boudoir.

'Here we are.' Gumbril got out and rang the second floor bell.

The door was opened by an impertinent-looking little maid.

‘Mr Shearwater’s at the lavatory,’ she said, in answer to Gumbril’s question.

‘Laboratory?’ he suggested.

‘At the ‘ospital.’ That made it clear.

‘And is Mrs Shearwater at home?’ he asked maliciously.

The little maid shook her head. ‘I expected ’er, but she didn’t come back to dinner.’

‘Would you mind giving her a message when she does come in,’ said Gumbril. ‘Tell her that Mr Toto was very sorry he hadn’t time to speak to her when he saw her this evening in Pimlico.’

‘Mr who?’

‘Mr Toto.’

‘Mr Toto is sorry ’e ‘adn’t the time to speak to Mrs Shearwater when ’e saw ’er in Pimlico this evening. Very well, sir.’

‘You won’t forget?’ said Gumbril.

‘No, I won’t forget.’

He went back to the cab and explained that they had drawn blank once more.

‘I’m rather glad,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘If we ever did find anybody, it would mean the end of this Last-Ride-Together feeling. And that would be sad. And it’s a lovely night. And really, for the moment, I feel I can do without my lights. Suppose we just drove for a bit now.’

But Gumbril would not allow that. ‘We haven’t had enough to eat yet,’ he said, and he gave the cabman Gumbril Senior’s address.

Gumbril Senior was sitting on his little iron balcony among the dried-out pots that had once held geraniums, smoking his pipe and looking earnestly out into the darkness in front of him. Clustered in the fourteen plane-trees of the square, the starlings were already asleep. There was no sound but the rustling of the leaves. But sometimes, every hour or so, the birds would wake up. Something — perhaps it might be a stronger gust of wind, perhaps some happy dream of worms, some nightmare of cats simultaneously dreamed by all the flock together — would suddenly rouse them. And then they would all start to talk at once, at the tops of their shrill voices — for perhaps half a minute. Then in an instant they all went to sleep again and there was once more no sound but the rustling of the shaken leaves. At these moments Mr Gumbril would lean forward, would strain his eyes and his ears in the hope of seeing, of hearing something — something significant, explanatory, satisfying. He never did, of course; but that in no way diminished his happiness.

Mr Gumbril received them on his balcony with courtesy.

‘I was just thinking of going in to work,’ he said. ‘And now you come and give me a good excuse for sitting out here a little longer. I’m delighted.’

Gumbril Junior went downstairs to see what he could find in the way of food. While he was gone, his father explained to Mrs Viveash the secrets of the birds. Enthusiastically, his light floss of grey hair floating up and falling again about his head as he pointed and gesticulated, he told her; the great flocks assembled — goodness only

knew where! — they flew across the golden sky, detaching here a little troop, there a whole legion, they flew until at last all had found their appointed resting-places and there were no more to fly. He made this nightly flight sound epical, as though it were a migration of peoples, a passage of armies.

‘And it’s my firm belief,’ said Gumbril Senior, adding notes to his epic, ‘that they make use of some sort of telepathy, some kind of direct mind-to-mind communication between themselves. You can’t watch them without coming to that conclusion.’

‘A charming conclusion,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘It’s a faculty,’ Gumbril Senior went on, ‘we all possess, I believe. All we animals.’ He made a gesture which included himself, Mrs Viveash and the invisible birds among the plane-trees. ‘Why don’t we use it more? You may well ask. For the simple reason, my dear young lady, that half our existence is spent in dealing with things that have no mind — things with which it is impossible to hold telepathic communication. Hence the development of the five senses. I have eyes that preserve me from running into the lamp-post, ears that warn me I’m in the neighbourhood of Niagara. And having made these instruments very efficient, I use them in holding converse with other beings having a mind. I let my telepathic faculty lie idle, preferring to employ an elaborate and cumbrous arrangement of symbols in order to make my thought known to you through your senses. In certain individuals, however, the faculty is naturally so well-developed — like the musical, or the mathematical, or the chess-playing faculties in other people — that they cannot help entering into direct communication with other minds, whether they want to or not. If we knew a good method of educating and drawing out the latent faculty, most of us could make ourselves moderately efficient telepaths; just as most of us can make ourselves into moderate musicians, chess players and mathematicians. There would also be a few, no doubt, who could never communicate directly. Just as there are a few who cannot recognize “Rule Britannia” or Bach’s Concerto in D minor for two violins, and a few who cannot comprehend the nature of an algebraical symbol. Look at the general development of the mathematical and musical faculties only within the last two hundred years. By the twenty-first century, I believe, we shall all be telepaths. Meanwhile, these delightful birds have forestalled us. Not having the wit to invent a language or an expressive pantomime, they contrive to communicate such simple thoughts as they have, directly and instantaneously. They all go to sleep at once, wake at once, say the same thing at once; they turn all at once when they’re flying. Without a leader, without a word of command, they do everything together, in complete unison. Sitting here in the evenings, I sometimes fancy I can feel their thoughts striking against my own. It has happened to me once or twice: that I have known a second before it actually happened, that the birds were going to wake up and begin their half-minute of chatter in the dark. Wait! Hush.’ Gumbril Senior threw back his head, pressed his hand over his mouth, as though by commanding silence on himself he could command it on the whole world. ‘I believe they’re going to wake now. I feel it.’

He was silent. Mrs Viveash looked towards the dark trees and listened. A full minute passed. Then the old gentleman burst out happily laughing.

‘Completely wrong!’ he said. ‘They’ve never been more soundly asleep.’ Mrs Viveash laughed too. ‘Perhaps they all changed their minds, just as they were waking up,’ she suggested.

Gumbril Junior reappeared; glasses clinked as he walked, and there was a little rattle of crockery. He was carrying a tray.

‘Cold beef,’ he said, ‘and salad and a bit of a cold apple-pie. It might be worse.’

They drew up chairs to Gumbril Senior’s work-table, and there, among the letters and the unpaid bills and the sketchy elevations of archiducal palaces, they ate the beef and the apple-pie, and drank the one-and-ninepenny vin ordinaire of the house. Gumbril Senior, who had already supped, looked on at them from the balcony.

‘Did I tell you,’ said Gumbril Junior, ‘that we saw Mr Porteous’s son the other evening — very drunk?’

Gumbril Senior threw up his hands. ‘If you knew the calamities that young imbecile has been the cause of!’

‘What’s he done?’

‘Gambled away I don’t know how much borrowed money. And poor Porteous can’t afford anything — even now.’ Mr Gumbril shook his head and clutched and combed his beard. ‘It’s a fearful blow, but of course, Porteous is very steadfast and serene and ... There!’ Gumbril Senior interrupted himself, holding up his hand. ‘Listen!’

In the fourteen plane-trees the starlings had suddenly woken up.

There was a wild outburst, like a stormy sitting in the Italian Parliament. Then all was silent. Gumbril Senior listened, enchanted. His face, as he turned back towards the light, revealed itself all smiles. His hair seemed to have blown loose of its own accord, from within, so to speak; he pushed it into place.

‘You heard them?’ he asked Mrs Viveash. ‘What can they have to say to one another, I wonder, at this time of night?’

‘And did you feel they were going to wake up?’ Mrs Viveash inquired.

‘No,’ said Gumbril Senior with candour.

‘When we’ve finished,’ Gumbril Junior spoke with his mouth full, ‘you must show Myra your model of London. She’d adore it — except that it has no electric sky-signs.’

His father looked all of a sudden very much embarrassed. ‘I don’t think it would interest Mrs Viveash much,’ he said.

‘Oh, yes it would. Really,’ she declared.

‘Well, as a matter of fact it isn’t here.’ Gumbril Senior pulled with fury at his beard.

‘Not here? But what’s happened to it?’

Gumbril Senior wouldn’t explain. He just ignored his son’s question and began to talk once more about the starlings. Later on, however, when Gumbril and Mrs Viveash were preparing to go, the old man drew him apart into a corner and began to whisper the explanation.



‘I didn’t want to blare it about in front of strangers,’ he said, as though it were a question of the housemaid’s illegitimate baby or a repair to the water-closet. ‘But the fact is, I’ve sold it. The Victoria and Albert had wind that I was making it; they’ve been wanting it all the time. And I’ve let them have it.’

‘But why?’ Gumbriel Junior asked in a tone of astonishment. He knew with what a paternal affection — no, more than paternal; for he was sure that his father was more whole-heartedly attached to his models than his son — with what pride he regarded these children of his spirit.

Gumbriel Senior sighed. ‘It’s all that young imbecile,’ he said.

‘What young imbecile?’

‘Porteous’s son, of course. You see, poor Porteous has had to sell his library, among other things. You don’t know what that means to him. All these precious books. And collected at the price of such hardships. I thought I’d like to buy a few of the best ones back for him. They gave me quite a good price at the Museum.’ He came out of his corner and hurried across the room to help Mrs Viveash with her cloak. ‘Allow me, allow me,’ he said.

Slowly and pensively Gumbriel Junior followed him. Beyond good and evil? Below good and evil? The name of earwig ... The tubby pony trotted. The wild columbines suspended, among the shadows of the hazel copse, hooked spurs, helmets of aerial purple. The Twelfth Sonata of Mozart was insecticide; no earwigs could crawl through that music. Emily’s breasts were firm and pointed and she had slept at last without a tremor. In the starlight, good, true and beautiful became one. Write the discovery in books — in books quos, in the morning, legimus cacantes. They descended the stairs. The cab was waiting outside.

‘The Last Ride again,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Golgotha Hospital, Southwark,’ said Gumbriel to the driver and followed her into the cab.

‘Drive, drive, drive,’ repeated Mrs Viveash. ‘I like your father, Theodore. One of these days he’ll fly away with the birds. And how nice it is of those starlings to wake themselves up like that in the middle of the night, merely to amuse him. Considering how unpleasant it is to be woken in the night. Where are we going?’

‘We’re going to look at Shearwater in his laboratory.’

‘Is that a long way away?’

‘Immensely,’ said Gumbriel.

‘Thank God for that,’ Mrs Viveash piously and expiringly breathed.

## Chapter XXII

SHEARWATER SAT ON his stationary bicycle, pedalling unceasingly like a man in a nightmare. The pedals were geared to a little wheel under the saddle and the rim of

the wheel rubbed, as it revolved, against a brake, carefully adjusted to make the work of the pedaller hard, but not impossibly hard. From a pipe which came up through the floor issued a little jet of water which played on the brake and kept it cool. But no jet of water played on Shearwater. It was his business to get hot. He did get hot.

From time to time his dog-faced young friend, Lancing, came and looked through the window of the experimenting chamber to see how he was getting on. Inside that little wooden house, which might have reminded Lancing, if he had had a literary turn of mind, of the Box in which Gulliver left Brobdingnag, the scenes of intimate life were the same every time he looked in. Shearwater was always at his post on the saddle of the nightmare bicycle, pedalling, pedalling. The water trickled over the brake. And Shearwater sweated. Great drops of sweat came oozing out from under his hair, ran down over his forehead, hung beaded on his eyebrows, ran into his eyes, down his nose, along his cheeks, fell like raindrops. His thick bull-neck was wet; his whole naked body, his arms and legs streamed and shone. The sweat poured off him and was caught as it rained down in a waterproof sheet, to trickle down its sloping folds into a large glass receptacle which stood under a hole in the centre of the sheet at the focal point where all its slopes converged. The automatically controlled heating apparatus in the basement kept the temperature in the box high and steady. Peering through the damp-dimmed panes of the window, Lancing noticed with satisfaction that the mercury stood unchangingly at twenty-seven point five Centigrade. The ventilators at the side and top of the box were open; Shearwater had air enough. Another time, Lancing reflected, they'd make the box air-tight and see the effect of a little carbon dioxide poisoning on top of excessive sweating. It might be very interesting, but to-day they were concerned with sweating only. After seeing that the thermometer was steady, that the ventilators were properly open, the water was still trickling over the brake, Lancing would tap at the window. And Shearwater, who kept his eyes fixed straight before him, as he pedalled slowly and unremittingly along his nightmare road, would turn his head at the sound.

'All right?' Lancing's lips moved and his eyebrows went up inquiringly.

Shearwater would nod his big, round head, and the sweat-drops, suspended on his eyebrows and his moustache, would fall like little liquid fruits shaken suddenly by the wind.

'Good,' and Lancing would go back to his thick German book under the reading-lamp at the other end of the laboratory.

Constant as the thermometer Shearwater pedalled steadily and slowly on. With a few brief halts for food and rest, he had been pedalling ever since lunch-time. At eleven he would go to bed on a shake-down in the laboratory and at nine to-morrow morning he would re-enter the box and start pedalling again. He would go on all to-morrow and the day after; and after that, as long as he could stand it. One, two, three, four. Pedal, pedal, pedal ... He must have travelled the equivalent of sixty or seventy miles this afternoon. He would be getting on for Swindon. He would be nearly at Portsmouth. He would be past Cambridge, past Oxford. He would be nearly at Harwich, pedalling

through the green and golden valleys where Constable used to paint. He would be at Winchester by the bright stream. He would have ridden through the beech woods of Arundel out into the sea ...

In any case he was far away, he was escaping. And Mrs Viveash followed, walking swayingly along on feet that seemed to tread between two abysses, at her leisure. Pedal, pedal. The hydrogen ion concentration in the blood ... Formidably, calmly, her eyes regarded. The lids cut off an arc of those pale circles. When she smiled, it was a crucifixion. The coils of her hair were copper serpents. Her small gestures loosened enormous fragments of the universe and at the faint dying sound of her voice they had fallen in ruins about him. His world was no longer safe, it had ceased to stand on its foundations. Mrs Viveash walked among his ruins and did not even notice them. He must build up again. Pedal, pedal. He was not merely escaping; he was working a building machine. It must be built with proportion; with proportion, the old man had said. The old man appeared in the middle of the nightmare road in front of him, clutching his beard. Proportion, proportion. There were first a lot of dirty rocks lying about; then there was St Paul's. These bits of his life had to be built up proportionably.

There was work. And there was talk about work and ideas. And there were men who could talk about work and ideas. But so far as he had been concerned that was about all they could do. He would have to find out what else they did; it was interesting. And he would have to find out what other men did; men who couldn't talk about work and not much about ideas. They had as good kidneys as any one else.

And then there were women.

On the nightmare road he remained stationary. The pedals went round and round under his driving feet; the sweat ran off him. He was escaping, and yet he was also drawing nearer. He would have to draw nearer. 'Woman, what have I to do with you?' Not enough; too much.

Not enough — he was building her in, a great pillar next to the pillar of work.

Too much — he was escaping. If he had not caged himself here in this hot box, he would have run out after her, to throw himself — all in fragments, all dissipated and useless — in front of her. And she wanted none of him. But perhaps it would be worse, perhaps it would be far, far worse if she did.

The old man stood in the road before him, clutching his beard, crying out, 'Proportion, proportion.' He trod and trod at his building machine, working up the pieces of his life, steadily, unremittingly working them into a proportionable whole, into a dome that should hang, light, spacious and high, as though by a miracle, on the empty air. He trod and trod, escaping, mile after mile into fatigue, into wisdom. He was at Dover now, pedalling across the Channel. He was crossing a dividing gulf and there would be safety on the other side; the cliffs of Dover were already behind him. He turned his head as though to look back at them; the drops of sweat were shaken from his eyebrows, from the shaggy fringes of his moustache. He turned his head from the blank wooden wall in front of him over his left shoulder. A face was looking through the observation window behind him — a woman's face.

It was the face of Mrs Viveash.

Shearwater uttered a cry and at once turned back again. He redoubled his pedalling. One, two, three, four — furiously he rushed along the nightmare road. She was haunting him now in hallucinations. She was pursuing and she was gaining on him. Will, wisdom, resolution and understanding were of no avail, then? But there was always fatigue. The sweat poured down his face, streamed down the indented runnel of his spine, along the seam at the meeting-place of the ribs. His loin-cloth was wringing wet. The drops pattered continuously on the waterproof sheet. His calves and the muscles of his thighs ached with pedalling. One, two, three, four — he trod round a hundred times with either foot. After that he ventured to turn his head once more. He was relieved, and at the same time he was disappointed, to see that there was now no face at the window. He had exorcised the hallucination. He settled down to a more leisurely pedalling.

In the annexe of the laboratory the animals devoted to the service of physiology were woken by the sudden opening of the door, the sudden irruption of light. The albino guinea-pigs peered through the meshes of their hutch and their red eyes were like the rear-lights of bicycles. The pregnant she-rabbits lolloped out and shook their ears and pointed their tremulous noses towards the door. The cock into which Shearwater had engrafted an ovary came out, not knowing whether to crow or cluck.

‘When he’s with hens,’ Lancing explained to his visitors, ‘he thinks he’s a cock. When he’s with a cock, he’s convinced he’s a pullet.’

The rats who were being fed on milk from a London dairy came tumbling from their nest with an anxious hungry squeaking. They were getting thinner and thinner every day; in a few days they would be dead. But the old rat, whose diet was Grade A milk from the country, hardly took the trouble to move. He was as fat and sleek as a brown furry fruit, ripe to bursting. No skim and chalky water, no dried dung and tubercle bacilli for him. He was in clover. Next week, however, the fates were plotting to give him diabetes artificially.

In their glass pagoda the little black axolotls crawled, the heraldry of Mexico, among a scanty herbage. The beetles, who had had their heads cut off and replaced by the heads of other beetles, darted uncertainly about, some obeying their heads, some their genital organs. A fifteen-year-old monkey, rejuvenated by the Steinach process, was discovered by the light of Lancing’s electric torch, shaking the bars that separated him from the green-furred, bald-rumped, bearded young beauty in the next cage. He was gnashing his teeth with thwarted passion.

Lancing expounded to the visitors all the secrets. The vast, unbelievable, fantastic world opened out as he spoke. There were tropics, there were cold seas busy with living beings, there were forests full of horrible trees, silence and darkness. There were ferments and infinitesimal poisons floating in the air. There were leviathans suckling their young, there were flies and worms, there were men, living in cities, thinking, knowing good and evil. And all were changing continuously, moment by moment, and each remained all the time itself by virtue of some unimaginable enchantment. They were all alive. And on the other side of the courtyard beyond the shed in which the animals

slept or uneasily stirred, in the huge hospital that went up sheer like a windowed cliff into the air, men and women were ceasing to be themselves, or were struggling to remain themselves. They were dying, they were struggling to live. The other windows looked on to the river. The lights of London Bridge were on the right, of Blackfriars to the left. On the opposite shore, St Paul's floated up as though self-supported in the moonlight. Like time the river flowed, silent and black. Gumbril and Mrs Viveash leaned their elbows on the sill and looked out. Like time the river flowed, stanchlessly, as though from a wound in the world's side. For a long time they were silent. They looked out, without speaking, across the flow of time, at the stars, at the human symbol hanging miraculously in the moonlight. Lancing had gone back to his German book; he had no time to waste looking out of windows.

'To-morrow,' said Gumbril at last, meditatively.

'To-morrow,' Mrs Viveash interrupted him, 'will be as awful as to-day.' She breathed it like a truth from beyond the grave prematurely revealed, expiringly from her death-bed within.

'Come, come,' protested Gumbril.

In his hot box Shearwater sweated and pedalled. He was across the Channel now; he felt himself safe. Still he trod on; he would be at Amiens by midnight if he went on at this rate. He was escaping, he had escaped. He was building up his strong light dome of life. Proportion, cried the old man, proportion! And it hung there, proportioned and beautiful in the dark, confused horror of his desires, solid and strong and durable among his broken thoughts. Time flowed darkly past.

'And now,' said Mrs Viveash, straightening herself up, and giving herself a little shake, 'now we'll drive to Hampstead and have a look at Piers Cotton.'

# Those Barren Leaves

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# Part I. An Evening at Mrs. Aldwinkle's

## Chapter I

THE LITTLE TOWN of Vezza stands at the confluence of two torrents that come down in two deep valleys from the Apuan mountains. Turbulently — for they still remember their mountain source — the united streams run through the town; silence in Vezza is the continuous sound of running waters. Then, gradually, the little river changes its character; the valley broadens out, soon the hills are left behind and the waters, grown placid as a Dutch canal, glide slowly through the meadows of the coastal plain and mingle with the tideless Mediterranean.

Dominating Vezza itself, a bold promontory of hill juts out like a wedge between the two valleys. Near the top of the hill and set in the midst of ilex trees and tall cypresses that rise up blackly out of the misty olives, stands a huge house. A solemn and regular façade, twenty windows wide, looks down over the terraced cypresses and the olive trees on to the town. Behind and above this façade one sees irregular masses of buildings climbing up the slopes beyond. And the whole is dominated by a tall slender tower that blossoms out at the top, after the manner of Italian towers, into overhanging machicolations. It is the summer palace of the Cybo Malaspina, one-time Princes of Massa and Carrara, Dukes of Vezza, and marquesses, counts and barons of various other villages in the immediate neighbourhood.

The road is steep that leads up from Vezza to the palace of the Cybo Malaspina, perched on the hill above the town. The Italian sun can shine most powerfully, even in September, and olive trees give but little shade. The young man with the peaked cap and the leather wallet slung over his shoulder pushed his bicycle slowly and wearily up the hill. Every now and then he halted, wiped his face and sighed. It was on an evil day, he was thinking, on a black, black day for the poor postmen of Vezza that the insane old English-woman with the impossible name bought this palace; and a blacker day still when she had elected to come and live in it. In the old days the place had been quite empty. A couple of peasant families had lived in the out-houses; that was all. Not more than one letter a month between them, and as for telegrams — why, there had never been a telegram for the palace in all the memory of man. But those happy days were now over, and what with letters, what with packets of newspapers and parcels, what with expresses and telegrams, there was never a day and scarcely

an hour in the day when some one from the office wasn't toiling up to this accursed house.

True, the young man went on thinking, one got a good tip for bringing a telegram or an express. But being a young man of sense, he preferred leisure, if a choice had to be made, to money. The expense of energy was not to be compensated for by the three francs he would receive at the end of the climb. Money brings no satisfaction if one has to work for it; for if one works for it one has no time to spend it.

The ideal, he reflected, as he replaced his cap and once more started climbing, the ideal would be to win a big prize in the lottery. A really immense prize.

He took out of his pocket a little slip of paper which had been given him only this morning by a beggar in exchange for a couple of soldi. It was printed with rhymed prophecies of good fortune — and what good fortune! The beggar had been very generous. He would marry the woman of his heart, have two children, become one of the most prosperous merchants of his city, and live till eighty-three. To these oracles he gave small faith. Only the last verse seemed to him — though he would have found it difficult to explain why — worthy of serious attention. The last verse embodied a piece of specific good advice.

Intanto se vuoi vincere  
Un bel ternone al Lotto,  
Giuoca il sette e il sedici,  
Uniti al cinquantotto.

He read through the verse several times until he had got it by heart; then folded up the paper and put it away again. Seven, sixteen and fifty-eight — there certainly was something very attractive about those numbers.

Giuoca il sette e il sedici  
Uniti al cinquantotto.

He had a very good mind to do as the oracle commanded. It was a charm, a spell to bind fate: one couldn't fail to win with those three numbers. He thought of what he would do when he had won. He had just decided on the make of car he would buy — one of the new 14-40 horse-power Lancias would be more elegant, he thought, than a Fiat and less expensive (for he retained his good sense and his habits of economy even in the midst of overflowing wealth) than an Isotta Fraschini or a Nazzaro — when he found himself at the foot of the steps leading up to the palace door. He leaned his bicycle against the wall and, sighing profoundly, rang the bell. This time the butler only gave him two francs instead of three. Such is life, he thought, as he coasted down through the forest of silver olive trees towards the valley.

The telegram was addressed to Mrs. Aldwinkle; but in the absence of the lady of the house, who had driven down with all her other guests to the Marina di Vezza for a day's bathing, the butler brought the telegram to Miss Thriplow.

Miss Thriplow was sitting in a dark little Gothic room in the most ancient part of the palace, composing the fourteenth chapter of her new novel on a Corona typewriter. She was wearing a printed cotton frock — huge blue checks ruled, tartan-fashion, on a

white ground — very high in the waist, very full and long in the skirt; a frock that was at once old-fashioned and tremendously contemporary, school-girlish and advanced, demure and more than Chelsea-ishly emancipated. The face that she turned towards the butler as he came in was very smooth and round and pale, so smooth and round that one would never have credited her with all the thirty years of her age. The features were small and regular, the eyes dark brown; and their arched brows looked as though they had been painted on to the porcelain mask by an oriental brush. Her hair was nearly black and she wore it drawn sleekly back from her forehead and twined in a large knot at the base of her neck. Her uncovered ears were quite white and very small. It was an inexpressive face, the face of a doll, but of an exceedingly intelligent doll.

She took the telegram and opened it.

‘It’s from Mr. Calamy,’ she explained to the butler. ‘He says he’s coming by the three-twenty and will walk up. I suppose you had better have his room got ready for him.’

The butler retired; but instead of going on with her work, Miss Thriplow leaned back in her chair and pensively lighted a cigarette.

Miss Thriplow came down at four o’clock, after her siesta, dressed, not in the blue and white frock of the morning, but in her best afternoon frock — the black silk one, with the white piping round the flounces. Her pearls, against this dark background, looked particularly brilliant. There were pearls too in her pale small ears; her hands were heavily ringed. After all that she had heard of Calamy from her hostess she had thought it necessary to make these preparations, and she was glad that his unexpected arrival was to leave her alone with him at their first introduction. Alone, it would be easier for her to make the right, the favourable first impression which is always so important.

From what Mrs. Aldwinkle had said about him Miss Thriplow flattered herself that she knew just the sort of man he was. Rich, handsome, and what an amorist! Mrs. Aldwinkle had dwelt, of course, very lengthily and admiringly on that last quality. The smartest hostesses pursued him; he was popular in the best and most brilliant sets. But not a mere social butterfly, Mrs. Aldwinkle had insisted. On the contrary, intelligent, fundamentally serious, interested in the arts and so on. Moreover, he had left London at the height of his success and gone travelling round the world to improve his mind. Yes, Calamy was thoroughly serious. Miss Thriplow had taken all this with a grain of salt; she knew Mrs. Aldwinkle’s weakness for being acquainted with great men and her habit, when the admittedly Great were lacking, of promoting her common acquaintances to the rank of greatness. Deducting the usual seventy-five per cent. rebate from Mrs. Aldwinkle’s encomiums, she pictured to herself a Calamy who was one of Nature’s Guardsmen, touched, as Guardsmen sometimes are, with that awed and simple reverence for the mysteries of art, which makes these aristocratic autodidacts frequent the drawing-rooms where highbrows are to be found, makes them ask poets out to expensive meals, makes them buy cubist drawings, makes them even try, in secret, to write verses and paint themselves. Yes, yes, Miss Thriplow thought, she perfectly knew

the type. That was why she had made these preparations — put on that masterpiece of a fashionable black dress, those pearls, those rings; that was why she had donned, at the same time, the dashing manner of one of those brilliant, equivocal-looking, high-born young women at whose expense, according to Mrs. Aldwinkle, he had scored his greatest amorous triumphs. For Miss Thriplow didn't want to owe any of her success with this young man — and she liked to be successful with everybody — to the fact that she was a female novelist of good repute. She wanted, since he was one of Nature's Guardsmen with a fortuitous weakness for artists, to present herself to him as one of Nature's Guardswomen with a talent for writing equally fortuitous and unessential. She wanted to show him that, after all, she was quite up to all this social business, even though she had been poor once, and a governess at that (and, knowing her, Miss Thriplow was sure that Mrs. Aldwinkle couldn't have failed to tell him that). She would meet him on level terms, as Guardswoman to Guardsman. Afterwards, when he had liked her for her Guardish qualities, they could get down to art and he could begin to admire her as a stylist as well as a brilliant young woman of his own sort.

Her first sight of him confirmed her in her belief that she had been right to put on all her jewellery and her dashing manner. For the butler ushered into the room positively the young man who, on the covers of illustrated magazines, presses his red lips to those of the young woman of his choice. No, that was a little unfair. He was not quite so intolerably handsome and silly as that. He was just one of those awfully nice, well-brought-up, uneducated young creatures who are such a relief, sometimes, after too much highbrow society. Brown, blue-eyed, soldierly and tall. Frightfully upper class and having all the glorious self-confidence that comes of having been born rich and in a secure and privileged position; a little insolent, perhaps, in his consciousness of good looks, in his memory of amorous successes. But lazily insolent; the roasted quails fell into his mouth; it was unnecessary to make an effort. His eyelids drooped in a sleepy arrogance. She knew all about him, at sight; oh, she knew everything.

He stood in front of her, looking down into her face, smiling and with eyebrows questioningly raised, entirely unembarrassed. Miss Thriplow stared back at him quite as jauntily. She too could be insolent when she wanted to.

'You're Mr. Calamy,' she informed him at last.

He inclined his head.

'My name is Mary Thriplow. Everybody else is out. I shall do my best to entertain you.'

He bowed again, and took her extended hand. 'I've heard a great deal about you from Lilian Aldwinkle,' he said.

That she'd been a governess? Miss Thriplow wondered.

'And from lots of other people,' he went on. 'Not to mention your books.'

'Ah; but don't let's talk of those,' she waved them airily away. 'They're irrelevant, one's old books — irrelevant because they're written by some one who has ceased to exist. Let the dead bury their dead. The only book that counts is the one one's writing at the moment. And by the time that it's published and other people have

begun to read it, that too has become irrelevant. So that there never is a book of one's own that it's interesting to talk about.' Miss Thriplow spoke languidly, with a little drawl, smiling as she spoke and looking at Calamy with half-closed eyes. 'Let's talk of something more interesting,' she concluded.

'The weather,' he suggested.

'Why not?'

'Well, it's a subject,' said Calamy, 'about which, as a matter of fact, I can speak at the moment with interest — I might almost say with warmth.' He pulled out a coloured silk handkerchief and wiped his face. 'Such an inferno as those dusty roads in the plain I never walked through before. Sometimes, I confess, in this Italian glare I pine for the glooms of London, the parasol of smoke, the haze that takes the edge off a building at a hundred yards and hangs mosquito netting half-way down every vista.'

'I remember meeting a Sicilian poet,' said Miss Thriplow, who had invented this successor of Theocritus on the spur of the moment, 'who said just the same. Only he preferred Manchester. Bellissima Manchester!' She turned up her eyes and brought her hands together with a clap. 'He was a specimen in that glorious menagerie one meets at Lady Trunion's.' That was a good name to drop casually like that. Lady Trunion's was one of the salons where Nature's Guardsmen and Guardswomen encountered the funnies and the fuzzy-wuzzies — in a word, the artists. By using the word 'menagerie,' Miss Thriplow put herself, with Calamy, on the Guardsmen's side of the bars.

But the effect of the talismanic name on Calamy was not what she had expected. 'And does that frightful woman still continue to function?' he said. 'You must remember I've been away for a year; I'm not up to date.'

Miss Thriplow hastily readjusted the expression of her face, the tone of her voice. Smiling with a knowing contempt, she said: 'But she's nothing to Lady Giblet, is she? For real horrors you must go to her. Why, the house is positively a *mauvais lieu*.' She moved her jewelled hand from side to side with the gesture of a connoisseur in horror.

Calamy did not entirely agree. 'Vulgarer, perhaps, at the Giblet's; but not worse,' he said — and in a tone of voice, with an expression on his face that showed Miss Thriplow that he meant what he said and didn't at the bottom of his soul secretly adore these social delights. 'After having been away, as I have, for a year or so, to come back to civilization and find the same old people doing the same idiotic things — it's astonishing. One expects everything to be quite different. I don't know why; perhaps because one's rather different oneself. But everything is exactly the same. The Giblet, the Trunion and even, let's be frank, our hostess — though I'm honestly very fond of poor dear Lilian. There's not the slightest change. Oh, it's more than astonishing — it's positively terrifying.'

It was at this point in the conversation that Miss Thriplow became aware that she had made a huge mistake, that she was sailing altogether on the wrong tack. Another moment and she would have consummated a hideous error in social judgment, have irreparably made what she called, in her jovial undergraduatish moments, a 'floater.' Miss Thriplow was very sensitive about her floaters. Memories of floaters had a way of

sticking deep in her spirit, making wounds that never thoroughly healed. Cicatrized, the old scars still hurt from time to time. Suddenly, for no reason, in the middle of the night, or even in the middle of the jolliest party, she would remember an ancient floater — just like that, *à propos de bottes* — would remember and be overcome by a feeling of self-reproach and retrospective shame. And there was no remedy, no spiritual prophylaxis. One might do one's best to invent triumphantly right and tactful alternatives to the floater — imagine oneself, for example, whispering to sister Fanny the mollifying instead of the bitter, wounding phrase; might walk in fancy with the airiest dignity out of Bardolph's studio into the dirty little street, past the house with the canary hanging in the window (an exquisite touch the canary), away, away — when in fact (oh Lord, what a fool one had been, and how miserable, afterwards!), in actual fact one had stayed. One could do one's best; but one could never really persuade oneself that the floater hadn't happened. Imagination might struggle to annihilate the odious memory; but it never had power to win a decisive victory.

And now, if she wasn't careful, she'd have another floater rankling and suppurating in her memory. 'How could I have been so stupid?' she thought, 'how could I?' For it was obvious now that the dashing manner, the fashionable disguise were entirely inappropriate to the occasion. Calamy, it was clear, didn't appreciate that sort of thing at all; he might have once, but he didn't now. If she went on like this she'd have him putting her down as merely frivolous, worldly, a snob; and it would need time and enormous efforts to obliterate the disastrous first impression.

Surreptitiously Miss Thriplow slipped the opal ring from off the little finger of her right hand, held it for a moment, clenched out of sight in her left; then, when Calamy wasn't looking, pushed it down into the crevice between the padded seat and the back of her chintz-covered arm-chair.

'Terrifying!' she echoed. 'Yes, that's exactly the word. Those things are terrifying. The size of the footmen!' She held up one hand above her head. 'The diameter of the strawberries!' She brought both hands (still far too glittering, she regretfully noticed, with their freight of rings) to within a foot of one another in front of her. 'The inanity of the lion hunters! The roaring of the lions!' It was unnecessary to do anything with her hands now; she dropped them back into her lap and took the opportunity to rid herself of the scarab and the brilliants. And like the conjuror who makes patter to divert attention from the workings of his trick, she leaned forward and began to talk very rapidly and earnestly. 'And seriously,' she went on, putting seriousness into her voice and smoothing the laughter out of her face, so that it was wonderfully round, earnest and ingenuous, 'what rot the lions do roar! I suppose it's awfully innocent of me; but I always imagined that celebrated people must be more interesting than other people. They're not!' She let herself fall back, rather dramatically, into her chair. In the process, one hand seemed to have got accidentally stuck behind her back. She disengaged it, but not before the scarab and the brilliants had been slipped into the cache. There was nothing left now but the emerald; that could stay. It was very chaste and austere. But she would never be able to take off her pearls without his noticing.

Never — even though men are so inconceivably unobservant. Rings were easy enough to get rid of; but a necklace. . . . And they weren't even real pearls.

Calamy, meanwhile, was laughing. 'I remember making the same discovery myself,' he said. 'It's rather painful at first. One feels as though one has been somehow swindled and done in. You remember what Beethoven said: "that he seldom found in the playing of the most distinguished virtuosi that excellence which he supposed he had a right to expect." One has a right to expect celebrated people to live up to their reputations; they ought to be interesting.'

Miss Thriplow leaned forward again, nodding her assent with a child-like eagerness. 'I know lots of obscure little people,' she said, 'who are much more interesting and much more genuine, one somehow feels, than the celebrated ones. It's genuineness that counts, isn't it?'

Calamy agreed.

'I think it's difficult to be genuine,' Miss Thriplow went on, 'if one's a celebrity or a public figure, or anything of that sort.' She became very confidential indeed. 'I get quite frightened when I see my name in the papers and photographers want to take pictures of me and people ask me out to dinner. I'm afraid of losing my obscurity. Genuineness only thrives in the dark. Like celery.' How little and obscure she was! How poor and honest, so to speak. Those roaring lions at Lady Trunion's, those boring lion huntresses . . . they had no hope of passing through the needle's eye.

'I'm delighted to hear you saying all this,' said Calamy. 'If only all writers felt as you do!'

Miss Thriplow shook her head, modestly declining the implied compliment. 'I'm like Jehovah,' she said; 'I just am that I am. That's all. Why should I make believe that I'm somebody else? Though I confess,' she added, with a greatly daring candour, 'that I was intimidated by your reputation into pretending that I was more mondaine than I really am. I imagined you as being so tremendously worldly and smart. It's a great relief to find you're not.'

'Smart?' repeated Calamy, making a grimace.

'You sounded so dazzlingly social from Mrs. Aldwinkle's accounts.' And as she spoke the words she felt herself becoming correspondingly obscurer and littler.

Calamy laughed. 'Perhaps I was that sort of imbecile once,' he said. 'But now — well, I hope all that's over now.'

'I pictured you,' Miss Thriplow went on, straining, in spite of her obscurity, to be brilliant, 'I pictured you as one of those people in the Sketch— "walking in the Park with a friend," you know; a friend who would turn out at the least to be a duchess or a distinguished novelist. Can you wonder that I was nervous?' She dropped back into the depths of her chair. Poor little thing! But the pearls, though not marine, were still rather an embarrassment.

## Chapter II

MRS. ALDWINKLE, WHEN she returned, found them on the upper terrace, looking at the view. It was almost the hour of sunset. The town of Vezza at their feet was already eclipsed by the shadow of the great bluff which projected, on the further side of the westernmost of the two valleys, into the plain. But, beyond, the plain was still bright. It lay, stretched out beneath them like a map of itself — the roads marked in white, the pinewoods dark green, the streams as threads of silver, ploughland and meadowland in chequers of emerald and brown, the railway a dark brown line ruled along it. And beyond its furthest fringes of pinewoods and sand, darkly, opaquely blue, the sea. Towards this wide picture, framed between the projecting hills, of which the eastern was still rosily flushed with the light, the western profoundly dark, a great flight of steps descended, past a lower terrace, down, between columnar cypresses, to a grand sculptured gateway half-way down the hill.

They stood there in silence, leaning their elbows on the balustrade. Ever since she had jettisoned the Guardswoman they had got on, Miss Thriplow thought, most awfully well. She could see that he liked her combination of moral ingenuousness and mental sophistication, of cleverness and genuineness. Why she had ever thought of pretending she was anything but simple and natural she couldn't now imagine. After all, that was what she really was — or at least what she had determined that she ought to be.

From the entrance court on the west flank of the palace came the hoot of a motor horn and the sound of voices.

'There they are,' said Miss Thriplow.

'I rather wish they weren't,' he said, and sighing he straightened himself up and turned round, with his back to the view, towards the house. 'It's like heaving a great stone into a calm pool — all this noise, I mean.'

Mentally cataloguing herself among the tranquil charms of evening, Miss Thriplow took the remark to be complimentary to herself. 'What smashings of crystal one has to put up with,' she said. 'Every other moment, if one's at all sensitive.'

Through the huge echoing saloons of the palace the sound of an approaching voice could be heard. 'Calamy,' it called, 'Calamy!' mounting through the syllables of the name from a low to a much higher note, not, however, through any intervals known to music, but in a succession of uncertain and quite unrelated tones. 'Calamy!' It was as vague and tuneless as the call of an articulate wind. There were hurrying footsteps, a rustling of draperies. In the huge pompous doorway at the head of the steps leading down from the house to the terrace appeared the figure of Mrs. Aldwinkle.

'There you are!' she called in a rapture. Calamy walked to meet her.

Mrs. Aldwinkle was one of those large, handsome, old-masterish women who look as though they had been built up from sections of two different people — such broad shoulders they have, so Junonian a form; and growing from between the shoulders such a slender neck, such a small, compact and childish head. They look their best



between twenty-eight and, shall we say, five-and-thirty, when the body is in its perfect maturity and the neck, the little head, the unravaged features seem still to belong to a young girl. Their beauty is made the more striking, the more attractive by the curious incongruousness of its components.

‘At thirty-three,’ Mr. Cardan used to say of her, ‘Lilian Aldwinkle appealed to all the instinctive bigamist in one. She was eighteen in the attics and widow Dido on the floors below. One had the impression of being with two women at the same time. It was most stimulating.’

He spoke, alas, in the past tense; for Mrs. Aldwinkle was no longer thirty-three, nor had been these twelve, these fifteen years or more. The Junonian form — that was still stately and as yet not too massive. And from behind, it is true, the head still looked like a child’s head set on those broad shoulders. But the face, which had once been so much the younger member of the partnership, had outstripped the body in the race through time and was old and worn beyond its years. The eyes were the youngest feature. Large, blue and rather prominent, they stared very glitteringly and intently out of the face. But the setting of them was pouchy and crow’s-footed. There were a couple of horizontal wrinkles across the broad forehead. Two deep folds ran down from the corner of the nose, past the mouth, where they were partially interrupted by another system of folds that moved with the movements of the lips, to the lower edge of the jaw, forming a sharp line of demarcation between the sagging cheeks and the strong, prominent chin. The mouth was wide, with lips of rather vague contour, whose indefiniteness was enhanced by Mrs. Aldwinkle’s very careless reddening of them. For Mrs. Aldwinkle was an impressionist; it was the effect at a distance, the grand theatrical flourish that interested her. She had no patience, even at the dressing-table, for niggling pre-Raphaelite detail.

She stood there for a moment at the top of the steps, an imposing and majestic figure. Her long and ample dress of pale green linen hung down in stiff fluted folds about her. The green veil tied round her wide straw hat floated airily over her shoulders. She carried a large reticule over one arm and from her waist there dangled at the end of little chains a whole treasury of gold and silver objects.

‘There you are!’ she smiled at the approaching Calamy, smiled what had once been a smile of piercing sweetness, of alluring enchantment. Its interest now, alas, was chiefly historical. With a gesture at once theatrically exaggerated and inexpressive, Mrs. Aldwinkle suddenly stretched out both her hands in welcome and ran down the steps to meet him. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s movements were as inharmonious and uncertain as her voice. She moved awkwardly and stiffly. The majesty of her repose was dissipated.

‘Dear Calamy,’ she cried, and embraced him. ‘I must kiss you,’ she said. ‘It’s such ages since I saw you.’ Then turning with a look of suspicion to Miss Thriplow. ‘How long has he been here?’ she asked.

‘Since before tea,’ said Miss Thriplow.

‘Before tea?’ Mrs. Aldwinkle echoed shrilly, as though outraged. ‘But why didn’t you let me know in time when you were coming?’ she went on, turning to Calamy. The

thought that he had arrived when she was not there, and that he had, moreover, spent all this time talking with Mary Thriplow, annoyed her. Mrs. Aldwinkle was perpetually haunted by the fear that she was missing something. For a number of years now the universe had always seemed to be conspiring to keep her away from the places where the exciting things were happening and the wonderful words being said. She had been loth enough, this morning, to leave Miss Thriplow behind at the palace; Mrs. Aldwinkle didn't want her guests to lead independent existences out of her sight. But if she had known, if she had had the slightest suspicion, that Calamy was going to arrive while she was away, that he would spend hours *en tête à tête* with Mary Thriplow — why then she would never have gone down to the sea at all. She'd have stayed at home, however tempting the prospect of a bathe.

'You seem to have made yourself extremely smart for the occasion,' Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, looking at Miss Thriplow's pearls and her black silk with the white piping round the flounces.

Miss Thriplow looked at the view and pretended not to have heard what her hostess had said. She had no wish to engage in a conversation on this particular subject.

'Well now,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle to her new guest, 'I must show you the view and the house and all that.'

'Miss Thriplow's already very kindly been doing that,' said Calamy.

At this piece of information Mrs. Aldwinkle looked extremely annoyed. 'But she can't have shown you everything,' she said, 'because she doesn't know what there is to show. And besides, Mary knows nothing about the history of the place, or the Cybo Malaspinas, or the artists who worked on the palace, or . . .' she waved her hand with a gesture indicating that, in fine, Mary Thriplow knew nothing whatever and was completely incapable of showing any one round the house and its gardens.

'In any case,' said Calamy, doing his best to say the right thing, 'I've seen enough already to make me think the place perfectly lovely.'

But Mrs. Aldwinkle was not content with this spontaneous and untutored admiration. She was sure that he had not really seen the beauty of the view, that he had not understood it, not known how to analyse it into its component charms. She began to expound the prospect.

'The cypresses make such a wonderful contrast with the olives,' she explained, prodding the landscape with the tip of her parasol, as though she were giving a lantern lecture with coloured slides.

She understood it all, of course; she was entirely qualified to appreciate it in every detail. For the view was now her property. It was therefore the finest in the world; but at the same time, she alone had the right to let you know the fact.

We are all apt to value unduly those things which happen to belong to us. Provincial picture galleries are always stuffed with Raphaels and Giorgiones. The most brilliant metropolis in Christendom, according to its inhabitants, is Dublin. My gramophone and my Ford car are better than yours. And how pathetically boring are those poor

but cultured tourists who show us their collection of picture postcards with as much pride as if they had been the original paintings themselves.

With the palace Mrs. Aldwinkle had purchased vast domains unmentioned in the contract. She had bought, to begin with, the Cybo Malaspina and their history. This family, whose only claim to fame is to have produced, a little before its extinction, that Prince of Massa Carrara to whom the Old Woman in 'Candide' — when she was young and a Pope's ravishing daughter — was once engaged to be married, had now become for Mrs. Aldwinkle as splendid as the Gonzaga, the Este, the Medici, or the Visconti. Even the dull Dukes of Modena, the tenants of the palace (except during the brief Napoleonic interlude) between the extinction of the Cybo Malaspina and the foundation of the Kingdom of Italy, even the Dukes of Modena had so far profited by their connection with the place that for Mrs. Aldwinkle they were now patrons of letters and fathers of their people. And Napoleon's sister, Elisa Bacciochi, who had, while Princess of Lucca, passed more than one hot summer on these heights, had come to be credited by the present owner with an unbounded enthusiasm for the arts and, what in Mrs. Aldwinkle's eyes was almost more splendid, an unbounded enthusiasm for love. In Elisa Buonaparte-Bacciochi Mrs. Aldwinkle had acquired a sister soul, whom she alone understood.

It was the same with the landscape. It was hers down to the remote horizon, and nobody but she could really give it its due, And then, how she appreciated the Italians! Ever since she had bought a house in Italy, she had become the one foreigner who knew them intimately. The whole peninsula and everything it contained were her property and her secret. She had bought its arts, its music, its melodious language, its literature, its wine and cooking, the beauty of its women and the virility of its Fascists. She had acquired Italian passion: cuore, amore and dolore were hers. Nor had she forgotten to buy the climate — the finest in Europe — the fauna — and how proud she was when she read in her morning paper that a wolf had devoured a Pistoiese sportsman within fifteen miles of home! — the flora — especially the red anemones and the wild tulips — the volcanoes — still so wonderfully active — the earthquakes. . . .

'And now,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle, when she had polished off the view, 'now we must look at the house.'

She turned her back on the view. 'This part of the palace,' she said, continuing her lecture, 'dates from about 1630.' She pointed upwards with her parasol; the coloured slides were now architectural. 'A very fine specimen of early baroque. What remains of the old castle, with the tower, constitutes the eastern wing of the present house. . . .'

Miss Thriplow, who had heard all this before, listened none the less with the rapt expression of interest that one sees on the faces of children at Royal Institution lectures; partly to atone in Mrs. Aldwinkle's eyes for the offence of having been at home when Calamy arrived, and partly to impress Calamy himself with her capacity for being frankly, totally and uncritically absorbed in the little affairs of the moment.

‘Now I’ll show you the inside of the palace,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, mounting the steps that led from the terrace to the house; her treasures jingled at the end of their chains. Obediently Miss Thriplow and Calamy followed in her wake.

‘Most of the paintings,’ proclaimed Mrs. Aldwinkle, ‘are by Pasquale da Montecatini. A great painter — dreadfully underrated.’ She shook her head.

Miss Thriplow was somewhat embarrassed when, at this remark, her companion turned to her and made a hardly perceptible grimace. Whether to smile confidentially and ironically back, whether to ignore the grimace and preserve the Royal Institution expression — that was the question. In the end she decided to ignore the tacit confidence.

On the threshold of the great saloon they were met by a young girl dressed in a frock of pale pink linen, with a very young round face (otherwise ingenuous than Miss Thriplow’s) looking out of a rectangular window cut in a short smooth bell of copper-coloured hair. A pair of wide-open pale blue eyes looked out from beneath the straight metallic fringe. Her nose was small and delicately snubby. A short upper lip made her look at once pathetic and merry, like a child. It was Mrs. Aldwinkle’s niece, Irene.

She shook hands with Calamy.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘that I ought to tell you that you’ve grown up tremendously since I saw you last. But the truth is that I don’t think you have at all.’

‘I can’t help my appearance,’ she answered. ‘But inside . . .’ Inside Irene was older than the rocks on which she sat. It was not for nothing that she had passed the five most impressionable years of her life under her Aunt Lilian’s guardianship.

Mrs. Aldwinkle impatiently cut short the conversation. ‘I want you to look at this ceiling,’ she said to Calamy. Like hens drinking they stared up at the rape of Europa. Mrs. Aldwinkle lowered her gaze. ‘And the rustic work with the group of marine deities.’ In a pair of large niches, lined with shell-work and sponge-stone, two fishy groups furiously writhed. ‘So delightfully seicento,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle.

Irene, meanwhile, feeling herself excused by long familiarity from paying much attention to the marine deities, had noticed that the loose cretonne covers of the arm-chairs were crumpled. Being naturally tidy — and since she had lived with Aunt Lilian she had had to be tidy for two — she tiptoed across the room to smooth them out. Bending down to the nearest of the chairs, she took hold of the loose cover near the front of the seat and gave it a smart pull down, so as to loosen it completely before she tucked it tidily in again. The stuff came forward like a suddenly bellying sail and with it there was shot out — from nowhere, as though Irene had been doing a conjuring trick — a glittering shower of jewels. They rattled on the floor, they rolled over the tiles. The noise disturbed Miss Thriplow in her rapt and child-like contemplation of the sponge-stone niches. She turned round just in time to see a scarab ring racing towards her, with the limp of an eccentric hoop, across the tiles. Arrived within a few feet of her it lost speed, it staggered, it fell on its side. Miss Thriplow picked it up.

‘Oh, it’s only my rings,’ she said airily, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for her rings to come jumping out of the chair when Irene straightened out

the cover. 'That's all,' she added reassuringly to Irene, who was standing, as though petrified by surprise, looking down at the scattered jewels.

Mrs. Aldwinkle was fortunately absorbed in telling Calamy about Pasquale da Montecatini.

## Chapter III

DINNER WAS SERVED in the Saloon of the Ancestors. In Mrs. Aldwinkle's enthusiastic imagination what marvellous symposia had been held within those walls — centuries even before they were built — what intellectual feasts! Aquinas, here, had confided to an early Malaspina his secret doubt on the predictability of rollations, had twitted the robber marquess, over a goblet of wine, with the feebleness of his synderesis. Dante had insisted on the advantages of having a Platonic mistress whom one never met and who could, when necessary, be identified with Theology. Peter of Picardy, meanwhile, on his way to Rome had recited from his rhymed version of Physiologus the lines on the Hyaena, a beast which, besides being an hermaphrodite, carries in its eye a stone which, held by a man in his mouth, permits him to see the future; it symbolizes moreover avarice and lasciviousness. Learned Boccaccio had discoursed on the genealogy of the gods. Pico della Mirandola, over the boar's head, quoted the kabbala in support of the doctrine of the Trinity. Michelangelo had expounded his plans for the façade of San Lorenzo in Florence. Galileo had speculated why it is only up to thirty-two feet that Nature abhors a vacuum. Marini had astonished with his conceits. Luca Giordano, for a wager, had painted, between the roast and the dessert, a full-sized picture of Hannibal crossing the Alps. . . . And then, what brilliant ladies heightened the lustre of these feasts! Lovely, perennially young, accomplished as the protagonists of Castiglione's Courtier, amorous in the extreme — they inspired the men of genius to yet higher flights, they capped their hardest sallies with a word of feminine grace.

It had been Mrs. Aldwinkle's ambition, ever since she bought the palace, to revive these ancient glories. She saw herself, unofficially a princess, surrounded by a court of poets, philosophers and artists. Beautiful women should swim through the great saloons and the gardens, glowing with love for the men of genius. And periodically — for the apartment of the dwarfs, which the Cybo Malaspina, in imitation of the Gonzaga, had included in their palace, demanded appropriate inhabitants to furnish it — periodically they should bring forth, painlessly, children to the men of genius — all curly-headed, fully toothed and two years old on the day of birth, and all infant prodigies. Rows of little Mozarts. In a word, the palace of Vezza should re-become what it had never been except in Mrs. Aldwinkle's fancy.

What it had been in fact one could only guess by looking at the faces of the Ancestors who gave the banqueting-hall its name.

From circular niches set high in the walls of the huge square room the lords of Massa Carrara looked out, bust after bust, across the intervening centuries. Right round the room they went, beginning on the left of the fireplace and ending, with the penultimate Cybo Malaspina, who arranged the room, on the right. And as marquess succeeded marquess and prince, prince, an expression of ever profounder imbecility made itself apparent on the faces of the Ancestors. The vulture's nose, the formidable jaw of the first robber marquess transformed themselves by gradual degrees into the vague proboscides of ant-eaters, into criminally prognathous deformities. The foreheads grew lower with every generation, the marble eyes stared ever blanklier and the look of conscious pride became more and more strongly marked on every countenance. It was the boast of the Cybo Malaspina that they had never married beneath them and that their heirs had always been legitimate. One had only to look at the faces of the last three Princes to feel sure that the boast was amply justified. Were these the Muses' friends?

'You can imagine the splendour of the scene,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle rapturously as she entered the Saloon of the Ancestors on Calamy's arm. 'The innumerable candles, the silks, the jewels. And all the crowd manœuvring in the most stately manner according to the rules of etiquette.' The last representative, albeit adoptive, of these gorgeous beings, Mrs. Aldwinkle lifted her head still higher and with a still more swelling port sailed across the huge room towards the little table where, in shrunken splendour, the successors of Cybo Malaspina were to dine. The train of her coral-coloured velvet dress rustled after her.

'It must have been very fine,' Calamy agreed. 'Certainly, from the point of view of picturesqueness, we've lost by the passing of etiquette. One wonders how much further informality will go. Mr. Gladstone, in his old age, paid a visit to Oxford and was horrified to observe the new fashions in undergraduates' dress. In his young days every young man who respected himself had at least one pair of trousers in which he never sat down for fear of making them bag at the knees, while the outfit in which he normally walked about the streets was never worth less than seventy or eighty pounds. And yet, in the time of Mr. Gladstone's visit, the undergraduates still wore stiff collars and bowler hats. What would he have said if he could have seen them now? And what shall we say fifty years hence?'

The company disposed itself round the table. Calamy, as the new arrival, occupied the place of honour on Mrs. Aldwinkle's right.

'You've broached a very interesting subject,' said Mr. Cardan, who sat opposite him, on their hostess's left. 'Very interesting,' he repeated, as he unfolded his napkin. Mr. Cardan was a middle-sized, thickly built man. The upper hem of his trousers followed an ample geodesic; his shoulders were very broad, his neck short and powerful. The red face looked tough and knobbly like the head of a cudgel. It was an enigmatic and equivocal face, whose normal expression was at once gross and sensitively refined, serious and sly. The mouth was small and its thin lips fitted tightly together, as though they were the moving parts of a very well made piece of furniture. The line that marked

the meeting of the lips was almost straight, but at one end its horizontal gravity was deflected a trifle downwards, so that Mr. Cardan seemed to be for ever in process of suppressing a wry smile that was for ever importunately troubling his demureness. The hair was smooth, silvery and saintly. The nose was short and straight, like a lion's — but a lion's that had become, with time and good living, rather bottled. Looking out from the midst of a web-work of fine wrinkles, the eyes were small, but bright and very blue. As the result, perhaps, of an illness — or perhaps it was merely under the weight of five-and-sixty years — one white eyebrow had settled down permanently lower than the other. From the right side of his face Mr. Cardan looked at you mysteriously and confidentially through the gap in a kind of chronic wink. But from the left the glance was supercilious and aristocratic, as though the western socket had been stretched by an invisible monocle a size or so too large for it. An expression of benevolence mingled with malice shone in his glance while he was talking; and when he laughed, every polished red facet of his cudgel's face twinkled with mirth, as though suddenly illumined from within. Mr. Cardan was neither a poet nor a philosopher; nor of a remarkably brilliant family; but Mrs. Aldwinkle, who had known him intimately for many years, justified his inclusion among her courtiers on the ground that he was one of the obscure Great: potentially anything he chose to be, but actually, through indolence, unknown.

Mr. Cardan took a couple of spoonfuls of soup before proceeding. 'A very interesting subject,' he repeated yet again. He had a melodious voice, ripe, round, fruity and powdered, as it were, with a bloom of huskiness — the faint hoarseness of those who have drunk well, eaten well and copiously made love. 'Formality, external pomp, etiquette — their practical disappearance from modern life is really a most extraordinary thing, when you come to think of it. Formality and pomp were one of the essential features of ancient government. Tyranny tempered by transformation scenes — that was the formula of all governments in the seventeenth century, particularly in Italy. Provided you treated your people to a procession or some similarly spectacular function once a month or thereabouts, you could do whatever you pleased. It was the papal method *par excellence*. But it was imitated by every grand seigneur, down to the most piddling little count in the peninsula. Look how all the architecture of the period is conditioned by the need for display. The architect was there to make backgrounds for the incessant amateur theatricals of his employers. Huge vistas of communicating saloons to march down, avenues for processions, vast flights of steps to do the Grand Monarch descent from the skies. No comfort — since comfort is only private — but an immense amount of splendour to impress the spectator from outside. Napoleon was the last ruler to practise it systematically and scientifically on the grand scale. Those reviews, those triumphal entries and exits, those coronations and weddings and christenings, all those carefully prepared stage effects — why, they were half his secret. And now these pomps are no more. Are our rulers so stupid and so regardless of the lessons of history that they neglect these aids to government? Or can it be that tastes have changed, that the public no longer demands these shows and is no longer impressed by them? I put the

question to our political friends.' Mr. Cardan leaned forward, and looking past Miss Thriplow, who sat on his left, smiled at the young man who sat beyond her and at the older man occupying the corresponding place on the opposite side of the table, next to Irene Aldwinkle.

The young man, who looked even younger than he really was — and at best it was only two or three months since Lord Hovenden had attained his majority — smiled amiably at Mr. Cardan and shook his head, then turned hopefully to the person who sat opposite him. 'Ask me anover,' he said. Lord Hovenden still found it difficult to pronounce a th. 'What do you say, Mr. Falx?' An expression of respectful attention appeared on his boyish, freckled face as he waited for Mr. Falx's answer. Whatever the answer might be, it was obvious that Lord Hovenden would regard it as oracular. He admired, he revered Mr. Falx.

Mr. Falx, indeed, invited admiration and respect. With his white beard, his long and curly white hair, his large dark liquid eyes, his smooth broad forehead and aquiline nose, he had the air of a minor prophet. Nor were appearances deceptive. In another age, in other surroundings, Mr. Falx would in all probability have been a minor prophet: a denouncer, a mouthpiece of the Lord, a caller to salvation, a threatener of wrath to come. Having been born in the middle of the nineteenth century and having passed the years of his early manhood in the profession which, between three and seven, every male child desires to embrace — that of the engine driver — he had become not exactly a prophet, but a Labour leader.

Lord Hovenden, whose claim to figure in Mrs. Aldwinkle's court was the fact that she had known him since he was a baby, that he was descended from Simon de Montfort, and that he was immensely rich, had added a further merit: he had become an ardent Guild Socialist. An earnest young schoolmaster had first apprised him of the fact — hitherto but very imperfectly realized by Lord Hovenden — that there are a great many poor people whose lives are extremely disagreeable and arduous and who, if justice were done, would be better off than they are at present. His generous impulses were stirred. Youthfully, he desired to precipitate an immediate millennium. Perhaps, too, a certain egotistical ambition to distinguish himself above his fellows had something to do with his enthusiasm. Among persons born in privileged positions and in the midst of wealth, snobbery often takes a form rather different from that which it commonly assumes. Not always, indeed; for there are plenty of rich and titled persons who regard wealth and title with the same abject respect as is shown by those whose acquaintance with the nobility and the plutocracy is only in fiction and the pages of the weekly papers. But others, whose ambition it is to climb out of the familiar surroundings into, at any rate intellectually, higher spheres, become infected with a passionate snobbery in regard to the artistic or political world. This snobbery — the snobbery of blood towards brain — had mingled without his being conscious of it with Lord Hovenden's purely humanitarian ardour, and had given it added strength. Lord Hovenden's pleasure at being introduced to Mr. Falx had been enormous, and the thought that he alone, of all his friends and relations, enjoyed the privilege of Mr. Falx's acquaintance, that he



alone was free of the exciting political world in which Mr. Falx lived, had made him more than ever enthusiastic in the cause of justice. There had been occasions, however — and they had become more frequent of late — when Lord Hovenden had found that the demands made on him by a strenuous social life left him very little time for Mr. Falx or Guild Socialism. For one who danced as long and often as he did it was difficult to pay much attention to anything else. In lulls between the merrymaking he remembered with shame that he had not done his duty by his principles. It was to make up for arrears in enthusiasm that he had cut short his grouse shooting to accompany Mr. Falx to an International Labour Conference in Rome. The conference was to be held towards the end of September; but Lord Hovenden had sacrificed a month's more shooting than was necessary by suggesting that, before the conference, Mr. Falx and he should go to stay for a few weeks with Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'Come when you like and bring whom you like.' Those were the words of Lilian's invitation. He telegraphed to Mrs. Aldwinkle to say that Mr. Falx needed a holiday and that he proposed to bring him; Mrs. Aldwinkle replied that she would be delighted to have him. There they were.

Mr. Falx paused for a moment before answering Mr. Cardan's question. He turned his bright dark eyes round the table, as though collecting everybody's attention; then spoke in the penetrating musical voice that had stirred so many audiences to enthusiasm. 'Twentieth-century rulers,' he said, 'respect the educated democracy too much to try to bamboozle it and keep it falsely contented by mere shows. Democracies demand reason.'

'Oh, come,' protested Mr. Cardan. 'What about Mr. Bryan's agitation against Evolution?'

'Moreover,' Mr. Falx went on, ignoring the point, 'we in the twentieth century have outgrown that sort of thing.'

'Perhaps we have,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Though I can't imagine how we should have. Opinions change, of course, but the love of a show isn't an opinion. It's founded on something deeper, something which has no business to change.' Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'It reminds me,' he went on after a little pause, 'of another, similarly deep-rooted change that I can never account for: the change in our susceptibility to flattery. It's impossible to read any ancient moralist without finding copious warnings against flatterers. "A flattering mouth worketh ruin" — it's in the Bible. And the reward of the flatterer is also specified there. "He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail" — though one would have thought that the vicariousness of the threatened punishment rendered it a little less formidable. But at any rate, in ancient days the great and the prosperous seem to have been fairly at the mercy of flatterers. And they laid it on so thick, they did their job, from all accounts, so extremely coarsely! Can it be that the educated plutocracy of those days was really taken in by that sort of thing? It wouldn't be now. The flattery would have to be a great deal more subtle nowadays to produce the same effect. Moreover, I never find in the works of the modern moralists any warnings against flatterers. There's been some sort of change; though how it has come about, I really don't quite know.'

‘Perhaps there has been a moral progress,’ suggested Mr. Falx.

Lord Hovenden turned his eyes from Mr. Falx’s face, on which, while he was speaking, they had been reverently fixed, and smiled at Mr. Cardan with an air of inquiring triumph that seemed to ask whether he had any answer to make to that.

‘Perhaps,’ repeated Mr. Cardan, rather dubiously.

Calamy suggested another reason. ‘It’s surely due,’ he said, ‘to the change in the position of the great and the prosperous. In the past they regarded themselves and were regarded by others as being what they were by divine right. Consequently, the grossest flattery seemed to them only their due. But now the right to be a prince or a millionaire seems a little less divine than it did. Flattery which once seemed only an expression of proper respect now sounds excessive; and what in the past was felt to be almost sincere is now regarded as ironical.’

‘I think you may be right,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘One result, at any rate, of this slump in flattery has been a great alteration in the technique of the parasite.’

‘Has the technique of the parasite ever altered?’ asked Mr. Falx. Lord Hovenden passed on his question to Mr. Cardan in an interrogating smile. ‘Hasn’t he always been the same — living on the labours of society without contributing to the common stock?’

‘We are speaking of different sorts of parasites,’ Mr. Cardan explained, twinkling genially at the minor prophet. ‘Your parasites are the idle rich; mine are the idle poor who live on the idle rich. Big fleas have little fleas; I was referring to the tapeworms of tapeworms. A most interesting class, I assure you; and one that has never really had its due from the natural historians of humanity. True, there’s Lucian’s great work on the art of being a parasite, and a very fine work too; but a little out of date, particularly where flattery is concerned. Better than Lucian is Diderot. But the Neveu de Rameau deals with only a single type of parasite, and that not the most successful or the most worthy of imitation. Mr. Skimpole in *Bleak House* isn’t bad. But he lacks subtlety; he’s not a perfect model for the budding tapeworm. The fact is that no writer, so far as I’m aware, has really gone into the question of parasites. I feel their remissness,’ Mr. Cardan added, twinkling first at Mrs. Aldwinkle, then round the table at her guests, ‘almost as a personal affront. Professing as I do — or perhaps trying to profess would be a more accurate description — the parasitical mystery, I regard this conspiracy of silence as most insulting.’

‘How absurd you are,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. The complacent references to his own moral defects and weaknesses were frequent in Mr. Cardan’s conversation. To disarm criticism by himself forestalling it, to shock and embarrass those susceptible of embarrassment, to air his own freedom from the common prejudices by lightly owning to defects which others would desire to conceal — it was to achieve these ends that Mr. Cardan so cheerfully gave himself away. ‘Absurd!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle repeated.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘Not at all absurd,’ he said. ‘I’m only telling the truth. For alas, it is true that I’ve never really been a successful parasite. I could have been a pretty effective flatterer; but unfortunately I happen to live in an age when flattery

doesn't work. I might have made a tolerably good buffoon, if I were a little stupider and a little more high-spirited. But even if I could have been a buffoon, I should certainly have thought twice before taking up that branch of parasitism. It's dangerous being a court fool, it's most precarious. You may please for a time; but in the end you either bore or offend your patrons. Diderot's Neveu de Rameau is the greatest literary specimen of the type; you know what a wretched sort of life he led. No, your permanently successful parasite, at any rate in modern times, belongs to an entirely different type — a type, alas, to which by no possible ingenuity could I make myself conform.'

'I should hope not,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle, standing up for Mr. Cardan's Better Self.

Mr. Cardan bowed his acknowledgments and continued. 'All the really successful parasites I have come across recently belong to the same species,' he said. 'They're quiet, they're gentle, they're rather pathetic. They appeal to the protective maternal instincts. They generally have some charming talent — never appreciated by the gross world, but recognized by the patron, vastly to his credit of course; (that flattery's most delicate). They never offend, like the buffoon; they don't obtrude themselves, but gaze with dog-like eyes; they can render themselves, when their presence would be tiresome, practically non-existent. The protection of them satisfies the love of dominion and the altruistic parental instinct that prompts us to befriend the weak. You could write at length about all this,' went on Mr. Cardan, turning to Miss Thriplow. 'You could make a big deep book out of it. I should have done it myself, if I had been an author; and but for the grace of God, I might have been. I give you the suggestion.'

In words of one syllable Miss Thriplow thanked him. She had been very mousey all through dinner. After all the risks she had run this afternoon, the floaters she had stood on the brink of, she thought it best to sit quiet and look as simple and genuine as possible. A few slight alterations in her toilet before dinner had made all the difference. She had begun by taking off the pearl necklace and even, in spite of the chastity of its design, the emerald ring. That's better, she had said to herself as she looked at the obscure little person in the simple black frock — without a jewel, and the hands so white and frail, the face so pale and smooth — who stood opposite her in the looking-glass. 'How frankly and innocently she looks at you with those big brown eyes!' She could imagine Calamy saying that to Mr. Cardan; but what Mr. Cardan would answer she couldn't quite guess; he was such a cynic. Opening a drawer, she had pulled out a black silk shawl — not the Venetian one with the long fringes, but the much less romantic bourgeois, English shawl that had belonged to her mother. She draped it over her shoulders and with her two hands drew it together across her bosom. In the pier glass she seemed almost a nun; or better still, she thought, a little girl in a convent school — one of a hundred black-uniformed couples, with lace-frilled pantalettes coming down over their ankles, walking in a long, long crocodile, graded from five foot eight at the head to four foot nothing at the tail. But if she looped the thing up, hood fashion, over her head, she'd be still more obscure, still poorer and honester — she'd be a factory girl, click-clicking along on her clogs to the cotton

mill. But perhaps that would be carrying things a little too far. After all, she wasn't a Lancashire lass. Awfully cultured, but not spoilt; clever, but simple and genuine. That was what she was. In the end she had come down to dinner with the black shawl drawn very tightly round her shoulders. Very small and mousey. The head girl in the convent school had all the accomplishments; but, for the present, wouldn't speak unless she were spoken to. Modestly, then, demurely, she thanked him.

'Meanwhile,' Mr. Cardan continued, 'the sad fact remains that I have never succeeded in persuading anybody to become completely responsible for me. True, I've eaten quintals of other people's food, drunk hectolitres of their liquor' — he raised his glass and looking over the top of it at his hostess, emptied it to her health — 'for which I'm exceedingly grateful. But I've never contrived to live permanently at their expense. Nor have they, for their part, shown the slightest sign of wanting to take me for ever to themselves. Mine's not the right sort of character, alas. I'm not pathetic. I've never struck the ladies as being particularly in need of maternal ministrations. Indeed, if I ever had any success with them — I trust I may say so without fatuity — it was due to my strength rather than to my feebleness. At sixty-six, however . . .' He shook his head sadly. 'And yet one doesn't, by compensation, become any the more pathetic.'

Mr. Falx, whose moral ideas were simple and orthodox, shook his head; he didn't like this sort of thing. Mr. Cardan, moreover, puzzled him. 'Well,' he pronounced, 'all that I can say is this: when we've been in power for a little there won't be any parasites of Mr. Cardan's kind for the simple reason that there won't be any parasites of any kind. They'll all be doing their bit.'

'Luckily,' said Mr. Cardan, helping himself again to the mixed fry, 'I shall be dead by that time. I couldn't face the world after Mr. Falx's friends have dosed it with Keating's and vermifuge. Ah, all you young people,' he went on, turning to Miss Thriplow, 'what a fearful mistake you made, being born when you were!'

'I wouldn't change,' said Miss Thriplow.

'Nor would I,' Calamy agreed.

'Nor I,' Mrs. Aldwinkle echoed, ardently associating herself with the party of youth. She felt as young as they did. Younger indeed; for having been young when the world was younger, she had the thoughts and the feelings of a generation that had grown up placidly in sheltered surroundings — or perhaps had not grown up at all. The circumstances which had so violently and unnaturally matured her juniors had left her, stiffened as she already was by time into a definite mould, unchanged. Spiritually, they were older than she.

'I don't see that it would be possible to live in a more exciting age,' said Calamy. 'The sense that everything's perfectly provisional and temporary — everything, from social institutions to what we've hitherto regarded as the most sacred scientific truths — the feeling that nothing, from the Treaty of Versailles to the rationally explicable universe, is really safe, the intimate conviction that anything may happen, anything may be discovered — another war, the artificial creation of life, the proof of continued existence after death — why, it's all infinitely exhilarating.'

‘And the possibility that everything may be destroyed?’ questioned Mr. Cardan.

‘That’s exhilarating too,’ Calamy answered, smiling.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘It may be rather tame of me,’ he said, ‘but I confess, I prefer a more quiet life. I persist that you made a mistake in so timing your entry into the world that the period of your youth coincided with the war and your early maturity with this horribly insecure and unprosperous peace. How incomparably better I managed my existence! I made my entry in the late fifties — almost a twin to *The Origin of Species*. . . . I was brought up in the simple faith of nineteenth-century materialism; a faith untroubled by doubts and as yet unsophisticated by that disquieting scientific modernism which is now turning the staunchest mathematical physicists into mystics. We were all wonderfully optimistic then; believed in progress and the ultimate explicability of everything in terms of physics and chemistry, believed in Mr. Gladstone and our own moral and intellectual superiority over every other age. And no wonder. For we were growing richer and richer every day. The lower classes, whom it was still permissible to call by that delightful name, were still respectful, and the prospect of revolution was still exceedingly remote. True, we were at the same time becoming faintly but uncomfortably aware that these lower classes led a rather disagreeable life, and that perhaps the economic laws were not quite so unalterable by human agency as Mr. Buckle had so comfortingly supposed. And when our dividends came rolling in — I still had dividends at that time,’ said Mr. Cardan parenthetically and sighed — ‘came rolling in as regular as the solstices, we did, it is true, feel almost a twinge of social conscience. But we triumphantly allayed those twinges by subscribing to Settlements in the slums, or building, with a little of our redundant cash, a quite superfluous number of white-tiled lavatories for our workers. Those lavatories were to us what papal indulgences were to the less enlightened contemporaries of Chaucer. With the bill for those lavatories in our waistcoat pocket we could draw our next quarter’s dividends with a conscience perfectly serene. It justified us, too, even in our little frolics. And what frolics we had! Discreetly, of course. For in those days we couldn’t do things quite as openly as you do now. But it was very good fun, all the same. I seem to remember a quite phenomenal number of bachelor dinner parties at which ravishing young creatures used to come popping out of giant pies and dance *pas seuls* among the crockery on the table.’ Mr. Cardan slowly shook his head and was silent in an ecstasy of recollection.

‘It sounds quite idyl-lic,’ said Miss Thriplow, drawlingly. She had a way of lovingly lingering over any particularly rare or juicy word that might find its way into her sentences.

‘It was,’ Mr. Cardan affirmed. ‘And the more so, I think, because it was so entirely against the rules of those good old days, and because so much discretion did have to be used. It may be merely that I’m old and that my wits have thickened with my arteries; but it does seem to me that love isn’t quite so exciting now as it used to be in my youth. When skirts touch the ground, the toe of a protruding shoe is an allurement. And there were skirts, in those days, draping everything. There was no frankness, no seen reality;

only imagination. We were powder magazines of repression and the smallest hint was a spark. Nowadays, when young women go about in kilts and are as bare-backed as wild horses, there's no excitement. The cards are all on the table, nothing's left to fancy. All's above-board and consequently boring. Hypocrisy, besides being the tribute vice pays to virtue, is also one of the artifices by which vice renders itself more interesting. And between ourselves,' said Mr. Cardan, taking the whole table into his confidence, 'it can't do without those artifices. There's a most interesting passage on this subject in Balzac's *Cousine Bette*. You remember the story?'

'Such a wonderful . . . !' exclaimed Mrs. Aldwinkle, with that large and indistinct enthusiasm evoked in her by every masterpiece of art.

'It's where Baron Hulot falls under the spell of Madame Marneffe: the old beau of the empire and the young woman brought up on the Romantic Revival and early Victorian virtues. Let me see if I can remember it.' Mr. Cardan thoughtfully frowned, was silent for a moment, then proceeded in an almost flawless French. ' "Cet homme de l'empire, habitué au genre empire, devait ignorer absolument les façons de l'amour moderne, les nouveaux scrupules, les différentes conversations inventées depuis 1830, et où la 'pauvre faible femme' finit par se faire considérer comme la victime des désirs de son amant, comme une sœur de charité qui panse des blessures, comme un ange qui se dévoue. Ce nouvel art d'aimer consomme énormément de paroles évangéliques à l'œuvre du diable. La passion est un martyre. On aspire à l'idéal, à l'infini de part et d'autre; l'on veut devenir meilleur par l'amour. Toutes ces belles phrases sont un prétexte à mettre encore plus d'ardeur dans la pratique, plus de rage dans les chutes (Mr. Cardan rolled out these words with a particular sonority) que par le passé. Cette hypocrisie, le caractère de notre temps a gangrené la galanterie." How sharp that is,' said Mr. Cardan, 'how wide and how deep! Only I can't agree with the sentiment expressed in the last sentence. For if, as he says, hypocrisy puts more ardour into the practice of love and more "rage in the chutes," then it cannot be said to have gangrened gallantry. It has improved it, revived it, made it interesting. Nineteenth-century hypocrisy was a concomitant of nineteenth-century literary romanticism: an inevitable reaction, like that, against the excessive classicism of the eighteenth century. Classicism in literature is intolerable because there are too many restrictive rules; it is intolerable in love because there are too few. They have this in common, despite their apparent unlikeness, that they are both matter-of-fact and unemotional. It is only by inventing rules about it which can be broken, it is only by investing it with an almost supernatural importance, that love can be made interesting. Angels, philosophers and demons must haunt the alcove; otherwise it is no place for intelligent men and women. No such personages were to be found there in classical times; still less in the neo-classic. The whole process was as straightforward, prosaic, quotidian, and *terre à terre* as it could be. It must really have become very little more interesting than eating dinner — not that I disparage that, mind you, particularly nowadays; but in my youth' — Mr. Cardan sighed — 'I set less stock in those days by good food. Still, even now, I have to admit, there's not much excitement, not much poetry in eating. It is, I suppose, only

in countries where powerful taboos about food prevail that the satisfaction of hunger takes on a romantic aspect. I can imagine that a strictly-brought-up Jew in the time of Samuel might sometimes have been seized by almost irresistible temptations to eat a lobster or some similar animal that divides the hoof but does not chew the cud. I can imagine him pretending to his wife that he was going to the synagogue; but in reality he slinks surreptitiously away down a sinister alley to gorge himself illicitly in some house of ill fame on pork and lobster mayonnaise. Quite a drama there. I give you the notion, gratis, as the subject for a story.'

'I'm most grateful,' said Miss Thriplow.

'And then, remember, the next morning, after the most portentous dreams all the night through, he'll wake up tremendously strict, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and he'll send a subscription to the society for the Protection of Public Morals and another to the Anti-Lobster League. And he'll write to the papers saying how disgraceful it is that young novelists should be allowed to publish books containing revolting descriptions of ham being eaten in mixed company, of orgies in oyster shops, with other culinary obscenities too horrible to be mentioned. He'll do all that, won't he, Miss Mary?'

'Most certainly. And you forgot to say,' added Miss Thriplow, forgetting that she was the head girl in the convent school, 'that he'll insist more strictly than ever on his daughters being brought up in perfect ignorance of the very existence of sausages.'

'Quite right,' said Mr. Cardan. 'All of which was merely meant to show how exciting even eating might become if religion were brought into it, if dinner were made a mystery and the imagination thoroughly stirred every time the gong sounded. Conversely, how tedious love becomes when it is taken as matter-of-factly as eating dinner. It was essential for the men and women of 1830, if they didn't want to die of pure boredom, to invent the pauvre faible femme, the martyr, the angel, the sister of charity, to talk like the Bible while they were consummating the devil's work. The sort of love that their predecessors of the eighteenth century and the empire had made was too prosaic a business. They turned to hypocrisy in mere self-preservation. But the present generation, tired of playing at Madame Marneffe, has reverted to the empire notions of Baron Hulot. . . . Emancipation is excellent, no doubt, in its way. But in the end it defeats its own object. People ask for freedom; but what they finally get turns out to be boredom. To those for whom love has become as obvious an affair as eating dinner, for whom there are no blushful mysteries, no reticences, no fancy-fostering concealments, but only plain speaking and the facts of nature — how flat and stale the whole business must become! It needs crinolines to excite the imagination and dragonish duennas to inflame desire to passion. Too much light conversation about the Oedipus complex and anal erotism is taking the edge off love. In a few years, I don't mind prophesying, you young people will be whispering to one another sublime things about angels, sisters of charity and the infinite. You'll be sheathed in Jaeger and pining behind bars. And love, in consequence, will seem incomparably more romantic, more alluring than it does in these days of emancipation.' Mr. Cardan spat out the pips of his last grape,

pushed the fruit plate away from him, leaned back in his chair and looked about him triumphantly.

‘How little you understand women,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, shaking her head. ‘Doesn’t he, Mary?’

‘Some women, at any rate,’ Miss Thriplow agreed. ‘You seem to forget, Mr. Cardan, that Diana is quite as real a type as Venus.’

‘Exactly,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘You couldn’t have put it more succinctly.’ Eighteen years ago, she and Mr. Cardan had been lovers. Elzevir, the pianist, had succeeded him — a short reign — to be followed by Lord Trunion — or was it Dr. Lecoing? — or both? At the moment Mrs. Aldwinkle had forgotten these facts. And when she did remember, it was not quite in the way that other people — Mr. Cardan, for example — remembered them. It was all wonderfully romantic, now; and she had been Diana all the time.

‘But I entirely agree with you,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I unequivocally admit the existence of Artemis. I could even prove it for you empirically.’

‘That’s very good of you,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, trying to be sarcastic.

‘The only figure on Olympus whom I have always regarded as being purely mythical,’ Mr. Cardan went on, ‘as having no foundation in the facts of life, is Athena. A goddess of wisdom — a goddess!’ he repeated with emphasis. ‘Isn’t that a little too thick?’

Majestically Mrs. Aldwinkle rose from the table. ‘Let us go out into the garden,’ she said.

## Chapter IV

MRS. ALDWINKLE HAD even bought the stars.

‘How bright they are!’ she exclaimed, as she stepped out at the head of her little troop of guests on to the terrace. ‘And how they twinkle! How they palpitate! As though they were alive. They’re never like this in England, are they, Calamy?’

Calamy agreed. Agreeing, he had found, was a labour-saving device — positively a necessity in this Ideal Home. He always tried to agree with Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘And how clearly one sees the Great Bear!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, speaking almost perpendicularly upwards into the height of heaven. The Bear and Orion were the only constellations she could recognize. ‘Such a strange and beautiful shape, isn’t it?’ It might almost have been designed by the architect of the Malaspina palace.

‘Very strange,’ said Calamy.

Mrs. Aldwinkle dropped her eyes from the zenith, turned and smiled at him, penetratingly, forgetting that in the profound and moonless darkness her charm would be entirely wasted.

Miss Thriplow’s voice spoke softly, with a kind of childish drawl through the darkness. ‘They might be Italian tenors,’ she said, ‘tremoloing away like that so passionately



in the sky. No wonder, with those stars overhead, no wonder life tends to become a bit operatic in this country at times.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle was indignant. 'How can you blaspheme like that against the stars?' she said. Then, remembering that she had also bought Italian music, not to mention the habits and customs of the whole Italian people, she went on: 'Besides, it's such a cheap joke about the tenors. After all, this is the only country where *bel canto* is still . . .'

She waved her hand. 'And you remember how much Wagner admired what's-his-name. . . .'

'Bellini,' prompted the little niece as self-effacingly as possible. She had heard her aunt speak of Wagner's admiration before.

'Bellini,' repeated Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'Besides, life isn't operatic in Italy. It's genuinely passionate.'

Miss Thriplow was, for a moment, rather at a loss for an answer. She had a faculty for making these little jokes; but at the same time she was so very much afraid that people might regard her as merely clever and unfeeling, a hard and glittering young woman. Half a dozen smart repartees were possible, of course; but then she mustn't forget that she was fundamentally so simple, so Wordsworthian, such a violet by a mossy stone — particularly this evening, in her shawl.

However much we should like to do so, however highly, in private, we think of our abilities, we generally feel that it is bad form to boast of our intelligence. But in regard to our qualities of heart we feel no such shame; we talk freely of our kindness, bordering on weakness, of our generosity carried almost to the point of folly (tempering our boasting a little by making out that our qualities are so excessive as to be defects). Miss Thriplow, however, was one of those rare people so obviously and admittedly clever that there could be no objection to her mentioning the fact as often as she liked; people would have called it only justifiable self-esteem. But Miss Thriplow, perversely, did not want to be praised or to praise herself for her intelligence. She was chiefly anxious to make the world appreciative of her heart. When, as on this occasion, she followed her natural bent towards smartness too far, or when, carried away by the desire to make herself agreeable in flashing company, she found herself saying something whose brilliance was not in harmony with the possession of simple and entirely natural emotions, she would recollect herself and hastily try to correct the misapprehension she had created among her hearers. Now, therefore, at the end of a moment's lightning meditation, she managed to think of a remark which admirably combined, she flattered herself, the most genuine feeling for Nature with an elegantly recondite allusion — this last for the benefit particularly of Mr. Cardan, who as a scholarly gentleman of the old school was a great appreciator and admirer of learning.

'Yes, Bellini,' she said rapturously, picking up the reference from the middle of Mrs. Aldwinkle's last sentence. 'What a wonderful gift of melody! *Casta diva* — do you remember that?' And in a thin voice she sang the first long phrase. 'What a lovely line the melody traces out! Like the line of those hills against the sky.' She pointed.

On the further side of the valley to westward of the promontory of hill on which the palace stood, projected a longer and higher headland. From the terrace one looked up at its huge impending mass. . . . It was at this that Miss Thriplow now pointed. With her forefinger she followed the scalloped and undulating outline of its silhouette.

‘Even Nature, in Italy, is like a work of art,’ she added.

Mrs. Aldwinkle was mollified. ‘That’s very true,’ she said; and stepping out, she began the evening’s promenading along the terrace. The train of her velvet robe rustled after her over the dusty flagstones. Mrs. Aldwinkle didn’t mind in the least if it got dirty. It was the general effect that mattered; stains, dust, clinging twigs and millepedes — those were mere details. She treated her clothes, in consequence, with a fine aristocratic carelessness. The little troop followed her.

There was no moon; only stars in a dark blue firmament. Black and flat against the sky, the Herculeses and the bowed Atlases, the kilted Dianas and the Venuses who concealed their charms with a two-handed gesture of alluring modesty, stood, like as many petrified dancers, on the piers of the balustrade. The stars looked between them. Below, in the blackness of the plain, burned constellations of yellow lights. Unremittingly, the croaking of frogs came up, thin, remote, but very clear, from invisible waters.

‘Nights like this,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, halting and addressing herself with intensity to Calamy, ‘make one understand the passion of the South.’ She had an alarming habit, when she spoke to any one at all intimately or seriously, of approaching her face very close to that of her interlocutor, opening her eyes to their fullest extent and staring for a moment with the fixed penetrating stare of an oculist examining his patient.

Like trucks at the tail of a suddenly braked locomotive, Mrs. Aldwinkle’s guests came joltingly to a stop when she stopped.

Calamy nodded. ‘Quite,’ he said, ‘quite.’ Even in this faint starlight, he noticed, Mrs. Aldwinkle’s eyes glittered alarmingly as she approached her face to his.

‘In this horrible bourgeois age’ — Mrs. Aldwinkle’s vocabulary (like Mr. Falx’s, though for different reasons) contained no word of bitterer disparagement than ‘bourgeois’ — ‘it’s only Southern people who still understand or even, I believe, feel passion.’ Mrs. Aldwinkle believed in passion, passionately.

From behind the glowing red end of his cigar Mr. Cardan began to speak. In the darkness his voice sounded more than ever ripe and fruity. ‘You’re quite right,’ he assured Mrs. Aldwinkle, ‘quite right. It’s the climate, of course. The warmth has a double effect on the inhabitants, direct and indirect. The direct effect needs no explaining; warmth calls to warmth. It’s obvious. But the indirect is fully as important. In a hot country one doesn’t care to work too hard. One works enough to keep oneself alive (and it’s tolerably easy to keep alive under these stars), and one cultivates long leisures. Now it’s sufficiently obvious that practically the only thing that anybody who is not a philosopher can do in his leisure is to make love. No serious-minded, hard-working man has the time, the spare energy or the inclination to abandon himself to passion. Passion can only flourish among the well-fed unemployed. Consequently,

except among women and men of the leisured class, passion in all its luxuriant intricacy hardly exists in the hard-working North. It is only among those whose desires and whose native idleness are fostered by the cherishing Southern heat that it has flourished and continues to flourish, as you rightly point out, my dear Lilian, even in this burghess age.'

Mr. Cardan had hardly begun to speak before Mrs. Aldwinkle indignantly moved on again. He outraged all her feelings.

Mr. Cardan talking all the way, they passed the silhouettes of modest Venus, of Diana and her attendant dog, of Hercules leaning on his club and Atlas bending under the weight of his globe, of Bacchus lifting to heaven the stump of a broken arm whose hand had once held the wine cup. Arrived at the end of the terrace, they turned and walked back again past the same row of symbols.

'It's easy to talk like that,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle, when he had finished. 'But it doesn't make any difference to the grandeur of passion, to its purity and beauty and . . .' She faded out breathlessly.

'Wasn't it Bossuet,' asked Irene timidly, but with determination, for she felt that she owed it to Aunt Lilian to intervene; and besides, Aunt Lilian liked her to take part in the conversation, 'wasn't it Bossuet who said that there was something of the Infinite in passion?'

'Splendid, Irene,' Mr. Cardan cried encouragingly.

Irene blushed in the concealing darkness. 'But I think Bossuet's quite right,' she declared. She could become a lioness, in spite of her blushes, when it was a question of supporting Aunt Lilian. 'I think he's absolutely right,' she confirmed, after a moment of recollection, out of her own experience. She herself had felt most infinitely, more than once — for Irene had run through a surprising number of passions in her time. 'I can't think,' her Aunt Lilian used to say to her, when Irene came in the evenings to brush her hair before she went to bed, 'I can't think how it is that you're not wildly in love with Peter — or Jacques — or Mario.' (The name might change as Mrs. Aldwinkle and her niece moved in their seasonal wanderings, backwards and forwards across the map of Europe; but, after all, what's in a name?) 'If I were your age I should be quite bowled over by him.' And thinking more seriously now of Peter, or Jacques, or Mario, Irene would discover that Aunt Lilian was quite right; the young man was indeed a very remarkable young man. And for the remainder of their stay at the Continental, the Bristol, the Savoia, she would be in love — passionately. What she had felt on these occasions was decidedly infinite. Bossuet, there was no doubt of it, knew what he was talking about.

'Well, if you think he's right, Irene,' said Mr. Cardan, 'why then, there's nothing for me to do but retire from the argument. I bow before superior authority.' He took the cigar out of his mouth and bowed.

Irene felt herself blushing once more. 'Now you're making fun of me,' she said.

Mrs. Aldwinkle put her arm protectively round the young girl's shoulders. 'I won't let you tease her, Cardan,' she said. 'She's the only one of you all who has a real feeling

for what is noble and fine and grand.' She drew Irene closer to her, pressed her in a sidelong and peripatetic embrace. Happily, devotedly, Irene abandoned herself. Aunt Lilian was wonderful!

'Oh, I know,' said Mr. Cardan apologetically, 'that I'm nothing but an old capripede.'

Meanwhile Lord Hovenden, humming loudly and walking a little apart from the rest of the company, was making it clear, he hoped, to every one that he was occupied with his own thoughts and had not heard anything that had been said for the last five minutes. What had been said disturbed him none the less. How did Irene know so much about passion, he wondered? Had there been, could there still be . . . other people? Painfully and persistently the question asked itself. With the idea of dissociating himself still more completely from all that had been said, he addressed himself to Mr. Falx.

'Tell me, Mr. Falx,' he said in a pensive voice, as though he had been thinking about the subject for some time before he spoke, 'what do you think of the Fascist Trades Unions?'

Mr. Falx told him.

Passion, Calamy was thinking, passion. . . . One could have enough of it, good Lord! He sighed. If one could say: Never again, and be sure of meaning what one said, it would be a great comfort. Still, he reflected, there was something rather perversely attractive about this Thriplow woman.

Miss Thriplow meanwhile would have liked to say something showing that she too believed in passion — but in a passion of a rather different brand from Mrs. Aldwinkle's; in a natural, spontaneous and almost childish kind of passion, not the hot-house growth that flourishes in drawing-rooms. Cardan was right in not thinking very seriously of that. But he could hardly be expected to know much about the simple and dewy loves that she had in mind. Nor Mrs. Aldwinkle, for that matter. She herself understood them perfectly. On second thoughts, however, Miss Thriplow decided that they were too tenuous and delicate — these gossamer passions of hers — to be talked of here, in the midst of unsympathetic listeners.

Casually, as she passed, she plucked a leaf from one of the overhanging trees. Absent-mindedly she crushed it between her fingers. From the bruised leaf a fragrance mounted to her nostrils. She lifted her hand towards her face, she sniffed, once, again. And suddenly she was back in the barber's shop at Weltringham, waiting there while her cousin Jim had his hair cut. Mr. Chigwell, the barber, had just finished with the revolving brush. The shaft of the machine was still turning, the elastic driving band went round and round over the wheel, writhing from side to side as it went round, like a dying snake suspended, dangerously, above Jim's cropped head.

'A little brilliantine, Mr. Thriplow? Hair's rather dry, you know, rather dry, I'm afraid. Or the usual bay rum?'

'Bay rum,' said Jim in the gruffest, most grown-up voice he could get out of his chest.

And Mr. Chigwell would pick up a vaporizer and squirt Jim's hair with clouds made out of a clear brown liquid. And the air in the shop was filled with a fragrance which was the fragrance of this leaf, this leaf from Apollo's tree, that she held in her hand. It all happened years ago and Jim was dead. They had loved one another childishly, with that profound and delicate passion of which she could not speak — not here, not now.

The others went on talking. Miss Thriplow sniffed at her crushed bay leaf and thought of her girlhood, of the cousin who had died. Darling, darling Jim, she said to herself; darling Jim! Again and again. How much she had loved him, how terribly unhappy she had been when he died. And she still suffered; still, after all these years. Miss Thriplow sighed. She was proud of being able to suffer so much; she encouraged her suffering. This sudden recollection of Jim, when he was a little boy, in the barber's shop, this vivid remembrance conjured up by the smell of a crushed leaf, was a sign of her exquisite sensibility. Mingled with her grief there was a certain sense of satisfaction. After all, this had happened quite by itself, of its own accord, and spontaneously. She had always told people that she was sensitive, had a deep and quivering heart. This was a proof. Nobody knew how much she suffered, underneath. How could people guess what lay behind her gaiety? 'The more sensitive one is,' she used to tell herself, 'the more timid and spiritually chaste, the more necessary it is for one to wear a mask.' Her laughter, her little railleries were the mask that hid from the outside world what was in her soul; they were her armour against a probing and wounding curiosity. How could they guess, for example, what Jim had meant to her, what he still meant — after all these years? How could they imagine that there was a little holy of holies in her heart where she still held communion with him? Darling Jim, she said to herself, darling, darling Jim. The tears came into her eyes. With a finger that still smelt of crushed bay leaves she brushed them away.

It suddenly occurred to her that this would make a splendid short story. There would be a young man and a young girl walking like this under the stars — the huge Italian stars, tremoloing away like tenors (she would remember to bring that into the description) overhead in the velvet sky. Their conversation edges nearer and nearer to the theme of love. He's rather a timid young man. (His name, Miss Thriplow decided, would be Belamy.) One of those charming young men who adore at long range, feel that the girl's too good for them, daren't hope that she might stoop from her divinity, and all that. He's afraid of saying definitely that he loves her for fear of being ignominiously rejected. She, of course, likes him most awfully and her name is Edna. Such a delicate, sensitive creature; his gentleness and diffidence are the qualities in him that particularly charm her.

The conversation gets nearer and nearer to love; the stars palpitate more and more ecstatically. Edna picks a leaf from the fragrant laurel as she passes. 'What must be so wonderful about love,' the young man is just saying (it's a set speech and he's been screwing up his courage to get it out for the last half-hour), 'about real love, I mean, is the complete understanding, the fusion of spirits, the ceasing to be oneself and the

becoming some one else, the . . .’ But sniffing at the crushed leaf, she suddenly cries out, uncontrollably (impulsiveness is one of Edna’s charms), ‘Why, it’s the barber’s shop at Weltringham! Funny little Mr. Chigwell with the squint! And the rubber band still going round and round over the wheel, wriggling like a snake.’ But the poor young man, poor Belamy, is most dreadfully upset. If that’s the way she’s going to respond when he talks about love, he may as well be silent.

There’s a long pause; then he begins talking about Karl Marx. And of course she somehow can’t explain — it’s a psychological impossibility — that the barber’s shop at Weltringham is a symbol of her childhood and that the smell of the crushed laurel leaf brought back her dead brother — in the story it would be a brother — to her. She simply can’t explain that her apparently heartless interruption was prompted by a sudden anguish of recollection. She longs to, but somehow she can’t bring herself to begin. It’s too difficult and too elusive to be talked about, and when one’s heart is so sensitive, how can one uncover it, how can one probe the wound? And besides, he ought somehow to have guessed, he ought to have loved her enough to understand; she has her pride too. Every second she delays, the explanation becomes more impossible. In a flat, miserable voice he goes on talking about Karl Marx. And suddenly, unrestrainedly, she begins sobbing and laughing at the same time.

## Chapter V

THE BLACK SILHOUETTE that on the terrace had so perfunctorily symbolized Mr. Cardan transformed itself as he entered the lamp-lit saloon into the complete and genial man. His red face twinkled in the light; he was smiling.

‘I know Lilian,’ he was saying. ‘She’ll sit out there under the stars, feeling romantic and getting colder and colder, for hours. There’s nothing to be done, I assure you. To-morrow she’ll have rheumatism. We can only resign ourselves and try to bear her sufferings in patience.’ He sat down in an arm-chair in front of the enormous empty hearth. ‘That’s better,’ he said, sighing. Calamy and Miss Thriplow followed his example.

‘But don’t you think I’d better bring her a shawl?’ suggested Miss Thriplow after a pause.

‘She’d only be annoyed,’ Mr. Cardan answered. ‘If Lilian has said that it’s warm enough to sit out of doors, then it is warm enough. We’ve already proved ourselves fools by wanting to go indoors; if we brought her a shawl, we should become something worse than fools: we should be rude and impertinent, we should be giving her the lie. “My dear Lilian,” we’d be as good as saying, “it isn’t warm. And when you say that it is, you’re talking nonsense. So we have brought you your shawl.” No, no, Miss Mary. You must surely see yourself that it wouldn’t do.’

Miss Thriplow nodded. 'How diplomatic!' she said 'You're obviously right. We're all children compared to you, Mr. Cardan. Only so high,' she added irrelevantly — but it was all in the childish part — reaching down her hand to within a foot or two of the floor. Childishly she smiled at him.

'Only so,' said Mr. Cardan ironically; and lifting his right hand to the level of his eyes, he measured between his thumb and forefinger a space of perhaps half an inch. With his winking eye he peeped at her through the gap. 'I've seen children,' he went on, 'compared to whom Miss Mary Thriplow would be . . .' He threw up his hands and let them fall with a clap on to his thighs, leaving the sentence to conclude itself in the pregnant silence.

Miss Thriplow resented this denial of her child-like simplicity. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. But circumstances did not permit her to insist on the fact too categorically in Mr. Cardan's presence. The history of their friendship was a little unfortunate. At their first meeting, Mr. Cardan, summing her up at a glance (wrongly, Miss Thriplow insisted), had taken her into a kind of cynical and diabolic confidence, treating her as though she were a wholly 'modern' and unprejudiced young woman, one of those young women who not only do what they like (which is nothing; for the demurest and the most 'old-fashioned' can and do act), but who also airily and openly talk of their diversions. Inspired by her desire to please, and carried away by her facility for adapting herself to her spiritual environment, Miss Thriplow had gaily entered into the part assigned to her. How brilliant she had been, how charmingly and wickedly daring! until finally, twinkling benevolently all the time, Mr. Cardan had led the conversation along such strange and such outrageous paths that Miss Thriplow began to fear that she had put herself in a false position. Goodness only knew what mightn't, with such a man, happen next. By imperceptible degrees Miss Thriplow transformed herself from a salamander, sporting gaily among the flames, into a primrose by the river's brim. Henceforward, whenever she talked to Mr. Cardan, the serious young female novelist — so cultured and intelligent, but so unspoiled — put in an appearance. For his part, with that tact which distinguished him in all his social negotiations, Mr. Cardan accepted the female novelist without showing the least astonishment at the change. At most, he permitted himself from time to time to look at her through his winking eye and smile significantly. Miss Thriplow on these occasions pretended not to notice. In the circumstances, it was the best thing she could do.

'People always seem to imagine,' said Miss Thriplow with a martyr's sigh, 'that being educated means being sophisticated. And what's more, they never seem to be able to give one credit for having a good heart as well as a good head.'

And she had such a good heart. Any one can be clever, she used to say. But what matters is being kind and good, and having nice feelings. She felt more than ever pleased about that bay-leaf incident. That was having nice feelings.

'They always seem entirely to misunderstand what one writes,' Miss Thriplow went on. 'They like my books because they're smart and unexpected and rather paradoxical and cynical and elegantly brutal. They don't see how serious it all is. They don't see

the tragedy and the tenderness underneath. You see,' she explained, 'I'm trying to do something new — a chemical compound of all the categories. Lightness and tragedy and loveliness and wit and fantasy and realism and irony and sentiment all combined. People seem to find it merely amusing, that's all.' She threw out her hands despairingly.

'It's only to be expected,' said Mr. Cardan comfortingly. 'Any one who has anything to say can't fail to be misunderstood. The public only understands the things with which it is perfectly familiar. Something new makes it lose its orientation. And then think of the misunderstandings between even intelligent people, people who know one another personally. Have you ever corresponded with a distant lover?' Miss Thriplow slightly nodded; she was familiar, professionally, with every painful experience. 'Then you must know how easy it is for your correspondent to take the expression of one of your passing moods — forgotten long before the arrival of the letter at its destination — as your permanent spiritual condition. Haven't you been shocked to receive, by the returning post, a letter rejoicing with you in your gaiety, when in fact, at the moment, you are plunged in gloom; or astonished, when you come whistling down to breakfast, to find beside your plate sixteen pages of sympathy and consolation? And have you ever had the misfortune to be loved by somebody you do not love? Then you know very well how expressions of affection which must have been written with tears in the eyes and from the depth of the heart seem to you not merely silly and irritating, but in the worst possible bad taste. Positively vulgar, like those deplorable letters that are read in the divorce courts. And yet these are precisely the expressions that you habitually use when writing to the person you yourself are in love with. In the same way, the reader of a book who happens to be out of tune with the author's prevailing mood will be bored to death by the things that were written with the greatest enthusiasm. Or else, like the far-away correspondent, he may seize on something which for you was not essential, to make of it the core and kernel of the whole book. And then, you admitted it yourself, you make it very hard for your readers. You write sentimental tragedies in terms of satire and they see only the satire. Isn't it to be expected?'

'There's something in that, of course,' said Miss Thriplow. But not everything, she added to herself.

'And then you must remember,' Mr. Cardan went on, 'that most readers don't really read. When you reflect that the pages which cost a week of unremitting and agonizing labour to write are casually read through — or, more likely, skipped through — in a few minutes, you cannot be surprised if little misunderstandings between author and reader should happen from time to time. We all read too much nowadays to be able to read properly. We read with the eyes alone, not with the imagination; we don't take the trouble to reconvert the printed word into a living image. And we do this, I may say, in sheer self-defence. For though we read an enormous number of words, nine hundred and ninety out of every thousand of them are not worth reading properly, are not even susceptible of being read except superficially, with the eye alone. Our perfunctory reading of nonsense habituates us to be careless and remiss with all our reading, even of good books. You may take endless pains with your writing, my dear



Miss Mary; but out of every hundred of your readers, how many, do you suppose, ever take the pains to read what you write — and when I say read,’ Mr. Cardan added, ‘I mean really read — how many, I repeat?’

‘Who knows?’ said Miss Thriplow. But even if they did read properly, she was thinking, would they really unearth that Heart? That was the vital question.

‘It’s this mania for keeping up to date,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘that has killed the art of reading. Most of the people I know read three or four daily newspapers, look at half a dozen weeklies between Saturday and Monday, and a dozen reviews at the end of every month. And the rest of the time, as the Bible with justifiable vigour would put it, the rest of the time they are whoring after new fiction, new plays and verses and biographies. They’ve no time to do anything but skim along uncomprehendingly. If you must complicate the matter by writing tragedy in terms of farce you can only expect confusion. Books have their destinies like men. And their fates, as made by generations of readers, are very different from the destinies foreseen for them by their authors. Gulliver’s Travels, with a minimum of expurgation, has become a children’s book; a new illustrated edition is produced every Christmas. That’s what comes of saying profound things about humanity in terms of a fairy story. The publications of the Purity League figure invariably under the heading “Curious” in the booksellers’ catalogues. The theological and, to Milton himself, the fundamental and essential part of Paradise Lost is now so ludicrous that we ignore it altogether. When somebody speaks of Milton, what do we call to mind? A great religious poet? No. Milton means for us a collection of isolated passages, full of bright light, colour and thunderous harmony, hanging like musical stars in the lap of nothing. Sometimes the adult masterpieces of one generation become the reading of schoolboys in the next. Does any one over sixteen now read the poems of Sir Walter Scott? or his novels, for that matter? How many books of piety and morality survive only for their fine writing! and how our interest in the merely aesthetic qualities of these books would have scandalized their authors! No, at the end of the account it is the readers who make the book what it ultimately is. The writer proposes, the readers dispose. It’s inevitable, Miss Mary. You must reconcile yourself to fate.’

‘I suppose I must,’ said Miss Thriplow.

Calamy broke silence for the first time since they had entered the room. ‘But I don’t know why you complain of being misunderstood,’ he said, smiling. ‘I should have thought that it was much more disagreeable to be understood. One can get annoyed with imbeciles for failing to understand what seems obvious to oneself; one’s vanity may be hurt by their interpretation of you — they make you out to be as vulgar as themselves. Or you may feel that you have failed as an artist, in so far as you haven’t managed to make yourself transparently plain. But what are all these compared to the horrors of being understood — completely understood? You’ve given yourself away, you’re known, you’re at the mercy of the creatures into whose keeping you have committed your soul — why, the thought’s terrifying. If I were you,’ he went on, ‘I’d congratulate myself. You have a public which likes your books, but for

the wrong reasons. And meanwhile you're safe, you're out of their reach, you possess yourself intact.'

'Perhaps you're right,' said Miss Thriplow. Mr. Cardan understood her, she reflected, or at least understood part of her — an unreal, superficial part, it was true; but still, she had to admit, a part. And it certainly wasn't agreeable.

## Chapter VI

TO BE TORN between divided allegiances is the painful fate of almost every human being. Pull devil, pull baker; pull flesh, pull spirit; pull love, pull duty; pull reason and pull hallowed prejudice. The conflict, in its various forms, is the theme of every drama. For though we have learnt to feel disgust at the spectacle of a bull-fight, an execution or a gladiatorial show, we still look on with pleasure at the contortions of those who suffer spiritual anguish. At some distant future date, when society is organized in a rational manner so that every individual occupies the position and does the work for which his capacities really fit him, when education has ceased to instil into the minds of the young fantastic prejudices instead of truths, when the endocrine glands have been taught to function in perfect harmony and diseases have been suppressed, all our literature of conflict and unhappiness will seem strangely incomprehensible; and our taste for the spectacle of mental torture will be regarded as an obscene perversion of which decent men should feel ashamed. Joy will take the place of suffering as the principal theme of art; in the process, it may be, art will cease to exist. A happy people, we now say, has no history; and we might add that happy individuals have no literature. The novelist dismisses in a paragraph his hero's twenty years of happiness; over a week of misery and spiritual debate he will linger through twenty chapters. When there is no more misery, he will have nothing to write about. Perhaps it will be all for the best.

The conflict which had raged during the last few months within Irene's spirit, though not so serious as some of the inward battles that have distracted strong men in their search for the salvation of integrity, was still for her a painful one. Put baldly in its most concrete form, the question at issue was this: should she paint pictures and write? or should she make her own underclothing?

But for Aunt Lilian the conflict would never have become serious; indeed, it would never, in all probability, have begun at all. For if it had not been for Aunt Lilian, the Natural Woman in Irene would have remained undisputed mistress of the field, and she would have passed her days in a placid contentment over the lacy intricacies of her undergarments. Aunt Lilian, however, was on the side of the Unnatural Woman; it was she who had practically called the writer and the painter of pictures into existence, had invented Irene's higher talents and ranged them against the homelier.

Mrs. Aldwinkle's enthusiasm for the arts was such that she wanted every one to practise one or other of them. It was her own greatest regret that she herself had no

aptitude for any of them. Nature had endowed her with no power of self-expression; even in ordinary conversation she found it difficult to give utterance to what she wanted to say. Her letters were made up of the fragments of sentences; it was as though her thoughts had been blown to ungrammatical pieces by a bomb and scattered themselves on the page. A curious clumsiness of hand united with her native impatience to prevent her from drawing correctly or even doing plain sewing. And though she listened to music with an expression of rapture, she had an ear that could not distinguish a major from a minor third. 'I'm one of those unfortunate people,' she used to say, 'who have an artistic temperament without an artist's powers.' She had to content herself with cultivating her own temperament and developing other people's capacities. She never met a young person of either sex without encouraging him or her to become a painter, a novelist, a poet or a musician. It was she who had persuaded Irene that her little dexterity with camel's-hair brushes was a talent and that she ought on the strength of her amusing letters to write lyrics. 'How can you spend your time so stupidly and frivolously?' she used to ask, whenever she found Irene busy at her underlinen. And Irene, who adored her Aunt Lilian with the dog-like devotion that is only possible when one is eighteen, and rather young for one's age at that, put her sewing away and devoted all her energy to portraying in water-colours and describing in rhyme the landscape and the flowers of the garden. But the underclothing remained, none the less, a permanent temptation. She found herself wondering whether her chain-stitch wasn't better than her painting, her button-holing superior to her verse. She asked herself whether nightdresses weren't more useful than water-colours. More useful — and besides she was so awfully particular about what she wore next her skin; and she adored pretty things. So did Aunt Lilian, who used to laugh at her when she wore ugly, dowdy ones. At the same time Aunt Lilian didn't give her much of an allowance. For thirty shillings Irene could make a garment that it would have cost her five or six guineas to buy in a shop. . . .

Underclothing became for Irene the flesh, became illicit love and rebellious reason; poetry and water-colour painting, invested by her adoration of Aunt Lilian with a quality of sacredness, became spirit, duty and religion. The struggle between her inclination and what Aunt Lilian considered good was prolonged and distressing.

On nights like this, however, the Natural Woman faded completely out. Under the stars, in the solemn darkness, how could one think of underclothing? And Aunt Lilian was being so affectionate. Still, it certainly was rather cool.

'Art's the great thing,' Mrs. Aldwinkle was saying earnestly, 'the thing that really makes life worth living and justifies one's existence.' When Mr. Cardan was away she let herself go more confidently on her favourite themes.

And Irene, sitting at her feet, leaning against her knee, couldn't help agreeing. Mrs. Aldwinkle stroked the girl's soft hair, or with combing fingers disordered its sleek surface. Irene shut her eyes; happily, drowsily, she listened. Mrs. Aldwinkle's talk came to her in gusts — here a phrase, there a phrase.

‘Disinterested,’ she was saying, ‘disinterested . . .’ Mrs. Aldwinkle had a way, when she wanted to insist on an idea, of repeating the same word several times. ‘Disinterested . . .’ It saved her the trouble of looking for phrases which she could never find, of making explanations which always turned out, at the best, rather incoherent. ‘Joy in the work for its own sake. . . . Flaubert spent days over a single sentence. . . . Wonderful. . . .’

‘Wonderful!’ Irene echoed.

A little breeze stirred among the bay trees. Their stiff leaves rattled dryly together, like scales of metal. Irene shivered a little; it was downright cold.

‘It’s the only really creative . . .’ Mrs. Aldwinkle couldn’t think of the word ‘activity’ and had to content herself with making a gesture with her free hand. ‘Through art man comes nearest to being a god . . . a god. . . .’

The night wind rattled more loudly among the bay leaves. Irene crossed her arms over her chest, hugging herself to keep warm. Unfortunately, this boa of flesh and blood was itself sensitive. Her frock was sleeveless. The warmth of her bare arms drifted off along the wind; the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere rose by a hundred-billionth of a degree.

‘It’s the highest life,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘It’s the only life.’

Tenderly she ruffled Irene’s hair. And at this very moment, Mr. Falx was meditating, at this very moment, on tram-cars in the Argentine, among Peruvian guano-beds, in humming power-stations at the foot of African waterfalls, in Australian refrigerators packed with slaughtered mutton, in the heat and darkness of Yorkshire coal-mines, in tea-plantations on the slopes of the Himalaya, in Japanese banks, at the mouth of Mexican oil-wells, in steamers wallowing along across the China Sea — at this very moment, men and women of every race and colour were doing their bit to supply Mrs. Aldwinkle with her income. On the two hundred and seventy thousand pounds of Mrs. Aldwinkle’s capital the sun never set. People worked; Mrs. Aldwinkle led the higher life. She for art only, they — albeit unconscious of the privilege — for art in her.

Young Lord Hovenden sighed. If only it were he whose fingers were playing in the smooth thick tresses of Irene’s hair! It seemed an awful waste that she should be so fond of her Aunt Lilian. Somehow, the more he liked Irene the less he liked Aunt Lilian.

‘Haven’t you sometimes longed to be an artist yourself, Hovenden?’ Mrs. Aldwinkle suddenly asked. She leaned forward, her eyes glittering with the reflected light of two or three hundred million remote suns. She was going to suggest that he might try his hand at poetical rhapsodies about political injustice and the condition of the lower classes. Something half-way between Shelley and Walt Whitman.

‘Me!’ said Hovenden in astonishment. Then he laughed aloud: Ha, ha, ha! It was a jarring note.

Mrs. Aldwinkle drew back, pained. ‘I don’t know why you should think the idea so impossibly comic,’ she said.

‘Perhaps he has other work to do,’ said Mr. Falx out of the darkness. ‘More important work.’ And at the sound of that thrilling, deep, prophetic voice Lord Hovenden felt that, indeed, he had.

‘More important?’ queried Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘But can anything be more important? When one thinks of Flaubert . . .’ One thought of Flaubert — working through all a fifty-four hour week at a relative clause. But Mrs. Aldwinkle was too enthusiastic to be able to say what followed when one had thought of Flaubert.

‘Think of coal-miners for a change,’ said Mr. Falx in answer. ‘That’s what I suggest.’

‘Yes,’ Lord Hovenden agreed, gravely nodding. A lot of his money came from coal. He felt particularly responsible for miners when he had time to think of them.

‘Think,’ said Mr. Falx in his deep voice; and he relapsed into a silence more eloquently prophetic than any speech.

For a long time nobody spoke. The wind came draughtily and in ever chillier gusts. Irene clasped her arms still tighter over her breast; she shivered, she yawned with cold. Mrs. Aldwinkle felt the shaking of the young body that leaned against her knees. She herself was cold too; but after what she had said to Cardan and the others it was impossible for her to go indoors yet awhile. She felt, in consequence, annoyed with Irene for shivering. ‘Do stop,’ she said crossly. ‘It’s only a stupid habit. Like a little dog that shivers even in front of the fire.’

‘All ve same,’ said Lord Hovenden, coming to Irene’s defence, ‘it is getting raver cold.’

‘Well, if you find it so,’ retorted Mrs. Aldwinkle, with overwhelming sarcasm, ‘you’d better go in and ask them to light a fire.’

It was nearly midnight before Mrs. Aldwinkle finally gave the word to go indoors.

## Chapter VII

TO SAY GOOD-NIGHT definitely and for the last time was a thing which Mrs. Aldwinkle found most horribly difficult. With those two fatal words she pronounced sentence of death on yet another day (on yet another, and the days were so few now, so agonizingly brief); she pronounced it also, temporarily at least, on herself. For, the formula once finally uttered, there was nothing for her to do but creep away out of the light and bury herself in the black unconsciousness of sleep. Six hours, eight hours would be stolen from her and never given back. And what marvellous things might not be happening while she was lying dead between the sheets! Extraordinary happinesses might present themselves and, finding her asleep and deaf to their calling, pass on. Or some one, perhaps, would be saying the one supremely important, revealing, apocalyptic thing that she had been waiting all her life to hear. ‘There!’ she could imagine somebody winding up, ‘that’s the secret of the Universe. What a pity poor Lilian should have gone to bed. She would have loved to hear it.’ Good-night — it was like parting with a shy lover who had not yet ventured to declare himself. A minute more and he would speak, would reveal himself the unique soul-mate. Good-night, and

he would remain for ever merely diffident little Mr. Jones. Must she part with this day too, before it was transfigured?

Good-night. Every evening she put off the saying of it as long as she possibly could. It was generally half-past one or two before she could bring herself to leave the drawing-room. And even then the words were not finally spoken. For on the threshold of her bed-chamber she would halt, desperately renewing the conversation with whichever of her guests had happened to light her upstairs. Who knew? Perhaps in these last five minutes, in the intimacy, in the nocturnal silence, the important thing really would be said. The five minutes often lengthened themselves out to forty, and still Mrs. Aldwinkle stood there, desperately putting off and putting off the moment when she would have to pronounce the sentence of death.

When there was nobody else to talk to, she had to be content with the company of Irene, who always, when she herself had undressed, came back in her dressing-gown to help Mrs. Aldwinkle — since it would have been unfair to keep a maid up to such late hours — make ready for the night. Not that little Irene was particularly likely to utter the significant word or think the one apocalyptic thought. Though of course one never knew: out of the mouths of babes and sucklings . . . And in any case, talking with Irene, who was a dear child and so devoted, was better than definitely condemning oneself to bed.

To-night, it was one o'clock before Mrs. Aldwinkle made a move towards the door. Miss Thriplow and Mr. Falx, protesting that they too were sleepy, accompanied her. And like an attendant shadow, Irene silently rose when her aunt rose and silently walked after her. Half-way across the room Mrs. Aldwinkle halted and turned round. Formidable she was, a tragedy queen in coral-red velvet. Her little white muslin mirage halted too. Less patient, Mr. Falx and Miss Thriplow moved on towards the door.

'You must all come to bed soon, you know,' she said, addressing herself to the three men who remained at the further end of the room in a tone at once imperious and cajoling. 'I simply won't allow you, Cardan, to keep those poor young men out of their beds to all hours of the night. Poor Calamy has been travelling all day. And Hovenden needs all the sleep, at his age, that he can get.' Mrs. Aldwinkle took it hardly that any of her guests should be awake and talking while she was lying dead in the tomb of sleep. 'Poor Calamy!' she pathetically exclaimed, as though it were a case of cruelty to animals. She felt herself filled, all at once, with an enormous and maternal solicitude for this young man.

'Yes, poor Calamy!' Mr. Cardan repeated, twinkling. 'Out of pure sympathy I was suggesting that we should drink a pint or two of red wine before going to bed. There's nothing like it for making one sleep.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle turned her bright blue eyes on Calamy, smiled her sweetest and most piercing smile. 'Do come,' she said. 'Do.' She extended her hand in a clumsy and inexpressive gesture. 'And you, Hovenden,' she added, almost despairingly.

Hovenden looked uncomfortably from Mr. Cardan to Calamy, hoping that one or other of them would answer for him.

‘We shan’t be long,’ said Calamy. ‘The time to drink a glass of wine, that’s all. I’m not a bit tired, you know. And Cardan’s suggestion of Chianti is very tempting.’

‘Ah well,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, ‘if you prefer a glass of wine . . .’ She turned away with a sad indignation and rustled off towards the door, sweeping the tiled floor with the train of her velvet dress. Mr. Falx and Miss Thriplow, who had been lingering impatiently near the door, drew back in order that she might make her exit in full majesty. With a face that looked very gravely out of the little window in her bell of copper hair, Irene followed. The door closed behind them.

Calamy turned to Mr. Cardan. ‘If I prefer a glass of wine?’ he repeated on a note of interrogation. ‘But prefer it to what? She made it sound as if I had had to make a momentous and eternal choice between her and a pint of Chianti — and had chosen the Chianti. It passes my understanding.’

‘Ah, but then you don’t know Lilian as well as I do,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘And now, let’s go and hunt out that flask and some glasses in the dining-room.’

Half-way up the stairs — they were a grand and solemn flight loping gradually upwards under a slanting tunnel of barrel vaulting — Mrs. Aldwinkle paused. ‘I always think of them,’ she said ecstatically, ‘going up, coming down. Such a spectacle!’

‘Who?’ asked Mr. Falx.

‘Those grand old people.’

‘Oh, the tyrants.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle smiled pityingly. ‘And the poets, the scholars, the philosophers, the painters, the musicians, the beautiful women. You forget those, Mr. Falx.’ She raised her hand, as though summoning their spirits from the abyss. Psychical eyes might have seen a jewelled prince with a nose like an ant-eater’s slowly descending between obsequious human hedges. Behind him a company of buffoons and little hunch-backed dwarfs, stepping cautiously, sidelong, from stair to stair. . . .

‘I forget nothing,’ said Mr. Falx. ‘But I think tyrants are too high a price to pay.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle sighed and resumed her climbing. ‘What a queer fellow Calamy is, don’t you think?’ she said, addressing herself to Miss Thriplow. Mrs. Aldwinkle, who liked discussing other people’s characters and who prided herself on her perspicacity and her psychological intuition, found almost everybody ‘queer,’ even, when she thought it worth while discussing her, little Irene. She liked to think that every one she knew was tremendously complicated; had strange and improbable motives for his simplest actions, was moved by huge, dark passions; cultivated secret vices; in a word, was larger than life and a good deal more interesting. ‘What did you think of him, Mary?’

‘Very intelligent,’ thought Miss Thriplow.

‘Oh, of course, of course,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle agreed almost impatiently; that wasn’t anything much to talk about. ‘But one hears odd stories of his amorous tastes, you know.’ The party halted at the door of Mrs. Aldwinkle’s room. ‘Perhaps that was one of the reasons,’ she went on mysteriously, ‘why he went travelling all that time — right away from civilization. . . .’ On such a theme a conversation might surely be almost

indefinitely protracted; the moment for uttering the final, fatal good-night had not yet come.

Downstairs in the great saloon the three men were sitting over their red wine. Mr. Cardan had already twice refilled his glass. Calamy was within sight of the bottom of his first tumbler; young Lord Hovenden's was still more than half full. He was not a very accomplished drinker and was afraid of being sick if he swallowed too much of this young and generous brew.

'Bored, you're just bored. That's all it is,' Mr. Cardan was saying. He looked at Calamy over the top of his glass and took another sip, as though to his health. 'You haven't met any one of late who took your fancy; that's all. Unless, of course, it's a case of catarrh in the bile ducts.'

'It's neither,' said Calamy, smiling.

'Or perhaps it's the first great climacteric. You don't happen to be thirty-five, I suppose? Five times seven — a most formidable age. Though not quite so serious as sixty-three. That's the grand climacteric.' Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'Thank the Lord, I got past it without dying, or joining the Church of Rome, or getting married. Thank the Lord; but you?'

'I'm thirty-three,' said Calamy.

'A most harmless time of life. Then it's just boredom. You'll meet some little ravishment and all the zest will return.'

Young Lord Hovenden laughed in a very ventriloquial, man-of-the-worldly fashion.

Calamy shook his head. 'But I don't really want it to return, he said. 'I don't want to succumb to any more little ravishments. It's too stupid; it's too childish. I used to think that there was something rather admirable and enviable about being an *homme à bonnes fortunes*. Don Juan has an honoured place in literature; it's thought only natural that a Casanova should complacently boast of his successes. I accepted the current view, and when I was lucky in love — and I've always been only too deplorably fortunate — I used to think the more highly of myself.'

'We have all thought the same,' said Mr. Cardan. 'The weakness is a pardonable one.'

Lord Hovenden nodded and took a sip of wine to show that he entirely agreed with the last speaker.

'Pardonable, no doubt,' said Calamy. 'But when one comes to think it over, not very reasonable. For, after all, there's nothing really to be very proud of, there's nothing very much to boast about. Consider first of all the other heroes who have had the same sort of successes — more notable, very probably, and more numerous than one's own. Consider them. What do you see? Rows of insolent grooms and pugilists; leather-faced ruffians and disgusting old satyrs; louts with curly hair and no brains, and cunning little pimps like weasels; soft-palmed young epicenes and hairy gladiators — a vast army composed of the most odious specimens of humanity. Is one to be proud of belonging to their numbers?'



‘Why not?’ asked Mr. Cardan. ‘One should always thank God for whatever native talents one possesses. If your talent happens to lie in the direction of higher mathematics, praise God; and if in the direction of seduction, praise God just the same. And thanking God, when one comes to examine the process a little closely, is very much the same as boasting or being proud. I see no harm in boasting a little of one’s Casanovesque capacities. You young men are always so damned intolerant. You won’t allow any one to go to heaven, or hell, or nowhere, whichever the case may be, by any road except the one you happen to approve of. . . . You should take a leaf out of the Indians’ book. The Indians calculate that there are eighty-four thousand different types of human beings, each with its own way of getting through life. They probably underestimate.’

Calamy laughed. ‘I only speak for my type,’ he said.

‘And Hovenden and I for ours,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘Don’t we, Hovenden?’

‘Oh yes. Yes, of course,’ Lord Hovenden answered; and for some reason he blushed.

‘Proceed,’ said Mr. Cardan, refilling his glass.

‘Well then,’ Calamy went on, ‘belonging to the species I do belong to, I can’t take much satisfaction in these successes. The more so when I consider their nature. For either you’re in love with the woman or you aren’t; either you’re carried away by your inflamed imagination (for, after all, the person you’re really violently in love with is always your own invention and the wildest of fancies) or by your senses and your intellectual curiosity. If you aren’t in love, it’s a mere experiment in applied physiology, with a few psychological investigations thrown in to make it a little more interesting. But if you are, it means that you become enslaved, involved, dependent on another human being in a way that’s positively disgraceful, and the more disgraceful the more there is in you to be enslaved and involved.’

‘It wasn’t Browning’s opinion,’ said Mr. Cardan.

‘The woman yonder, there’s no use in life

But just to obtain her.’

‘Browning was a fool,’ said Calamy.

But Lord Hovenden was silently of opinion that Browning was quite right. He thought of Irene’s face, looking out of the little window in the copper bell.

‘Browning belonged to another species,’ Mr. Cardan corrected.

‘A foolish species, I insist,’ said Calamy.

‘Well, to tell the truth,’ Mr. Cardan admitted, closing his winking eye a little further, ‘I secretly agree with you about that. I’m not really as entirely tolerant as I should like to be.’

Calamy was frowning pensively over his own affairs, and without discussing the greater or less degree of Mr. Cardan’s tolerance he went on. ‘The question is, at the end of it all: what’s the way out? what’s to be done about it? For it’s obvious, as you say, that the little ravishments will turn up again. And appetite grows with fasting. And philosophy, which knows very well how to deal with past and future temptations, always seems to break down before the present, the immediate ones.’

‘Happily,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘For, when all is said, is there a better indoor sport? Be frank with me; is there?’

‘Possibly not,’ said Calamy, while young Lord Hovenden smiled at Mr. Cardan’s last remark, but unenthusiastically, in a rather painful indecision between amusement and horror. ‘But the point is, aren’t there better occupations for a man of sense than indoor sports, even the best of indoor sports?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Cardan, with decision.

‘For you, perhaps, there mayn’t be. But it seems to me,’ Calamy went on, ‘that I’m beginning to have had enough of sports, whether indoor or out-of-door. I’d like to find some more serious occupation.’

‘But that’s easier said than done.’ Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘For members of our species it’s precious hard to find any occupation that seems entirely serious. Eh?’

Calamy laughed, rather mournfully. ‘That’s true,’ he said. ‘But at the same time the sports begin to seem rather an outrage on one’s human dignity. Rather immoral, I would say, if the word weren’t so absurd.’

‘Not at all absurd, I assure you, when used as you use it.’ Mr. Cardan twinkled more and more genially over the top of his glass. ‘As long as you don’t talk about moral laws and all that sort of thing there’s no absurdity. For, it’s obvious, there are no moral laws. There are social customs on the one hand, and there are individuals with their individual feelings and moral reactions on the other. What’s immoral in one man may not matter in another. Almost nothing, for example, is immoral for me. Positively, you know, I can do anything and yet remain respectable in my own eyes, and in the eyes of others not merely wonderfully decent, but even noble.

Ah, what avail the loaded dice?

Ah, what the tubs of wine?

What every weakness, every vice?

Tom Cardan, all were thine.

I won’t bore you with the rest of this epitaph which I composed for myself some little time ago. Suffice to say that I point out in the two subsequent stanzas that these things availed absolutely nothing and that, malgré tout, I remained the honest, sober, pure and high-minded man that every one always instinctively recognizes me to be.’ Mr. Cardan emptied his glass and reached out once more for the fiasco.

‘You’re fortunate,’ said Calamy. ‘It’s not all of us whose personalities have such a natural odour of sanctity that they can disinfect our septic actions and render them morally harmless. When I do something stupid or dirty I can’t help feeling that it is stupid or dirty. My soul lacks virtues to make it wise or clean. And I can’t dissociate myself from what I do. I wish I could. One does such a devilish number of stupid things. Things one doesn’t want to do. If only one could be a hedonist and only do what was pleasant! But to be a hedonist one must be wholly rational; there’s no such thing as a genuine hedonist, there never has been. Instead of doing what one wants to do or what would give one pleasure, one drifts through existence doing exactly the opposite, most of the time — doing what one has no desire to do, following insane promptings that

lead one, fully conscious, into every sort of discomfort, misery, boredom and remorse. Sometimes,' Calamy went on, sighing, 'I positively regret the time I spent in the army during the war. Then, at any rate, there was no question of doing what one liked; there was no liberty, no choice. One did what one was told and that was all. Now I'm free; I have every opportunity for doing exactly what I like — and I consistently do what I don't like.'

'But do you know exactly what you do like?' asked Mr. Cardan.

Calamy shrugged his shoulders. 'Not exactly,' he said. 'I suppose I should say reading, and satisfying my curiosity about things, and thinking. But about what, I don't feel perfectly certain. I don't like running after women, I don't like wasting my time in futile social intercourse, or in the pursuit of what is technically known as pleasure. And yet for some reason and quite against my will I find myself passing the greater part of my time immersed in precisely these occupations. It's an obscure kind of insanity.'

Young Lord Hovenden, who knew that he liked dancing and desired Irene Aldwinkle more than anything in the world, found all this a little incomprehensible. 'I can't see what there is to prevent a man from doing what he wants to do. Except,' he qualified, remembering the teaching of Mr. Falx, 'economic necessity.'

'And himself,' added Mr. Cardan.

'And what's the most depressing of all,' Calamy went on, without paying attention to the interruption, 'is the feeling that one will go on like this for ever, in the teeth of every effort to stop. I sometimes wish I weren't externally free. For then at any rate I should have something to curse at, for getting in my way, other than my own self. Yes, positively, I sometimes wish I were a navvy.'

'You wouldn't if you had ever been one,' said Lord Hovenden, gravely and with a knowing air of speaking from personal experience.

Calamy laughed. 'You're perfectly right,' he said, and drained his glass. 'Shouldn't we think of going to bed?'

## Chapter VIII

TO IRENE FELL the privilege every evening of brushing her aunt's hair. For her these midnight moments were the most precious in the day. True, it was sometimes an agony for her to keep awake and the suppression of yawns was always painful; three years of incessant practice had not yet accustomed her to her Aunt Lilian's late hours. Aunt Lilian used to twit her sometimes on her childish longing for sleep; at other times she used to insist, very solicitously, that Irene should rest after lunch and go to bed at ten. The teasing made Irene feel ashamed of her babyishness; the solicitude made her protest that she wasn't a baby, that she was never tired and could easily do with five or six hours' sleep a night. The important thing, she had found, was not to be

seen yawning by Aunt Lilian and always to look fresh and lively. If Aunt Lilian noticed nothing there was neither teasing nor solicitude.

But in any case, every inconvenience was paid for a thousand times by the delights of these confidential conversations in front of the dressing-table mirror. While the young girl brushed and brushed away at the long tresses of pale golden-brown hair, Mrs. Aldwinkle, her eyes shut, and with an expression of beatitude on her face — for she took a cat's pleasure in the brushing — would talk, spasmodically, in broken sentences, of the events of the day, of her guests, of the people they had met; or of her own past, of plans for the future — hers or Irene's — of love. On all these subjects Mrs. Aldwinkle spoke intimately, confidentially, without reserve. Feeling that she was being treated by her Aunt Lilian as entirely grown-up and almost as an equal, Irene was proud and grateful. Without deliberately setting out to complete the subjugation of her niece, Mrs. Aldwinkle had discovered, in those midnight conversations, the most perfect means for achieving this end. If she talked like this to Irene, it was merely because she felt the need of talking intimately to some one, and because there was nobody else to talk to. Incidentally, however, she had contrived in the process to make the girl her slave. Made her Aunt Lilian's confidante, invested, so to speak, with a title of honour, Irene felt a gratitude which strengthened her original childish attachment to her aunt.

Meanwhile, she had learned to talk with an airy familiarity of many things concerning which young girls are supposed to be ignorant, and of which, indeed, she herself knew, except intellectually and at second hand, nothing. She had learned to be knowing and worldly wise, in the void, so to speak, and with no personal knowledge of the world. Gravely, ingenuously, she would say things that could only be uttered out of the depths of the profoundest innocence, amplifying and making embarrassingly explicit in public things that Mrs. Aldwinkle had only fragmentarily hinted at in the confidential small hours. She regarded herself as immensely mature.

To-night Mrs. Aldwinkle was in a rather gloomy, complaining mood.

'I'm getting old,' she said, sighing, and opening her eyes for a moment to look at her image in the glass that confronted her. The image did not deny the statement. 'And yet I always feel so young.'

'That's what really matters,' Irene declared. 'And besides, it's nonsense; you're not old; you don't look old.' In Irene's eyes, moreover, she really didn't look old.

'People don't like one any more when one gets old,' Mrs. Aldwinkle continued. 'Friends are terribly faithless. They fall away.' She sighed. 'When I think of all the friends . . .' She left the sentence unfinished.

All her life long Mrs. Aldwinkle had had a peculiar genius for breaking with her friends and lovers. Mr. Cardan was almost the sole survivor from an earlier generation of friends. From all the rest she had parted, and she had parted with a light heart. It had seemed easy to her, when she was younger, to make new friends in place of the old. Potential friends, she thought, were to be found everywhere, every day. But now she was beginning to doubt whether the supply was, after all, so inexhaustible as she

had once supposed. People of her own age, she found, were already set fast in the little social worlds they had made for themselves. And people of the younger generation seemed to find it hard to believe that she felt, in her heart, just as young as they did. They mostly treated her with the rather distant politeness which one accords to a stranger and an elder person.

‘I think people are horrid,’ said Irene, giving a particularly violent sweep with the hair-brush to emphasize her indignation.

‘You won’t be faithless?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle.

Irene bent over and, for all answer, kissed her on the forehead. Mrs. Aldwinkle opened her glittering blue eyes and looked up at her, smiling, as she did so, that siren smile that, for Irene, was still as fascinating as it had ever been.

‘If only everybody were like my little Irene!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle let her head fall forward and once more closed her eyes. There was a silence. ‘What are you sighing about in that heart-breaking way?’ she suddenly asked.

Irene’s blush ran tingling up into her temples and disappeared under the copper-coloured fringe. ‘Oh, nothing,’ she said, with an off-handedness that expressed the depth of her guilty embarrassment. That deep intake of breath, that brief and passionate expiry were not the components of a sigh. She had been yawning with her mouth shut.

But Mrs. Aldwinkle, with her bias towards the romantic, did not suspect the truth. ‘Nothing, indeed!’ she echoed incredulously. ‘Why, it was the noise of the wind blowing through the cracks of a broken heart. I never heard such a sigh.’ She looked at the reflection of Irene’s face in the mirror. ‘And you’re blushing like a peony. What is it?’

‘But it’s nothing, I tell you,’ Irene declared, speaking almost in a tone of irritation. She was annoyed with herself for having yawned so ineptly and blushed so pointlessly, rather than with her aunt. She immersed herself more than ever deeply in her brushing, hoping and praying that Mrs. Aldwinkle would drop the subject.

But Mrs. Aldwinkle was implacable in her tactlessness. ‘I never heard anything that sounded so love-sick,’ she said, smiling archly into the looking-glass. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s humorous sallies had a way of falling ponderously, like bludgeon strokes, on the objects of her raillery. One never knew, when she was being sprightly, whether to feel sorrier for the victim or for Mrs. Aldwinkle herself. For though the victim might get hard knocks, the spectacle of Mrs. Aldwinkle laboriously exerting herself to deliver them was sadly ludicrous; one wished, for her sake, for the sake of the whole human race, that she would desist. But she never did. Mrs. Aldwinkle always carried all her jokes to the foreseen end, and generally far further than was foreseeable by any one less ponderously minded than herself. ‘It was like a whale sighing!’ she went on with a frightful playfulness. ‘It must be a grand passion of the largest size. Who is it? Who is it?’ She raised her eyebrows, she smiled with what seemed to her, as she studied it in the glass, a most wickedly sly but charming smile — like a smile in a comedy by Congreve, it occurred to her.

‘But, Aunt Lilian,’ protested Irene, almost in despair, almost in tears, ‘it was nothing, I tell you.’ At moments like this she could almost find it in her to hate Aunt Lilian. ‘As a matter of fact, I was only . . .’ She was going to blurt it out courageously; she was just going to tell Aunt Lilian — at the risk of a teasing or an almost equally unwelcome solicitude: either were better than this — that she had been merely yawning. But Mrs. Aldwinkle, still relentlessly pursuing her fun, interrupted her.

‘But I guess who it is,’ she said, wagging a forefinger at the glass. ‘I guess. I’m not such a blind stupid old auntie as you think. You imagine I haven’t noticed. Silly child! Did she think I didn’t see that he was very assiduous and that she rather liked it? Did she think her stupid old auntie was blind?’

Irene blushed again; the tears came into her eyes. ‘But who are you talking about?’ she said in a voice that she had to make a great effort to keep from breaking and trembling out of control.

‘What an innocent!’ mocked Mrs. Aldwinkle, still very Congreve. And at this point — earlier than was usual with her on these occasions — she had mercy and consented to put poor Irene out of her agony. ‘Why, Hovenden,’ she said. ‘Who else should it be?’

‘Hovenden?’ Irene repeated with genuine surprise.

‘Injured innocence!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle momentarily renewed her trampling fun. ‘But it’s sufficiently obvious,’ she went on in a more natural voice. ‘The poor boy follows you like a dog.’

‘Me?’ Irene had been too much preoccupied in following her Aunt Lilian to notice that she in her turn was being followed.

‘Now don’t pretend,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘It’s so stupid pretending. Much better to be frank and straightforward. Admit, now, that you like him.’

Irene admitted. ‘Yes, of course I like him. But not . . . not in any special way. I’d really not thought of him like that.’

A shade contemptuously, benevolently amused, Mrs. Aldwinkle smiled. She forgot her depression, forgot her causes of personal complaint against the universal order of things. Absorbed in the uniquely interesting subject, in the sole and proper study of mankind, she was once more happy. Love — it was the only thing. Even Art, compared with it, hardly existed. Mrs. Aldwinkle was almost as much interested in other people’s love as in her own. She wanted every one to love, constantly and complicatedly. She liked to bring people together, to foster tender feelings, to watch the development of passion, to assist — when it happened; and Mrs. Aldwinkle was always rather disappointed when it did not — at the tragic catastrophe. And then, when the first love, growing old, had lingeringly or violently died, there was the new love to think of, to arrange, to foster, to watch; and then the third, the fourth. . . . One must always follow the spontaneous motions of the heart; it is the divine within us that stirs in the heart. And one must worship Eros so reverently that one can never be content with anything but the most poignant, most passionate manifestations of his power. To be content with a love that has turned in the course of time to mere affection, kindness

and quiet comprehension is almost to blaspheme against the name of Eros. Your true lover, thought Mrs. Aldwinkle, leaves the old, paralytic love and turns whole-heartedly to the young passion.

‘What a goose you are!’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘I sometimes wonder,’ she went on, ‘whether you’re capable of being in love at all, you’re so uncomprehending, so cold.’

Irene protested with all the energy of which she was capable. One could not have lived as long as she had in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s company without regarding the imputation of coldness, of insensitiveness to passion, as the most damning of all possible impeachments. It was better to be accused of being a murderess — particularly if it were a case of crime passionnel. ‘I don’t know how you say that,’ she said indignantly. ‘I’m always in love.’ Had there not been Peter, and Jacques, and Mario?

‘You may think you have,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle contemptuously, forgetting that it was she herself who had persuaded Irene that she was in love. ‘But it was more imagination than the real thing. Some women are born like that.’ She shook her head. ‘And they die like that.’ One might have inferred from Mrs. Aldwinkle’s words and the tone of her voice that Irene was a superannuated spinster of forty, proved conclusively, after twenty years of accumulated evidence, to be incapable of anything remotely resembling an amorous passion.

Irene made no answer, but went on brushing her aunt’s hair. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s aspersions were particularly wounding to her. She wished that she could do something startling to prove their baselessness. Something spectacular.

‘And I’ve always thought Hovenden an extremely nice boy,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle continued, with the air of pursuing an argument. She talked on. Irene listened and went on brushing.

## Chapter IX

IN THE SILENCE and solitude of her room, Miss Thriplow sat up for a long time, pen in hand, in front of an open note-book. ‘Darling Jim,’ she wrote, ‘darling Jim. To-day you came back to me so suddenly and unexpectedly that I could almost have cried aloud in front of all those people. Was it an accident that I picked that stiff leaf from Apollo’s tree and crushed it to fragrance between my fingers? Or were you there? was it you who secretly whispered to the unconscious part of me, telling me to pick that leaf? I wonder; oh, I wonder and wonder. Sometimes I believe that there are no accidents, that we do nothing by chance. To-night I felt sure of it.

‘But I wonder what made you want to remind me of Mr. Chigwell’s little shop at Weltringham. Why did you want to make me see you sitting in the barber’s chair, so stiff and grown-up, with the wheel of the mechanical brush still turning overhead and Mr. Chigwell saying, “Hair’s very dry, Mr. Thriplow”? And the rubber driving band used always to remind me . . .’ Miss Thriplow recorded the simile of the wounded snake

which had first occurred to her this evening. There was no particular reason why she should have antedated the conceit and attributed its invention to her childhood. It was just a question of literary tact; it seemed more interesting if one said that it had been made up when one was a child; that was all. 'I ask myself whether there is any particular significance in this reminder. Or perhaps it's just that you find me neglectful and unremembering — poor darling, darling Jim — and take whatever opportunity offers of reminding me that you existed, that you still exist. Forgive me, Jim. Everybody forgets. We should all be kind and good and unselfish if we always remembered — remembered that other people are just as much alive and individual and complicated as we are, remembered that everybody can be just as easily hurt, that everybody needs love just as much, that the only visible reason why we exist in the world is to love and be loved. But that's no excuse for me. It's no excuse for any one to say that other people are just as bad. I ought to remember more. I oughtn't to let my mind be choked with weeds. It's not only the memory of you that the weeds choke; it's everything that's best and most delicate and finest. Perhaps you reminded me of Mr. Chigwell and the bay rum in order to remind me at the same time to love more, and admire more, and sympathize more, and be more aware. Darling Jim.'

She put down her pen, and looking out through the open window at the starry sky she tried to think of him, tried to think of death. But it was difficult to think of death. It was difficult, she found, to keep the mind uninterruptedly on the idea of extinction, of non-life instead of life, of nothingness. In books one reads about sages meditating. She herself had often tried to meditate. But somehow it never seemed to come to much. All sorts of little irrelevant thoughts kept coming into her head. There was no focussing death, no keeping it steadily under the mind's eye. In the end she found herself reading through what she had written putting in a stop here and there, correcting slips in the style, where it seemed to be too formal, too made-up, insufficiently spontaneous and unsuitable to the secret diary.

At the end of the last paragraph she added another 'darling Jim,' and she repeated the words to herself, aloud, again and again. The exercise produced its usual effect; she felt the tears coming into her eyes.

The Quakers pray as the spirit moves them; but to let oneself be moved by the spirit is an arduous business. Kindlier and more worldly churches, with a feeling for human weakness, provide their worshippers with rituals, litanies, beads and prayer wheels.

'Darling Jim, darling Jim.' Miss Thriplow had found the form of words for her worship. 'Darling Jim.' The tears did her good; she felt better, kinder, softer. And then, suddenly, she seemed to be listening to herself from outside. 'Darling Jim.' But did she really care at all? Wasn't it all a comedy, all a pretence? He had died so long ago; he had nothing to do with her now. Why should she care or remember? And all this systematic thinking about him, this writing of things in a secret diary devoted to his memory — wasn't all that merely for the sake of keeping her emotions in training? Wasn't she deliberately scratching her heart to make it bleed, and then writing stories with the red fluid?



Miss Thriplow put away the thoughts as soon as they occurred to her: put them aside indignantly. They were monstrous thoughts, lying thoughts.

She picked up her pen again and wrote, very quickly, as though she were writing an exorcizing spell and the sooner it had been put on paper the sooner the evil thoughts would vanish.

‘Do you remember, Jim, that time we went out in the canoe together and nearly got drowned? . . .’

# Part II. Fragments From the Autobiography of Francis Chelifer

## Chapter I

OLD GENTLEMEN IN clubs were not more luxuriously cradled than I along the warm Tyrrhenian. Arms outstretched, like a live cross, I floated face upwards on that blue and tepid sea. The sun beat down on me, turning the drops on my face and chest to salt. My head was pillowed in the unruffled water; my limbs and body dimpled the surface of a pellucid mattress thirty feet thick and cherishingly resilient through all its thickness, down to the sandy bed on which it was spread. One might lie paralysed here for a life-time and never get a bedsore.

The sky above me was filmy with the noonday heat. The mountains, when I turned towards the land to look for them, had almost vanished behind a veil of gauze. But the Grand Hotel, on the other hand, though not perhaps quite so grand as it appeared in its illustrated prospectus — for there the front door was forty feet high and four tall acrobats standing on one another's shoulders could not have reached to the sills of the ground-floor windows — the Grand Hotel made no attempt to conceal itself; the white villas glared out unashamedly from their groves of pines; and in front of them, along the tawny beach, I could see the bathing huts, the striped umbrellas, the digging children, the bathers splashing and wallowing in the hot shallows — half-naked men like statues of copper, girls in bright tunics, little boiled shrimps instead of little boys, and sleek ponderous walruses with red heads, who were the matrons in their rubber caps and their wet black bathing garments. Here and there over the surface of the sea moved what the natives called patini — catamarans made of a pair of boxed-in pontoons joined together near the ends and with a high seat for the rower in the middle. Slowly, trailing behind them as they went loud wafts of Italian gallantry, giggles and song, they crawled across the flat blueness. Sometimes, at the head of its white wake, its noise and its stink, a motor boat would pass, and suddenly my transparent mattress would rock beneath me, as the waves of its passage lifted me and let me drop and lifted me up again, more and ever more languidly, till all was once more smooth.

So much for that. The description, as I see now that I come to re-read it, is not inelegant. For though I may not have played a hand of Bridge since I was eight and have never learned Mah Jong, I can claim at least to have studied the rules of style. I have learned the art of writing well, which is the art of saying nothing elaborately.

I have acquired all the literary accomplishments. But then, if I may say so without fatuity, I also have a talent. 'Nothing profits more than self-esteem founded on just and right.' I have Milton on my side to justify me in my assertion. When I write well, it is not merely another way of writing badly about nothing. In this respect my effusions differ a little from those of my cultured colleagues. I occasionally have something to say, and I find that the elegant but florid saying of it is as easy to me as walking. Not, of course, that I attach the slightest importance to that. I might have as much to say as La Rochefoucauld and as much facility for saying it as Shelley. But what of that? It would be great art, you say. No doubt; but what of that? It's a queer prejudice, this one of ours in favour of art. Religion, patriotism, the moral order, humanitarianism, social reform — we have all of us, I imagine, dropped all those overboard long ago. But we still cling pathetically to art. Quite unreasonably; for the thing has far less reason for existence than most of the objects of worship we have got rid of, is utterly senseless, indeed, without their support and justification. Art for art's sake — halma for halma's sake. It is time to smash the last and silliest of the idols. My friends, I adjure you, put away the ultimate and sweetest of the inebriants and wake up at last completely sober — among the dustbins at the bottom of the area steps.

This little digression will suffice, I hope, to show that I labour, while writing, under no illusions. I do not suppose that anything I do has the slightest importance, and if I take so much pains in imparting beauty and elegance to these autobiographical fragments, it is chiefly from force of habit. I have practised the art of literature so long that it comes natural to me to take the pains I have always taken. You may ask why I write at all, if I regard the process as being without importance? It is a pertinent question. Why do you do this inconsistent thing? I can only plead weakness in justification. On principle I disapprove of writing; on principle I desire to live brutishly like any other ordinary human being. The flesh is willing, but the spirit is weak. I confess I grow bored. I pine for amusements other than those legitimate distractions offered by the cinema and the Palais de Danse. I struggle, I try to resist the temptation; but in the end I succumb. I read a page of Wittgenstein, I play a little Bach; I write a poem, a few aphorisms, a fable, a fragment of autobiography. I write with care, earnestly, with passion even, just as if there were some point in what I were doing, just as if it were important for the world to know my thoughts, just as if I had a soul to save by giving expression to them. But I am well aware, of course, that all these delightful hypotheses are inadmissible. In reality I write as I do merely to kill time and amuse a mind that is still, in spite of all my efforts, a prey to intellectual self-indulgence. I look forward to a placid middle age when, having finally overcome the old Adam in me, finally quenched all the extravagant spiritual cravings, I shall be able to settle down in tranquillity to that life of the flesh, that natural human existence which still, I fear, seems to me so forbidding, so austere, so monotonous, so tedious. I have not yet attained to that blessed state. Hence these divagations into art; let me beg forgiveness for them. And above all, let me implore you once more not to imagine that I attach the slightest importance to them. My vanity would be hurt if I thought you did.

Poor Mrs. Aldwinkle, for example — there was some one who could never believe that I was not an art-for-arter. ‘But Chelifer,’ she used to say to me in her aimed, intent, breathless way, ‘how can you blaspheme like that against your own talent?’ And I would put on my most Egyptian air — I have always been accused of looking like an Egyptian sculpture — my most Sphingine smile, and say: ‘But I am a democrat; how can I allow my talent to blaspheme against my humanity?’ — or something enigmatic of that kind. Poor Mrs. Aldwinkle! But I run on too fast. I have begun to talk of Mrs. Aldwinkle and you do not know who Mrs. Aldwinkle is. Nor did I, for that matter, as I reclined that morning along the soft resilient water — I knew no more, then, than her name; who does not? Mrs. Aldwinkle the salonnière, the hostess, the giver of literary parties and agapes of lions — is she not classical? a household word? a familiar quotation? Of course. But in the flesh, till that moment, I had never seen her. Not through any lack of exertions on her part. For only a few months before, a telegram had arrived for me at my publisher’s: ‘PRINCE PAPADIAMANTOPOULOS JUST ARRIVED MOST ANXIOUS TO KNOW BEST LITERARY ARTISTIC INTELLECTUAL SOCIETY IN LONDON COULD YOU DINE MEET HIM THURSDAY EIGHT FIFTEEN 112 BERKELEY SQUARE LILIAN ALDWINKLE.’ In this telegraphic form, and couched in those terms, the invitation had certainly seemed alluring. But a little judicious inquiry showed me that the prospect was not really quite so attractive as it appeared. For Prince Papadiamantopoulos turned out, in spite of his wonderfully promising title and name, to be a perfectly serious intellectual like the rest of us. More serious indeed; for I discovered, to my horror, that he was a first-class geologist and could understand the differential calculus. Among the other guests were to be at least three decent writers and one painter. And Mrs. Aldwinkle herself was rumoured to be quite well educated and not entirely a fool. I filled up the reply-paid form and took it to the nearest post office. ‘MUCH REGRET NEVER DINE OUT EXCEPT IN LENT FRANCIS CHELIFER.’ During Lent I confidently expected to receive another invitation. I was relieved, however, and a little disappointed, to hear no more from Mrs. Aldwinkle. I should have liked her to make, in vain, a further effort to lure me from my allegiance to Lady Giblet.

Ah, those evenings at Lady Giblet’s — I never miss a single one if I can help it. The vulgarity, ignorance and stupidity of the hostess, the incredible second-rateness of her mangy lions — these are surely unique. And then those camp-followers of the arts, those delicious Bohemians who regard their ability to appreciate the paintings of the cubists and the music of Stravinsky as a sufficient justification for helping themselves freely to one another’s wives — nowhere can you see such brilliant specimens of the type as at Lady Giblet’s. And the conversations one hears within those marble halls — nowhere, surely, are pretensions separated from justifying facts by a vaster gulf. Nowhere can you hear the ignorant, the illogical, the incapable of thought talking so glibly about things of which they have not the slightest understanding. And then you should hear them boasting parenthetically, as they express an imbecile’s incoherent opinion, of their own clear-headedness, their modern outlook, their ruthless scientific

intelligence. Surely you can find nothing so perfect in its kind as at Lady Giblet's — I at least know of nothing more complete. At Mrs. Aldwinkle's one might very likely hear a serious conversation; never by any chance in the salon of my choice.

But that morning in the blue Tyrrhenian was the last of my life to be passed beyond the pale of Mrs. Aldwinkle's acquaintanceship; it was also as nearly as possible the first of my future life. Fate seemed that morning to be in doubt whether to extinguish me completely or merely to make me acquainted with Mrs. Aldwinkle. Fortunately, as I like to think, it chose the latter alternative. But I anticipate.

I first saw Mrs. Aldwinkle on this particular morning without knowing who she was. From where I was lying on my mattress of blue brine I noticed a heavily laden patino bearing slowly down upon me from the shore. Perched high on the rower's bench a tall young man was toiling languidly at the oars. His back against the bench, his hairy legs stretched out along the prow of one of the pontoons, sat a thick-set oldish man with a red face and short white hair. The bow of the other pontoon accommodated two women. The elder and larger of them sat in front, trailing her legs in the water; she was dressed in a kilted bathing costume of flame-coloured silk and her hair was tied up in a pink bandana handkerchief. Immediately behind her there squatted, her knees drawn up to her chin, a very youthful slender little creature in a black maillot. In one of her hands she held a green parasol with which she kept off the sunlight from her elder companion. Within the cylinder of greenish shadow the pink and flame-coloured lady, whom I afterwards learnt to be Mrs. Aldwinkle herself, looked like a Chinese lantern lighted in a conservatory; and when an accidental movement of the young girl's umbrella allowed the sunlight for a moment to touch her face, one could imagine that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus was being performed before one's eyes — for the green and corpse-like hue suddenly left the features, the colours of health, a little inflamed by the reflections from the bathing dress, seemed to rush back. The dead lived. But only for an instant; for the solicitous care of the young girl soon reversed the miracle. The sunshade swung back into position, the penumbra of the greenhouse enveloped the glowing lamp and the living face once more became ghastly, as though it belonged to some one who had lain for three days in the tomb.

At the stern, seen clearly only when the ponderous boat was already beginning to pass me, sat another young woman with a pale face and large dark eyes. A tendril of almost black hair escaped from under her bathing cap and fell, like a curling whisker, down her cheek. A handsome young man with a brown face and brown muscular arms and legs sprawled along the stern of the other pontoon, smoking a cigarette.

The voices that faintly came to me from the approaching boat sounded, somehow, more familiar than those I had heard from other patini. I became aware, all at once, that they were speaking English.

'The clouds,' I heard the old red-faced gentleman saying (he had just turned round, in obedience to a gesture from the Chinese lantern in the conservatory, to look at the piled-up masses of vapour that hung like another fantastic range above the real mountains), 'the clouds you so much admire are only made possible by the earth's

excrementitious dust hanging in the air. There are thousands of particles to every cubic centimetre. The water vapour condenses round them in droplets sufficiently large to be visible. Hence the clouds — marvellous and celestial shapes, but with a core of dust. What a symbol of human idealism!’ The melodious voice grew louder and louder as the young man dipped and dipped his oars. ‘Earthy particles transfigured into heavenly forms. The heavenly forms are not self-existent, not absolute. Dust writes these vast characters across the sky.’

Preserve me, I thought. Did I come to Marina di Vezza to listen to this sort of thing?

In a voice loud but indistinct, and strangely unmusical, the Chinese lantern lady began to quote Shelley, incorrectly. ‘ ”From peak to peak in a bridge-like . . .” ’ she began, and relapsed into silence, clawing the air in search of the synonym for shape which ought to rhyme with peak. ‘ ”Over a something sea.” I think The Cloud is almost the loveliest of all. It’s wonderful to think that Shelley sailed in this sea. And that he was burnt only a little way off, down there.’ She pointed down the coast to where, behind the haze, the interminable sea-front of Viareggio stretched away mile after mile. Faintly now one might discern the ghost of its nearest outskirts. But at evening it would emerge; clear and sharp in the sloping light, as though they had been cut from gems, Palace and Grande Bretagne, Europe (già Aquila Nera) and Savoia would twinkle there, majestic toys, among the innumerable lesser inns and boarding-houses, reduced at this distance to an exquisite loveliness and so pathetically small and delicate that one could almost have wept over them. At this very moment, on the other side of the curtain of haze, a hundred thousand bathers were thronging the empty beaches where Shelley’s body had been committed to the fire. The pinewoods in which, riding out from Pisa, he hunted lovely thoughts through the silence and the fragrant shadows teemed now with life. Unnumbered country copulatives roamed at this moment through those glades. . . . And so forth. Style pours out of my fountain pen. In every drachm of blue-black ink a thousand mots justes are implicit, like the future characteristics of a man in a piece of chromosome. I apologize.

Youth, then, at the prow and pleasure at the helm — and the flesh was so glossy under the noonday sun, the colours so blazingly bright, that I was really reminded of Etty’s little ravishment — the laden boat passed slowly within a few yards of me. Stretched like a live cross on my mattress of brine I looked at them languidly through half-closed eyes. They looked at me; a blank incuriosity was on their faces — for a glimpse only, then they averted their eyes as though I had been one of those exhausted frogs one sees, after the breeding season, floating belly upwards on the surface of a pond. And yet I was what is technically known as an immortal soul. It struck me that it would have been more reasonable if they had stopped their boat and hailed me across the water. ‘Good morning, stranger. How goes your soul? And what shall we do to be saved?’ But on the other hand, our habit of regarding strangers as being nothing more to us than exhausted frogs probably saves a good deal of trouble.

‘From cape to cape,’ emended the red-faced gentleman, as they receded from me.

And very diffidently, in a soft shy voice, the solicitous young creature suggested that the something sea was a torrent sea.

'Whatever vat may be,' said the young rower, whose exertions under the broiling sun entitled him to take the professionally nautical, commonsense view about the matter.

'But it's obvious what it is,' said the Chinese lantern lady, rather contemptuously. The young man at the stern threw away his cigarette and started meditatively whistling the tune of 'Deh, vieni alla finestra' from Don Giovanni.

There was a silence; the boat receded, stroke after stroke. The last words I heard were uttered, drawlingly and in a rather childish voice, by the young woman in the stern. 'I wish I could get brown more quickly,' she said, lifting one foot out of the water and looking at the white bare leg. 'One might have been living in a cellar. Such a dreadfully unwholesome look of blanched asparagus. Or even mushrooms,' she added pensively.

The Chinese lantern lady said something, then the red-faced man. But the conversation had ceased to be articulately audible. Soon I could hear no more; they had gone, leaving behind them, however, the name of Shelley. It was here, along these waters, that he had sailed his flimsy boat. In one hand he held his Sophocles, with the other the tiller. His eyes looked now at the small Greek letters, now to the horizon, or landwards towards the mountains and clouds. 'Port your helm, Shelley,' Captain Williams would shout. And the helm went hard over to starboard; the ship staggered, almost capsized. Then, one day, flash! the black opaque sky split right across; crash and rumble! the thunder exploded overhead and with the noise of boulders being trundled over the surface of the metal clouds, the echoes rolled about the heavens and among the mountains— 'from peak to peak,' it occurred to me, adopting the Chinese lantern lady's emendation, 'from peak to peak with a gong-like squeak.' (What an infamy!) And then, with a hiss and a roar, the whirl-blast was upon them. It was all over.

Even without the Chinese lantern lady's hint I should probably have started thinking of Shelley. For to live on this coast, between the sea and the mountains, among alternate flawless calms and shattering sudden storms, is like living inside one of Shelley's poems. One walks through a transparent and phantasmagorical beauty. But for the hundred thousand bathers, the jazz band in the Grand Hotel, the unbroken front which civilization, in the form of boarding-houses, presents for miles at a time to the alien and empty sea, but for all these, one might seriously lose one's sense of reality and imagine that fancy had managed to transform itself into fact. In Shelley's days, when the coast was all but uninhabited, a man might have had some excuse for forgetting the real nature of things. Living here in an actual world practically indistinguishable from one of imagination, a man might almost be justified for indulging his fancy to the extravagant lengths to which Shelley permitted his to go.

But a man of the present generation, brought up in typical contemporary surroundings, has no justifications of this sort. A modern poet cannot permit himself the mental luxuries in which his predecessors so freely wallowed. Lying there on the water, I re-

peated to myself some verses, inspired by reflections like these, which I had written some few months before.

The Holy Ghost comes sliding down  
On Ilford, Golders Green and Penge.  
His hosts infect him as they rot;  
The victims take their just revenge.  
For if of old the sons of squires  
And livery stable keepers turned  
To flowers and hope, to Greece and God,  
We in our later age have learned  
That we are native where we walk  
Through the dim streets of Camden Town.  
But hopeful still through twice-breathed air  
The Holy Ghost comes shining down.

I wrote these lines, I remember, one dark afternoon in my office in Gog's Court, Fetter Lane. It is in the same office, on an almost perfectly similar afternoon, that I am writing now. The reflector outside my window reflects a faint and muddy light that has to be supplemented by electricity from within. An inveterate smell of printer's ink haunts the air. From the basement comes up the thudding and clanking of presses; they are turning out the weekly two hundred thousand copies of the 'Woman's Fiction Budget.' We are at the heart, here, of our human universe. Come, then, let us frankly admit that we are citizens of this mean city, make the worst of it resolutely and not try to escape.

To escape, whether in space or in time, you must run a great deal further now than there was any need to do a hundred years ago when Shelley boated on the Tyrrhenian and conjured up millennial visions. You must go further in space, because there are more people, more and faster vehicles. The Grand Hotel, the hundred thousand bathers, the jazz bands have introduced themselves into that Shelleian poem which is the landscape of Versilia. And the millennium which seemed in the days of Godwin not so very remote has receded further and further from us, as each Reform Bill, each victory over entrenched capitalism dashed yet another illusion to the ground. To escape, in 1924, one must go to Tibet, one must look forward to at least the year 3000; and who knows? they are probably listening-in in the Dalai Lama's palace; and it is probable that the millennial state of a thousand years hence will be millennial only because it has contrived to make slavery, for the first time, really scientific and efficient.

An escape in space, even if one contrives successfully to make one, is no real escape at all. A man may live in Tibet or among the Andes; but he cannot therefore deny that London and Paris actually exist, he cannot forget that there are such places as New York and Berlin. For the majority of contemporary human beings, London and Manchester are the rule; you may have fled to the eternal spring of Arequipa, but you are not living in what is, for the mass of human consciousness, reality.



An escape in time is no more satisfactory. You live in the radiant future, live for the future. You console yourself for the spectacle of things as they are by the thought of what they will be. And you work, perhaps, to make them be what you think they ought to be. I know all about it, I assure you. I have done it all myself — lived in a state of permanent intoxication at the thought of what was to come, working happily for a gorgeous ideal of happiness. But a little reflection suffices to show how absurd these forward lookings, these labours for the sake of what is to be, really are. For, to begin with, we have no reason to suppose that there is going to be a future at all, at any rate for human beings. In the second place we do not know whether the ideal of happiness towards which we are striving may not turn out either to be totally unrealizable or, if realizable, utterly repellent to humanity. Do people want to be happy? If there were a real prospect of achieving a permanent and unvarying happiness, wouldn't they shrink in horror from the boring consummation? And finally, the contemplation of the future, the busy working for it, does not prevent the present from existing. It merely partially blinds us to the present.

The same objections apply with equal force to the escapes which do not launch out into space or time, but into Platonic eternity, into the ideal. An escape into mere fancy does not prevent facts from going on; it is a disregarding of the facts.

Finally there are those people, more courageous than the escapers, who actually plunge into the real contemporary life around them, and are consoled by finding in the midst of its squalor, its repulsiveness and stupidity, evidences of a widespread kindliness, of charity, pity and the like. True, these qualities exist and the spectacle of them is decidedly cheering; in spite of civilization, men have not fallen below the brutes. Parents, even in human society, are devoted to their offspring; even in human society the weak and the afflicted are sometimes assisted. It would be surprising, considering the origins and affinities of man, if this were not the case. Have you ever read an obituary notice of which the subject did not possess, under his rough exterior and formidable manner, a heart of gold? And the obituarists, however cloying their literary productions, are perfectly right. We all have hearts of gold, though we are sometimes, it is true, too much preoccupied with our own affairs to remember the fact. The really cruel, the fundamentally evil man is as rare as the man of genius or the total idiot. I have never met a man with a really bad heart. And the fact is not surprising; for a man with a really bad heart is a man with certain instincts developed to an abnormal degree and certain others more or less completely atrophied. I have never met a man like Mozart for that matter.

Charles Dickens, it is true, managed to feel elated and chronically tearful over the existence of virtues among the squalor. 'He shows,' as one of his American admirers so fruitily puts it, 'that life in its rudest forms may wear a tragic grandeur; that amidst follies and excesses the moral feelings do not wholly die, and that the haunts of the blackest crime are sometimes lighted up by the presence of the noblest souls.' And very nice too. But is there any great reason to feel elated by the emergence of virtues in human society? We are not specially elated by the fact that men have livers and

pancreases. Virtues are as natural to man as his digestive organs; any sober biologist, taking into consideration his gregarious instincts, would naturally expect to find them.

This being the case, there is nothing in these virtues à la Dickens to ‘write home about’ — as we used to say at a time when we were remarkably rich in such virtues. There is no reason to be particularly proud of qualities which we inherit from our animal forefathers and share with our household pets. The gratifying thing would be if we could find in contemporary society evidences of peculiarly human virtues — the conscious rational virtues that ought to belong by definition to a being calling himself *Homo Sapiens*. Open-mindedness, for example, absence of irrational prejudice, complete tolerance and a steady, reasonable pursuit of social goods. But these, alas, are precisely what we fail to discover. For to what, after all, are all this squalor, this confusion and ugliness due but to the lack of the human virtues? The fact is that — except for an occasional sport of Nature, born now here, now there, and always out of time — we sapient men have practically no human virtues at all. Spend a week in any great town, and the fact is obvious. So complete is this lack of truly human qualities that we are reduced, if we condescend to look at reality at all, to act like Charles Dickens and congratulate the race on its merely animal virtues. The jolly, optimistic fellows who assure us that humanity is all right, because mothers love their children, poor folk pity and help one another, and soldiers die for a flag, are comforting us on the grounds that we resemble the whales, the elephants and the bees. But when we ask them to adduce evidence of human sapience, to give us a few specimens of conscious and reasonable well-doing, they rebuke us for our intellectual coldness and our general ‘inhumanity’ — which means our refusal to be content with the standards of the animals. However grateful we may feel for the existence in civilized society of these homely jungle virtues, we cannot justifiably set them off against the horrors and squalors of civilized life. The horrors and squalors arise from men’s lack of reason — from their failure to be completely and sapiently human. The jungle virtues are merely the obverse of this animalism, whose Heads is instinctive kindness and whose Tails is stupidity and instinctive cruelty.

So much for the last consolation of philosophy. We are left with reality. My office in Gog’s Court is situated, I repeat, at the very heart of it, the palpitating heart.

## Chapter II

GOG’S COURT, THE navel of reality! Repeating those verses of mine in the silence, I intimately felt the truth of it.

For if of old the sons of squires  
And livery stable keepers turned  
To flowers and hope, to Greece and God,  
We in our later age have learned

That we are native where we walk.

My voice boomed out oracularly across the flat sea. Nothing so richly increases the significance of a statement as to hear it uttered by one's own voice, in solitude. 'Resolved, so help me God, never to touch another drop!' Those solemn words, breathed out in a mist of whiskey — how often, in dark nights, on icy mornings, how often have they been uttered! And the portentous imprecation seems to engage the whole universe to do battle on behalf of the Better Self against its besetting vice. Thrilling and awful moment! Merely for the sake of living through it again, for the sake of once more breaking the empty silence with the reverberating Stygian oath, it is well worth neglecting the good resolution. I say nothing of the pleasures of inebriation.

My own brief recital served to confirm for me the truth of my speculations. For not only was I uttering the substance of my thoughts aloud; I was voicing it in terms of a formula that had an element, I flatter myself, of magic about it. What is the secret of these verbal felicities? How does it come about that a commonplace thought embodied by a poet in some abracadabrical form seems bottomlessly profound, while a positively false and stupid notion may be made by its expression to seem true? Frankly, I don't know. And what is more, I have never found any one who could give an answer to the riddle. What is it that makes the two words 'defunctive music' as moving as the dead march out of the *Eroica* and the close of *Coriolan*? Why should it be somehow more profoundly comic to 'call Tullia's ape a marmosite' than to write a whole play of Congreve? And the line, 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' — why should it in effect lie where it does? Mystery. This game of art strangely resembles conjuring. The quickness of the tongue deceives the brain. It has happened, after all, often enough. Old Shakespeare, for example. How many critical brains have been deceived by the quickness of his tongue! Because he can say 'Shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves,' and 'defunctive music,' and 'the expense of spirit in a waste of shame' and all the rest of it, we credit him with philosophy, a moral purpose and the most penetrating psychology. Whereas his thoughts are incredibly confused, his only purpose is to entertain and he has created only three characters. One, Cleopatra, is an excellent copy from the life, like a character out of a good realistic novel, say one of Tolstoy's. The other two — Macbeth and Falstaff — are fabulous imaginary figures, consistent with themselves but not real in the sense that Cleopatra is real. My poor friend Calamy would call them more real, would say that they belong to the realm of Absolute Art. And so forth. I cannot go into poor Calamy's opinions, at any rate in this context; later on, perhaps. For me, in any case, Macbeth and Falstaff are perfectly genuine and complete mythological characters, like Jupiter or Gargantua, Medea or Mr. Winkle. They are the only two well-invented mythological monsters in the whole of Shakespeare's collection; just as Cleopatra is the only well-copied reality. His boundless capacity for abracadabra has deceived innumerable people into imagining that all the other characters are as good.

But the Bard, heaven help me, is not my theme. Let me return to my recitation on the face of the waters. As I have said, my conviction 'that we are native where

we walk' was decidedly strengthened by the sound of my own voice pronouncing the elegant formula in which the notion was embalmed. Repeating the words, I thought of Gog's Court, of my little room with the reflector at the window, of the light that burns in winter even at noon, of the smell of printer's ink and the noise of the presses. I was back there, out of this irrelevant poem of a sunshiny landscape, back in the palpitating heart of things. On the table before me lay a sheaf of long galleys; it was Wednesday; I should have been correcting proofs, but I was idle that afternoon! On the blank six inches at the bottom of a galley I had been writing those lines: 'For if of old the sons of squires . . .' Pensively, a halma player contemplating his next move, I hung over them. What were the possible improvements? There was a knock at the door. I drew a sheet of blotting paper across the bottom of the galley— 'Come in' — and went on with my interrupted reading of the print. '. . . Since Himalayas were made to breed true to colour, no event has aroused greater enthusiasm in the fancier's world than the fixation of the new Flemish-Angora type. Mr. Spargle's achievement is indeed a nepoch-making one. . . .' I restored the n of nepoch to its widowed a, and looked up. Mr. Bosk, the sub-editor, was standing over me.

'Proof of the leader, sir,' he said, bowing with that exquisitely contemptuous politeness which characterized all his dealings with me, and handed me another galley.

'Thank you, Mr. Bosk,' I said.

But Mr. Bosk did not retire. Standing there in his favourite and habitual attitude, the attitude assumed by our ancestors (of whom, indeed, old Mr. Bosk was one) in front of the half-draped marble column of the photographer's studio, he looked at me, faintly smiling through his thin white beard. The third button of his waistcoat was undone and his right hand, like a half-posted letter, was inserted in the orifice. He rested his weight on a rigid right leg. The other leg was slightly bent, and the heel of one touching the toe of the other, his left foot made with his right a perfect right angle. I could see that I was in for a reproof.

'What is it, Mr. Bosk?' I asked.

Among the sparse hairs Mr. Bosk's smile became piercingly sweet. He put his head archly on one side. His voice when he spoke was mellifluous. On these occasions when I was to be dressed down and put in my place his courtesy degenerated into a kind of affected girlish coquetry. 'If you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Chelifier,' he said mincingly, 'I think you'll find that rabear in Spanish does not mean "to wag the tail," as you say in your leader on the derivation of the word "rabbit," so much as "to wag the hind quarters." '

'Wag the hind quarters, Mr. Bosk?' I said. 'But that sounds to me a very difficult feat.'

'Not in Spain, apparently,' said Mr. Bosk, almost giggling.

'But this is England, Mr. Bosk.'

'Nevertheless, my authority is no less than Skeat himself.' And triumphantly, with the air of one who, at a critical moment of the game, produces a fifth ace, Mr. Bosk brought forward his left hand, which he had been keeping mysteriously behind his

back. It held a dictionary; a strip of paper marked the page. Mr. Bosk laid it, opened, on the table before me; with a thick nail he pointed ‘ ”. . . or possibly,” I read aloud, “from Spanish rabear, to wag the hind quarters.” Right as usual, Mr. Bosk. I’ll alter it in the proof.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Mr. Bosk with a mock humility. Inwardly he was exulting in his triumph. He picked up his dictionary, repeated his contemptuously courteous bow and walked with a gliding noiseless motion towards the door. On the threshold he paused. ‘I remember that the question arose once before, sir,’ he said; his voice was poisonously honeyed. ‘In Mr. Parfitt’s time,’ and he slipped out, closing the door quietly behind him.

It was a Parthian shot. The name of Mr. Parfitt was meant to wound me to the quick, to bring the blush of shame to my cheek. For had not Mr. Parfitt been the perfect, complete and infallible editor? Whereas I . . . Mr. Bosk left it to my own conscience to decide what I was.

And indeed I was well aware of my short-comings. ‘The Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette,’ with which, as every schoolboy knows, is incorporated ‘The Mouse Breeders’ Record,’ could hardly have had a more unsuitable editor than I. To this day, I confess, I hardly know the right end of a rabbit from the wrong. Mr. Bosk was a survivor from the grand old days of Mr. Parfitt, the founder and for thirty years the editor of the Gazette.

‘Mr. Parfitt, sir,’ he used to tell me every now and then, ‘was a real fancier.’ His successor, by implication, was not.

It was at the end of the war. I was looking for a job — a job at the heart of reality. The illusory nature of the position had made me decline my old college’s offer of a fellowship. I wanted something — how shall I put it? — more palpitating. And then in *The Times* I found what I had been looking for. ‘Wanted Editor of proved literary ability for livestock trade paper. Apply Box 92.’ I applied, was interviewed, and conquered. The directors couldn’t finally resist my testimonial from the Bishop of Bosham. ‘A life-long acquaintance with Mr. Chelifer and his family permits me confidently to assert that he is a young man of great ability and high moral purpose, (signed) Hartley Bosh.’ I was appointed for a probationary period of six months.

Old Mr. Parfitt, the retiring editor, stayed on a few days at the office to initiate me into the secrets of the work. He was a benevolent old gentleman, short, thick and with a very large head. His square face was made to seem even broader than it was by the grey whiskers which ran down his cheeks to merge imperceptibly into the ends of his moustache. He knew more about mice and rabbits than any man in the country; but what he prided himself on was his literary gift. He explained to me the principles on which he wrote his weekly leaders.

‘In the fable,’ he told me, smiling already in anticipation of the end of this joke which he had been elaborating and polishing since 1892, ‘in the fable it is the mountain which, after a long and, if I may say so, geological labour, gives birth to the mouse. My principle, on the contrary, has always been, wherever possible, to make my mice parturate mountains.’ He paused expectantly. When I had laughed, he went on. ‘It’s

astonishing what reflections on life and art and politics and philosophy and what not you can get out of a mouse or a rabbit. Quite astonishing!’

The most notable of Mr. Parfitt’s mountain thoughts still hangs, under glass and in an Oxford frame, on the wall above the editorial desk. It was printed in the *Rabbit Fancier* for August 8, 1914.

‘It is not the readers of the *Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette*,’ Mr. Parfitt had written on that cardinal date, ‘who have made this war. No Mouse Breeder, I emphatically proclaim, has desired it. No! Absorbed in their harmless and indeed beneficent occupations, they have had neither the wish nor the leisure to disturb the world’s peace. If all men whole-heartedly devoted themselves to avocations like ours, there would be no war. The world would be filled with the innocent creators and fosterers of life, not, as at present, with its tigerish destroyers. Had Kaiser William the Second been a breeder of rabbits or mice, we should not find ourselves to-day in a world whose very existence is threatened by the unimaginable horrors of modern warfare.’

Noble words! Mr. Parfitt’s righteous indignation was strengthened by his fears for the future of his paper. The war, he gloomily foreboded, would mean the end of rabbit breeding. But he was wrong. Mice, it is true, went rather out of fashion between 1914 and 1918. But in the lean years of rationing, rabbits took on a new importance. In 1917 there were ten fanciers of Flemish Giants to every one there had been before the war. Subscriptions rose, advertisements were multiplied.

‘Rabbits,’ Mr. Parfitt assured me, ‘did a great deal to help us win the war.’

And conversely, the war did so much to help rabbits that Mr. Parfitt was able to retire in 1919 with a modest but adequate fortune. It was then that I took over control. And in spite of Mr. Bosk’s contempt for my ignorance and incompetence, I must in justice congratulate myself on the way in which I piloted the concern through the evil times which followed. Peace found the English people at once less prosperous and less hungry than they had been during the war. The time had passed when it was necessary for them to breed rabbits; and they could not afford the luxury of breeding them for pleasure. Subscriptions declined, advertisements fell off. I averted an impending catastrophe by adding to the paper a new section dealing with goats. Biologically, no doubt, as I pointed out to the directors in my communication on the subject, this mingling of ruminants with rodents was decidedly unsound. But commercially, I felt sure, the innovation would be justified. It was. The goats brought half a dozen pages of advertisements in their train and several hundred new subscribers. Mr. Bosk was furious at my success; but the directors thought very highly of my capacities.

They did not, it is true, always approve of my leading articles. ‘Couldn’t you try to make them a little more popular,’ suggested the managing director, ‘a little more practical too, Mr. Chelifer? For instance,’ and clearing his throat, he unfolded the typewritten sheet of complaints which he had had prepared and had brought with him to the board meeting, ‘for instance, what’s the practical value of this stuff about the use of the word “cony” as a term of endearment in the Elizabethan dramatists? And this article on the derivation of “rabbit” ’ — he looked at his paper again and coughed.

‘Who wants to know that there’s a Walloon word “robett”? Or that our word may have something to do with the Spanish rabear, to wag the hind quarters? And who, by the way,’ he added, looking up at me over his pince-nez with an air — prematurely put on — of triumph, ‘who ever heard of an animal wagging its hind quarters?’ ‘Nevertheless,’ I said, apologetically, but firmly, as befits a man who knows that he is right, ‘my authority is no less than Skeat himself.’

The managing director, who had hoped to score a point, went on, defeated, to the next count in the indictment. ‘And then, Mr. Chelifer,’ he said, ‘we don’t very much like, my fellow directors and I, we don’t much like what you say in your article on “Rabbit Fancying and its Lesson to Humanity.” It may be true that breeders have succeeded in producing domesticated rabbits that are four times the weight of wild rabbits and possess only half the quantity of brains — it may be true. Indeed, it is true. And a very remarkable achievement it is, Mr. Chelifer, very remarkable indeed. But that is no reason for upholding, as you do, Mr. Chelifer, that the ideal working man, at whose production the eugenist should aim, is a man eight times as strong as the present-day workman, with only a sixteenth of his mental capacity. Not that my fellow directors and I entirely disagree with what you say, Mr. Chelifer; far from it. All right-thinking men must agree that the modern workman is too well educated. But we have to remember, Mr. Chelifer, that many of our readers actually belong to that class.’

‘Quite.’ I acquiesced in the reproof.

‘And finally, Mr. Chelifer, there is your article on the “Symbology of the Goat.” We feel that the facts you have there collected, however interesting to the anthropologist and the student of folk-lore, are hardly of a kind to be set before a mixed public like ours.’

The other directors murmured their assent. There was a prolonged silence.

## Chapter III

I REMEMBER AN advertisement — for some sort of cough drops I think it was — which used to figure very largely in my boyhood on the back covers of the illustrated weeklies. Over the legend, ‘A Pine Forest in every Home,’ appeared a picture of three or four magnificent Norway spruces growing out of the drawing-room carpet, while the lady of the house, her children and guests took tea, with a remarkable air of unconcern and as though it was quite natural to have a sequoia sprouting out of the hearth-rug, under their sanitary and aromatic shade. A Pine Forest in every Home. . . . But I have thought of something even better. A Luna Park in every Office. A British Empire Exhibition Fun Fair in every Bank. An Earl’s Court in every Factory. True, I cannot claim to bring every attraction of the Fun Fair into your place of labour — only the switchback, the water-shoot and the mountain railway. Merry-go-round, wiggle-woggle,

flip-flap and the like are beyond the power of my magic to conjure up. Horizontal motion and a rotary giddiness I cannot claim to reproduce; my speciality is headlong descents, breathlessness and that delicious sickening feeling that your entrails have been left behind on an upper storey. Those who chafe at the tameness and sameness of office life, who pine for a little excitement to diversify the quotidian routine, should experiment with this little recipe of mine and bring the water-shoot into the counting-house. It is quite simple. All you have got to do is to pause for a moment in your work and ask yourself: Why am I doing this? What is it all for? Did I come into the world, supplied with a soul which may very likely be immortal, for the sole purpose of sitting every day at this desk? Ask yourself these questions thoughtfully, seriously. Reflect even for a moment on their significance — and I can guarantee that, firmly seated though you may be in your hard or your padded chair, you will feel all at once that the void has opened beneath you, that you are sliding headlong, fast and faster, into nothingness.

For those who cannot dispense with formularies and fixed prayers, I recommend this little catechism, to be read through in office hours whenever time hangs a little heavy.

Q. Why am I working here?

A. In order that Jewish stockbrokers may exchange their Rovers for Armstrong-Siddeleys, buy the latest jazz records and spend the week-end at Brighton.

Q. Why do I go on working here?

A. In the hope that I too may some day be able to spend the week-end at Brighton.

Q. What is progress?

A. Progress is stockbrokers, more stockbrokers and still more stockbrokers.

Q. What is the aim of social reformers?

A. The aim of social reformers is to create a state in which every individual enjoys the greatest possible amount of freedom and leisure.

Q. What will the citizens of this reformed state do with their freedom and leisure?

A. They will do, presumably, what the stockbrokers do with these things to-day, e.g. spend the week-end at Brighton, ride rapidly in motor vehicles and go to the theatre.

Q. On what condition can I live a life of contentment?

A. On the condition that you do not think.

Q. What is the function of newspapers, cinemas, radios, motorbikes, jazz bands, etc?

A. The function of these things is the prevention of thought and the killing of time. They are the most powerful instruments of human happiness.

Q. What did Buddha consider the most deadly of the deadly sins?

A. Unawareness, stupidity.

Q. And what will happen if I make myself aware, if I actually begin to think?

A. Your swivel chair will turn into a trolley on the mountain railway, the office floor will gracefully slide away from beneath you and you will find yourself launched into the abyss.



Down, down, down! The sensation, though sickening, is really delightful. Most people, I know, find it a little too much for them and consequently cease to think, in which case the trolley reconverts itself into the swivel chair, the floor closes up and the hours at the desk seem once more to be hours passed in a perfectly reasonable manner; or else, more rarely, flee in panic horror from the office to bury their heads like ostriches in religion or what not. For a strong-minded and intelligent person both courses are inadmissible; the first because it is stupid and the second because it is cowardly. No self-respecting man can either accept unreflectingly or, having reflected upon it, irresponsibly run away from the reality of human life. The proper course, I flatter myself, is that which I have adopted. Having sought out the heart of reality — Gog's Court, to be explicit — I have taken up my position there; and though fully aware of the nature of the reality by which I am surrounded, though deliberately keeping myself reminded of the complete imbecility of what I am doing, I yet remain heroically at my post. My whole time is passed on the switchback; all my life is one unceasing slide through nothing.

All my life, I insist; for it is not merely into Gog's Court that I magically introduce the fun of the fair. I so arrange my private life that I am sliding even out of office hours. My heart, to borrow the poetess's words, is like a singing bird whose nest is permanently in a water-shoot. Miss Carruthers's boardinghouse in Chelsea is, I assure you, as suitable a place to slither in as any east of Temple Bar. I have lived there now for four years. I am a pillar of the establishment and every evening, when I sit down to dinner with my fellow guests, I feel as though I were taking my place in a specially capacious family trolley on the switchback railway. All aboard! and away we go. With gathering momentum the trolley plunges down into vacancy.

Let me describe an evening on the Domestic water-shoot. At the head of the table sits Miss Carruthers herself; thirty-seven, plump though unmarried, with a face broadening towards the base and very flabby about the cheeks and chin — bull-doggy, in a word; and the snub nose, staring at you out of its upward-tilted nostrils, the small brown eyes do not belie the comparison. And what activity! never walks, but runs about her establishment like a demoniac, never speaks but shrilly shouts, carves the roast beef with scientific fury, laughs like a giant woodpecker. She belongs to a distinguished family which would never, in its days of glory, have dreamed of allowing one of its daughters to become what Miss Carruthers calls, applying to herself the most humiliating of titles and laughing as she does so, to emphasize the picturesque contrast between what she is by birth and what circumstance has reduced her to becoming, 'a common lodging-house keeper.' She is a firm believer in her class, and to her more distinguished guests deplores the necessity under which she labours to admit into her establishment persons not really, really . . . She is careful not to mix people of different sorts together. Her most genteel guests sit the closest to her at table; it is implied that, in the neighbourhood of Miss Carruthers, they will feel at home. For years I have had the honour of sitting at her left hand; for if less prosperous than Mrs.

Cloudesley Shove, the broker's widow (who sits in glory on the right), I have at least attended in my youth an ancient seat of learning.

The gong reverberates; punctually I hurry down to the dining-room. With fury and precision, like a conductor immersed in a Wagner overture, Miss Carruthers is carving the beef.

'Evening, Mr. Chelifer,' she loudly calls, without interrupting her labours. 'What news have you brought back with you from the city to-day?'

Affably I smile, professionally I rub the hands. 'Well, I don't know that I can think of any.'

'Evening, Mrs. Fox. Evening, Mr. Fox.' The two old people take their places near the further end of the table. They are not quite, quite . . . 'Evening, Miss Monad.' Miss Monad does responsible secretarial work and sits next to the Fox's. 'Evening, Mr. Quinn. Evening, Miss Webber. Evening, Mrs. Crotch.' But the tone in which she responds to Mr. Dutt's courteous greeting is much less affable. Mr. Dutt is an Indian — a black man, Miss Carruthers calls him. Her 'Evening, Mr. Dutt' shows that she knows her place and hopes that the man of the inferior race knows his. The servant comes in with a steaming dish of greens. Crambe ripetita — inspiring perfume! Mentally I burst into song.

These like remorse inveterate memories,  
Being of cabbage, are prophetic too  
Of future feasts, when Mrs. Cloudesley Shove  
Will still recall lamented Cloudesley.

Still

Among the moonlit cedars Philomel  
Calls back to mind, again, again,  
The ancient pain, the everlasting pain;  
And still inveterately the haunted air  
Remembers and foretells that roses were  
Red and to-morrow will again be red,  
But, 'Cloudesley, Cloudesley!' Philomel in vain  
Sobs on the night; for Cloudesley Shove is dead. . . .

And in the flesh, as though irresistibly summoned by my incantation, Mrs. Cloudesley Shove blackens the doorway with her widowhood.

'Not a very naice day,' says Mrs. Cloudesley, as she sits down.

'Not at all,' Miss Carruthers heartily agrees. And then, without turning from the beef, without abating for an instant the celerity of her carving, 'Fluffy!' she shouts through the increasing din, 'don't giggle like that.'

Politely Mr. Chelifer half raises himself from his chair as Miss Fluffy comes tumbling, on the tail end of her giggle, into the chair next to his. Always the perfect gent.

'I wasn't giggling, Miss Carruthers,' Fluffy protests. Her smile reveals above the roots of her teeth a line of almost bloodless gums.

‘Quite true,’ says young Mr. Brimstone, following her less tumultuously from the door and establishing himself in the seat opposite, next to Mrs. Cloudesley. ‘She wasn’t giggling. She was merely cachinnating.’

Everybody laughs uproariously, even Miss Carruthers, though she does not cease to carve. Mr. Brimstone remains perfectly grave. Behind his rimless pince-nez there is hardly so much as a twinkle. As for Miss Fluffy, she fairly collapses.

‘What a horrible man!’ she screams through her laughter, as soon as she has breath enough to be articulate. And picking up her bread, she makes as though she were going to throw it across the table in Mr. Brimstone’s face.

Mr. Brimstone holds up a finger. ‘Now you be careful,’ he admonishes. ‘If you don’t behave, you’ll be put in the corner and sent to bed without your supper.’

There is a renewal of laughter.

Miss Carruthers intervenes. ‘Now don’t tease her, Mr. Brimstone.’

‘Tease?’ says Mr. Brimstone, in the tone of one who has been misjudged. ‘But I was only applying moral suasion, Miss Carruthers.’

Inimitable Brimstone! He is the life and soul of Miss Carruthers’s establishment. So serious, so clever, such an alert young city man — but withal so exquisitely waggish, so gallant! To see him with Fluffy — it’s as good as a play.

‘There!’ says Miss Carruthers, putting down her carving tools with a clatter. Loudly, energetically, she addresses herself to her duties as a hostess. ‘I went to Buszard’s this afternoon,’ she proclaims, not without pride. We old county families have always bought our chocolate at the best shops. ‘But it isn’t what it used to be.’ She shakes her head; the high old feudal times are past. ‘It isn’t the same. Not since the A B C took it over.’

‘Do you see,’ asks Mr. Brimstone, becoming once more his serious self, ‘that the new Lyons Corner House in Piccadilly Circus will be able to serve fourteen million meals a year?’ Mr. Brimstone is always a mine of interesting statistics.

‘No, really?’ Mrs. Cloudesley is astonished.

But old Mr. Fox, who happens to have read the same evening paper as Mr. Brimstone, takes almost the whole credit of Mr. Brimstone’s erudition to himself by adding, before the other has time to say it: ‘Yes, and that’s just twice as many meals as any American restaurant can serve.’

‘Good old England!’ cried Miss Carruthers patriotically. ‘These Yanks haven’t got us beaten in everything yet.’

‘So naice, I always think, these Corner Houses,’ says Mrs. Cloudesley. ‘And the music they play is really quite classical, you know, sometimes.’

‘Quite,’ says Mr. Chelifer, savouring voluptuously the pleasure of dropping steeply from the edge of the convivial board into interstellar space.

‘And so sumptuously decorated,’ Mrs. Cloudesley continues.

But Mr. Brimstone knowingly lets her know that the marble on the walls is less than a quarter of an inch thick.

And the conversation proceeds. 'The Huns,' says Miss Carruthers, 'are only shamming dead.' Mr. Fox is in favour of a business government. Mr. Brimstone would like to see a few strikers shot, to encourage the rest; Miss Carruthers agrees. From below the salt Miss Monad puts in a word for the working classes, but her remark is treated with the contempt it deserves. Mrs. Cloudesley finds Charlie Chaplin so vulgar, but likes Mary Pickford. Miss Fluffy thinks that the Prince of Wales ought to marry a nice simple English girl. Mr. Brimstone says something rather cutting about Mrs. Asquith and Lady Diana Manners. Mrs. Cloudesley, who has a profound knowledge of the Royal Family, mentions the Princess Alice. Contrapuntally to this, Miss Webber and Mr. Quinn have been discussing the latest plays and Mr. Chelifer has engaged Miss Fluffy in a conversation which soon occupies the attention of all the persons sitting at the upper end of the table — a conversation about flappers. Mrs. Cloudesley, Miss Carruthers and Mr. Brimstone agree that the modern girl is too laxly brought up. Miss Fluffy adheres in piercing tones to the opposite opinion. Mr. Brimstone makes some splendid jokes at the expense of co-education, and all concur in deploring cranks of every variety. Miss Carruthers, who has a short way with dissenters, would like to see them tarred and feathered — all except pacifists, who, like strikers, could do with a little shooting. Lymphatic Mrs. Cloudesley, with sudden and surprising ferocity, wants to treat the Irish in the same way. (Lamented Cloudesley had connections with Belfast.) But at this moment a deplorable incident occurs. Mr. Dutt, the Indian, who ought never, from his lower sphere, even to have listened to the conversation going on in the higher, leans forward and speaking loudly across the intervening gulf ardently espouses the Irish cause. His eloquence rolls up the table between two hedges of horrified silence. For a moment nothing can be heard but ardent nationalistic sentiments and the polite regurgitation of prune stones. In the presence of this shocking and unfamiliar phenomenon nobody knows exactly what to do. But Miss Carruthers rises, after the first moment, to the occasion.

'Ah, but then, Mr. Dutt,' she says, interrupting his tirade about oppressed nationalities, 'you must remember that Mrs. Cloudesley Shove is English. You can hardly expect to understand what she feels. Can you?'

We all feel inclined to clap. Without waiting to hear Mr. Dutt's reply, and leaving three prunes uneaten on her plate, Miss Carruthers gets up and sweeps with dignity towards the door. Loudly, in the corridor, she comments on the insolence of black men. And what ingratitude, too!

'After I had made a special exception in his case to my rule against taking coloured people!'

We all sympathize. In the drawing-room the conversation proceeds. Headlong the trolley plunges.

A home away from home — that was how Miss Carruthers described her establishment in the prospectus. It was the awayness of it that first attracted me to the place. The vast awayness from what I had called home up till the time I first stayed there — that was what made me decide to settle for good at Miss Carruthers's. From the

house where I was born Miss Carruthers's seemed about as remote as any place one could conveniently find.

'I remember, I remember . . .' It is a pointless and futile occupation, difficult none the less not to indulge in. I remember. Our house at Oxford was dark, spiky and tall. Ruskin himself, it was said, had planned it. The front windows looked out on to the Banbury Road. On rainy days, when I was a child, I used to spend whole mornings staring down into the thoroughfare. Every twenty minutes a tram-car drawn by two old horses, trotting in their sleep, passed with an undulating motion more slowly than a man could walk. The little garden at the back once seemed enormous and romantic, the rocking-horse in the nursery a beast like an elephant. The house is sold now and I am glad of it. They are dangerous, these things and places inhabited by memory. It is as though, by a process of metempsychosis, the soul of dead events goes out and lodges itself in a house, a flower, a landscape, in a group of trees seen from the train against the sky-line, an old snapshot, a broken pen-knife, a book, a perfume. In these memory-charged places, among these things haunted by the ghosts of dead days, one is tempted to brood too lovingly over the past, to live it again, more elaborately, more consciously, more beautifully and harmoniously, almost as though it were an imagined life in the future. Surrounded by these ghosts one can neglect the present in which one bodily lives. I am glad the place is sold; it was dangerous. Evviva Miss Carruthers!

Nevertheless my thoughts, as I lay on the water that morning, reverted from the Home Away to the other home from which it was so distant. I recalled the last visit I had paid to the old house, a month or two since, just before my mother finally decided herself to move out. Mounting the steps that led up to the ogival porch I had felt like an excavator on the threshold of a tomb. I tugged at the wrought-iron bell pull; joints creaked, wires wheezily rattled, and far off, as though accidentally, by an afterthought, tinkled the cracked bell. In a moment the door would open, I should walk in, and there, there in the unruffled chamber the royal mummy would be lying — my own.

Nothing within those Gothic walls ever changed. Imperceptibly the furniture grew older; the wall-papers and the upholstery recalled with their non-committal russets and sage-greens the refinements of another epoch. And my mother herself, pale and grey-haired, draped in the dateless dove-grey dresses she had always worn, my mother was still the same. Her smile was the same dim gentle smile; her voice still softly modulated, like a studied and cultured music, from key to key. Her hair was hardly greyer — for it had whitened early and I was a late-born child — than I always remember it to have been. Her face was hardly more deeply wrinkled. She walked erect, seemed still as active as ever, she had grown no thinner and no stouter.

And she was still surrounded by those troops of derelict dogs, so dreadfully profuse, poor beasts! in their smelly gratitude. There were still the same moth-eaten cats picked up starving at a street corner to be harboured in luxury — albeit on a diet that was, on principle, strictly vegetarian — in the best rooms of the house. Poor children still came for buns and tea and traditional games in the garden — so traditional, very often, that nobody but my mother had ever heard of them; still came, when the season happened

to be winter, for gloves and woolly stockings and traditional games indoors. And the writing-table in the drawing-room was piled high, as it had always been piled, with printed appeals for some deserving charity. And still in her beautiful calligraphy my mother addressed the envelopes that were to contain them, slowly, one after another — and each a little work of art, like a page from a mediaeval missal, and each destined, without reprieve, to the waste-paper basket.

All was just as it had always been. Ah, but not quite, all the same! For though the summer term was in full swing and the afternoon bright, the little garden behind the house was deserted and unmelodious. Where were the morris dancers, where the mixolydian strains? And remembering that music, those dances, those distant afternoons, I could have wept.

In one corner of the lawn my mother used to sit at the little harmonium; I sat beside her to turn the pages of the music. In the opposite corner were grouped the dancers. My mother looked up over the top of the instrument; melodiously she inquired:

‘Which dance shall we have next, Mr. Toft? “Trenchmore”? Or “Omnium Gatherum”? Or “John come kiss me now”? Or what do you say to “Up tails all”? Or “Rub her down with straw”? Or “An old man’s a bed full of bones”? Such an *embarras de richesse*, isn’t there?’

And Mr. Toft would break away from his little company of dancers and come across the lawn wiping his face — for ‘Hoite-cum-Toite’ a moment before had been a most furious affair. It was a grey face with vague indeterminate features and a bright almost clerical smile in the middle of it. When he spoke it was in a very rich voice.

‘Suppose we try “Fading,” Mrs. Chelifer,’ he suggested. ‘ “Fading is a fine dance” — you remember the immortal words of the Citizen’s Wife in the Knight of the Burning Pestle? Ha ha!’ And he gave utterance to a little laugh, applause of his own wit. For to Mr. Toft every literary allusion was a joke, and the obscurer the allusion the more exquisite the wagery. It was rarely, alas, that he found any one to share his merriment. My mother was one of the few people who always made a point of smiling whenever Mr. Toft laughed at himself. She smiled even when she could not track the allusion to its source. Sometimes she even went so far as to laugh. But my mother had no facility for laughter; by nature she was a grave and gentle smiler.

And so ‘Fading’ it would be. My mother touched the keys and the gay, sad mixolydian air came snoring out of the harmonium like a strangely dissipated hymn tune. ‘One, two, three . . .’ called Mr. Toft richly. And then in unison all five — the don, the two undergraduates, the two young ladies from North Oxford — would beat the ground with their feet, would prance and stamp till the garters of little bells round the gentlemen’s grey flannel trousers (it went without saying, for some reason, that the ladies should not wear them) jingled like the bells of a runaway hansom-cab horse. One, two, three. . . . The Citizen’s Wife (ha ha!) was right. Fading is a fine dance indeed. Everybody dances Fading. Poor Mr. Toft had faded out of Oxford, had danced completely out of life, like Lycidas (tee-hee!) before his prime. Influenza had faded him. And of the undergraduates who had danced here, first and last, with Mr. Toft —

how many of them had danced Fading under the German barrage? Young Flint, the one who used always to address his tutor as 'Mr. Toft — oh, I mean Clarence' (for Mr. Toft was one of those genial boyish dons who insisted on being called by their Christian names), young Flint was dead for certain. And Ramsden too, I had a notion that Ramsden too was dead.

And then there were the young women from North Oxford. What, for example, of Miss Dewball's cheeks? How had those cabbage roses weathered the passage of the years? But for Miss Higlett, of course, there could be no more fading, no further desiccation. She was already a harebell baked in sand. Unwithering Higlett, blowsy Dewball. . . .

And I myself, I too had faded. The Francis Chelifer who, standing by the dissipated harmonium, had turned the pages of his mother's music, was as wholly extinct as Mr. Toft. Within this Gothic tomb reposed his mummy. My week-end visits were archaeological expeditions.

'Now that poor Mr. Toft's dead,' I asked as we walked, my mother and I, that afternoon, up and down the little garden behind the house, 'isn't there any one else here who's keen on morris dancing?' Or were those folky days, I wondered, for ever past?

My mother shook her head. 'The enthusiasm for it is gone,' she said sadly. 'This generation of undergraduates doesn't seem to take much interest in that kind of thing. I don't really know,' she added, 'what it is interested in.'

What indeed, I reflected. In my young days it had been Social Service and Fabianism; it had been long hearty walks in the country at four and a half miles an hour, with draughts of Five X beer at the end of them, and Rabelaisian song and conversations with yokels in incredibly picturesque little wayside inns; it had been reading parties in the Lakes and climbing in the Jura; it had been singing in the Bach Choir and even — though somehow I had never been able quite to rise to that — even morris dancing with Mr. Toft. . . . But Fading is a fine dance, and all these occupations seemed now a little queer. Still, I caught myself envying the being who had lived within my skin and joined in these activities.

'Poor Toft!' I meditated. 'Do you remember the way he had of calling great men by little pet names of his own? Just to show that he was on terms of familiarity with them, I suppose. Shakespeare was always Shake-bake, which was short, in its turn, for Shake-Bacon. And Oven, tout court, was Beethoven.'

'And always J. S. B. for Bach,' my mother continued, smiling elegiacally.

'Yes, and Pee Em for Philipp Emanuel Bach. And Madame Dudevant for George Sand, or, alternatively, I remember, "The Queen's Monthly Nurse" — because Dickens thought she looked like that the only time he saw her.' I recalled the long-drawn and delighted laughter which used to follow that allusion.

'You were never much of a dancer, dear boy.' My mother sadly shook her head over the past.

‘Ah, but at any rate,’ I answered, ‘at any rate I was a Fabian. And I went for hearty long walks in the country. I drank my pint of Five X at the Red Lion.’

‘I wish you could have gone without the beer,’ said my mother. That I had not chosen to be a total abstainer had always a little distressed her. Moreover, I had a taste for beefsteaks.

‘It was my substitute for morris dancing, if you follow me.’

But I don’t think she did follow me. We took two or three turns up and down the lawn in silence.

‘How is your paper doing?’ she asked at last.

I told her with a great show of enthusiasm about the cross between Angoras and Himalayans which we had just announced.

‘I often wish,’ she said after a pause, ‘that you had accepted the college’s offer. It would have been so good to have you here, filling the place your dear father occupied.’

She looked at me sadly. I smiled back at her as though from across a gulf. The child, I thought, grows up to forget that he is of the same flesh with his parents; but they do not forget. I wished, for her sake, that I were only five years old.

## Chapter IV

AT FIVE YEARS old, among other things, I used to write poems which my mother thoroughly and whole-heartedly enjoyed. There was one about larks which she still preserves, along with the locks of my pale childish hair, the faded photographs, the precocious drawings of railway trains and all the other relics of the period.

Oh lark, how you do fly  
Right up into the sky.  
How loud he sings  
And quickly wags his wings.  
The sun does shine,  
The weather is fine.  
Father says, Hark,  
Do you hear the lark?

My mother likes that poem better, I believe, than anything I have written since. And I dare say that my father, if he had lived, would have shared her opinion. But then he was an ardent Wordsworthian. He knew most of the Prelude by heart. Sometimes, unexpectedly breaking that profound and god-like silence with which he always enveloped himself, he would quote a line or two. The effect was always portentous; it was as though an oracle had spoken.

I remember with particular vividness one occasion when Wordsworth broke my father’s prodigious silence. It was one Easter time, when I was about twelve. We had gone to North Wales for the holidays; my father liked walking among hills and even



amused himself occasionally with a little mild rock climbing. Easter was early that year, the season backward and inclement; there was snow on all the hills. On Easter Sunday my father, who considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of church-going, suggested that we should climb to the top of Snowdon. We started early; it was cold; white misty clouds shut off the distant prospects. Silently we trudged upwards through the snow. Like the page of King Wenceslas I followed in my father's footsteps, treading in the holes he had kicked in the snow. Every now and then he would look round to see how I was getting on. Icy dewdrops hung in his brown beard. Gravely he smiled down on me as I came panting up, planting my small feet in his large tracks. He was a huge man, tall and broad-shouldered, with a face that might have been the curly-bearded original of one of those Greek busts of middle-aged statesmen or philosophers. Standing beside him, I always felt particularly small and insignificant. When I had come up with him, he would pat me affectionately on the shoulder with his large heavy hand, then turning his face towards the heights he addressed himself once more to the climb. Not a word was spoken.

As the sun mounted higher, the clouds dispersed. Through the rifted mist we saw the sky. Great beams of yellow light went stalking across the slopes of snow. By the time we reached the summit the sky was completely clear; the landscape opened out beneath us. The sun was shining brightly, but without heat; the sky was pale blue, remote and icy. Every northern slope of the glittering hills was shadowed with transparent blues or purples. Far down, to the westward, was the scalloped and indented coast, and seeming in its remoteness utterly calm, the grey sea stretched upwards and away towards the horizon. We stood there for a long time in silence, gazing at the astonishing landscape. Sometimes, I remember, I stole an anxious look at my father. What was he thinking about? I wondered. Huge and formidable he stood there, leaning on his ice-axe, turning his dark bright eyes slowly and meditatively this way and that. He spoke no word. I did not dare to break the silence. In the end he straightened himself up. He raised his ice-axe and with an emphatic gesture dug the pointed ferrule into the snow. 'Bloody fine!' he said slowly in his deep, cavernous voice. He said no more. In silence we retraced our steps towards the Pen-y-pass Hotel.

But my father had not, as I supposed, spoken his last word. When we were about half-way down I was startled and a little alarmed to hear him suddenly begin to speak. 'For I have learned,' he began abruptly (and he seemed to be speaking less for my benefit than to himself), 'to look on nature, not as in the hour of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes the still sad music of humanity, not harsh, nor grating, but of ample power to chasten and subdue. And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns and the round ocean and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the minds of men.' I listened to him with a kind of terror. The strange words (I had no idea at that time whence they came) reverberated mysteriously in my mind. It seemed an oracle, a divine revelation. My father ceased speaking as abruptly as he had begun. The words hung, as it were, isolated in the midst of his

portentous silence. We walked on. My father spoke no more till on the threshold of the inn, sniffing the frozen air, he remarked with a profound satisfaction: ‘Onions!’ And then, after a second sniff: ‘Fried.’

‘A sense of something far more deeply interfused.’ Ever since that day those words, pronounced in my father’s cavernous voice, have rumbled through my mind. It took me a long time to discover that they were as meaningless as so many hiccoughs. Such is the nefarious influence of early training.

My father, however, who never contrived to rid himself of the prejudices instilled into him in childhood, went on believing in his Wordsworthian formulas till the end. Yes, he too, I am afraid, would have preferred the precocious larks to my maturer lucubrations. And yet, how competently I have learned to write! In mere justice to myself I must insist on it. Not, of course, that it matters in the least. The larks might be my masterpiece; it would not matter a pin. Still, I insist. I insist. . . .

## Chapter V

‘QUITE THE LITTLE poet’ — how bitterly poor Keats resented the remark! Perhaps because he secretly knew that it was just. For Keats, after all, was that strange, unhappy chimaera — a little artist and a large man. Between the writer of the Odes and the writer of the letters there is all the gulf that separates a halma player from a hero.

Personally, I do not go in for heroic letters. I only modestly lay claim to being a competent second-class halma player — but a good deal more competent, I insist (though of course it doesn’t matter), than when I wrote about the larks. ‘Quite the little poet’ — always and, alas, incorrigibly I am that.

Let me offer you a specimen of my matured competence. I select it at random, as the reviewers say, from my long-projected and never-to-be-concluded series of poems on the first six Caesars. My father, I flatter myself, would have liked the title. That, at any rate, is thoroughly Wordsworthian; it is in the great tradition of that immortal ‘Needle Case in the form of a Harp.’ ‘Caligula crossing the bridge of boats between Baiae and Puteoli. By Peter Paul Rubens (b. 1577: d. 1640).’ The poem itself, however, is not very reminiscent of the Lake District.

Prow after prow the floating ships  
Bridge the blue gulph; the road is laid.  
And Caesar on a piebald horse  
Prances with all his cavalcade.  
Drunk with their own quick blood they go.  
The waves flash as with seeing eyes;  
The tumbling cliffs mimic their speed,  
And they have filled the vacant skies

With waltzing Gods and Virtues, set  
 The Sea Winds singing with their shout,  
 Made Vesta's temple on the headland  
 Spin like a twinkling roundabout.  
 The twined caduceus in his hand,  
 And having golden wings for spurs,  
 Young Caesar dressed as God looks on  
 And cheers his jolly mariners;  
 Cheers as they heave from off the bridge  
 The trippers from the seaside town;  
 Laughs as they bang the bobbing heads  
 And shove them bubbling down to drown.  
 There sweeps a spiral whirl of gesture  
 From the allegoric sky:  
 Beauty, like conscious lightning, runs  
 Through Jove's ribbed trunk and Juno's thigh,  
 Slides down the flank of Mars and takes  
 From Virtue's rump a dizzier twist,  
 Licks round a cloud and whirling stoops  
 Earthwards to Caesar's lifted fist.  
 A burgess tumbles from the bridge  
 Headlong, and hurrying Beauty slips  
 From Caesar through the plunging legs  
 To the blue sea between the ships.

Reading it through, I flatter myself that this is very nearly up to international halma form. A little more, and I shall be playing in critical test-matches against Monsieur Cocteau and Miss Amy Lowell. Enormous honour! I shrink from beneath its impendence.

But ah! those Caesars. They have haunted me for years. I have had such schemes for putting half the universe into two or three dozen poems about those monsters. All the sins, to begin with, and complementarily all the virtues. . . . Art, science, history, religion — they too were to have found their place. And God knows what besides. But they never came to much, these Caesars. The notion, I soon came to see, was too large and pretentious ever to be realized. I began (deep calls to deep) with Nero, the artist. 'Nero and Sporus walking in the gardens of the Golden House.'

Dark stirrings in the perfumed air  
 Touch your cheeks, lift your hair.  
 With softer fingers I caress,  
 Sporus, all your loveliness.  
 Round as a fruit, tree-tangled, shines  
 The moon; and fire-flies in the vines,  
 Like stars in a delirious sky,

Gleam and go out. Unceasingly  
The fountains fall, the nightingales  
Sing. But time flows and love avails  
Nothing. The Christians smoulder red;  
Their brave blue-hearted flames are dead.  
And you, sweet Sporus, you and I,  
We too must die, we too must die.

But the soliloquy which followed was couched in a more philosophic key. I set forth in it all the reasons for halma's existence — reasons which, at the time when I composed the piece, I almost believed in still. One lives and learns. Meanwhile, here it is.

The Christians by whose muddy light  
Dimly, dimly I divine  
Your eyes and see your pallid beauty  
Like a pale night-primrose shine  
Colourless in the dark, revere  
A God who slowly died that they  
Might suffer the less; who bore the pain  
Of all time in a single day,  
The pain of all men in a single  
Wounded body and sad heart.  
The yellow marble smooth as water  
Builds me a Golden House; and there  
The marble gods sleep in their strength  
And the white Parian girls are fair.  
Roses and waxen oleanders,  
Green grape bunches and the flushed peach, —  
All beautiful things I taste, touch, see,  
Knowing, loving, becoming each.  
The ship went down, my mother swam:  
I wedded and myself was wed;  
Old Claudius died of emperor-bane:  
Old Seneca too slowly bled.  
The wild beast and the victim both,  
The ravisher and the wincing bride;  
King of the world and a slave's slave,  
Terror-haunted, deified —  
An artist, O sweet Sporus, an artist,  
All these I am and needs must be.  
Is the tune Lydian? I have loved you.  
And you have heard my symphony  
Of wailing voices and clashed brass,  
With long shrill flutings that suspend

Pain o'er a muttering gulf of terrors,  
 And piercing breathless joys that end  
 In agony — could I have made  
 My song of Furies were the bane  
 Still sap within the hemlock stalk,  
 The red swords virgin bright again?  
 Or take a child's love that is all  
 Worship, all tenderness and trust,  
 A dawn-web, dewy and fragile — take  
 And with the violence of lust  
 Tear and defile it. You shall hear  
 The breaking dumbness and the thin  
 Harsh crying that is the very music  
 Of shame and the remorse of sin.  
 Christ died; the artist lives for all;  
 Loves, and his naked marbles stand  
 Pure as a column on the sky,  
 Whose lips, whose breast and thighs demand  
 Not our humiliation, not  
 The shuddering of an after shame;  
 And of his agonies men know  
 Only the beauty born of them.  
 Christ died, but living Nero turns  
 Your mute remorse to song; he gives  
 To idiot fate eyes like a lover's,  
 And while his music plays, God lives.  
 Romantic and noble sentiments! I protest, they do me credit.

And then there are the fragments about Tiberius; Tiberius, need I add, the representative in my symbolic scheme of love. Here is one. 'In the gardens at Capri.' (All my scenes are laid in gardens, I notice, at night, under the moon. Perhaps the fact is significant. Who knows?)

Hour after hour the stars  
 Move, and the moon towards remoter night  
 Averts her cheek.  
 Blind now, these gardens yet remember  
 That there were crimson petals glossy with light,  
 And their remembrance is this scent of roses.  
 Hour after hour the stars march slowly on,  
 And year by year mysteriously the flowers  
 Unfold the same bright pattern towards the sky.  
 Incurious under the streaming stars,  
 Breathing this new yet immemorial perfume

Unmoved, I lie along the tumbled bed;  
And the two women who are my bedfellows,  
Whose breath is sour with wine and their soft bodies  
Still hot and rank, sleep drunkenly at my side.

Commendable, I should now think, this fixture of the attention upon the relevant, the human reality in the centre of the pointless landscape. It was just at the time I wrote this fragment that I was learning the difficult art of this exclusive concentration on the relevant. They were painful lessons. War had prepared me to receive them; Love was the lecturer.

Her name was Barbara Waters. I saw her first when I was about fourteen. She was a month or two older than I. It was at one of those enormous water picnics on the Cherwell that were organized from time to time during the summer vacation by certain fiery and energetic spirits among the dons' wives. We would start out at seven, half a dozen punt-loads of us, from the most northerly of the Oxford boat-houses and make our way up-stream for an hour or so until night had fairly set in. Then, disembarking in some solitary meadow, we would spread cloths, unpack hampers, eat hilariously. And there were so many midges that even the schoolboys were allowed to smoke cigarettes to keep them off — even the schoolgirls. And how knowingly and with what a relish we, the boys, puffed away, blowing the smoke through our noses, opening our mouths like frogs to make rings! But the girls always managed to make their cigarettes come to pieces, got the tobacco into their mouths and, making faces, had to pick the bitter-tasting threads of it from between their lips. In the end, after much giggling, they always threw their cigarettes away, not half smoked; the boys laughed, contemptuously and patronizingly. And finally we packed ourselves into the punts again and floated home, singing; our voices across the water sounded praeter-naturally sweet. A yellow moon as large as a pumpkin shone overhead; there were gleamings on the crests of the ripples and in the troughs of the tiny waves, left in the wake of the punts, shadows of almost absolute blackness. The leaves of the willow trees shone like metal. A white mist lay along the meadows. Corncrakes incessantly ran their thumbs along the teeth of combs. A faint weedy smell came up from the river; the aroma of tobacco cut violently across it in pungent gusts; sometimes the sweet animal smell of cows insinuated itself into the watery atmosphere, and looking between the willows, we would see a company of the large and gentle beasts kneeling in the grass, their heads and backs projecting like the crests of mountains above the mist, still hard at work, though the laborious day was long since over, chewing and chewing away at a green breakfast that had merged into luncheon, at the tea that had become in due course a long-drawn-out vegetarian dinner. Munchily, squelchily, they moved their indefatigable jaws. The sound came faintly to us through the silence. Then a small clear voice would begin singing 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' or 'Greensleeves.'

Sometimes, for the fun of the thing, though it was quite unnecessary, and if the weather happened to be really warm, positively disagreeable, we would light a fire, so

that we might have the pleasure of eating our cold chicken and salmon mayonnaise with potatoes baked — or generally either half baked or burnt — in their jackets among the glowing cinders. It was by the light of one of these fires that I first saw Barbara. The punt in which I came had started some little time after the others; we had had to wait for a late arrival. By the time we reached the appointed supping place the others had disembarked and made all ready for the meal. The younger members of the party had collected materials for a fire, which they were just lighting as we approached. A group of figures, pale and colourless in the moonlight, were standing or sitting round the white cloth. In the black shadow of a huge elm tree a few yards further off moved featureless silhouettes. Suddenly a small flame spurted from a match and was shielded between a pair of hands that were transformed at once into hands of transparent coral. The silhouettes began to live a fragmentary life. The fire-bearing hands moved round the pyre; two or three new little flames were born. Then, to the sound of a great hurrah, the bonfire flared up. In the heart of the black shadow of the elm tree a new small universe, far vividder than the ghostly world of moonlight beyond, was suddenly created. By the light of the bright flames I saw half a dozen familiar faces belonging to the boys and girls I knew. But I hardly noticed them; I heeded only one face, a face I did not know. The leaping flame revealed it apocalyptically. Flushed, bright and with an air of being almost supernaturally alive in the quivering, changing light of the flames, it detached itself with an incredible clarity and precision from against a background of darkness which the fire had made to seem yet darker. It was the face of a young girl. She had dark hair with ruddy golden lights in it. The nose was faintly aquiline. The openings of the eyes were narrow, long and rather slanting, and the dark eyes looked out through them as though through mysterious loopholes, brilliant, between the fringed eyelids, with an intense and secret and unutterable happiness.

The mouth seemed to share in the same exquisite secret. Not full, but delicately shaped, the unparted lips were curved into a smile that seemed to express a delight more piercing than any laughter, any outburst of joy could give utterance to. The corners of the mouth were drawn upwards so that the line of the meeting of the lips was parallel with her tilted eyes. And this slanting close-lipped smile seemed as though suspended on two little folds that wrinkled the cheeks at the corners of the mouth. The face, which was rather broad across the cheek-bones, tapered away to a pointed chin, small and firm. Her neck was round and slender; her arms, which were bare in her muslin dress, very thin.

The punt moved slowly against the current. I gazed and gazed at the face revealed by the flickering light of the fire. It seemed to me that I had never seen anything so beautiful and wonderful. What was the secret of that inexpressible joy? What nameless happiness dwelt behind those dark-fringed eyes, that silent, unemphatic, close-lipped smile? Breathlessly I gazed. I felt the tears coming into my eyes — she was so beautiful. And I was almost awed, I felt something that was almost fear, as though I had suddenly come into the presence of more than a mere mortal being, into the presence of life itself. The flame leapt up. Over the silent, secret-smiling face the tawny reflections came and

went, as though wild blood were fluttering deliriously beneath the skin. The others were shouting, laughing, waving their arms. She remained perfectly still, close-lipped and narrow-eyed, smiling. Yes, life itself was standing there.

The punt bumped against the bank. 'Catch hold,' somebody shouted, 'catch hold, Francis.'

Reluctantly I did as I was told; I felt as though something precious were being killed within me.

In the years that followed I saw her once or twice. She was an orphan, I learned, and had relations in Oxford with whom she came occasionally to stay. When I tried to speak to her, I always found myself too shy to do more than stammer or say something trivial or stupid. Serenely, looking at me steadily between her eyelids, she answered. I remember not so much what she said as the tone in which she spoke — cool, calm, assured, as befitted the embodiment of life itself.

'Do you play tennis?' I would ask in desperation — and I could have wept at my own stupidity and lack of courage. Why are you so beautiful? What do you think about behind your secret eyes? Why are you so inexplicably happy? Those were the questions I wanted to ask her.

'Yes, I love tennis,' she gravely answered.

Once, I remember, I managed to advance so far along the road of coherent and intelligent conversation as to ask her what books she liked best. She looked at me unwaveringly while I spoke. It was I who reddened and turned away. She had an unfair advantage over me — the advantage of being able to look out from between her narrowed eyelids as though from an ambush. I was in the open and utterly without protection.

'I don't read much,' she said at last, when I had finished. 'I don't really very much like reading.'

My attempt to approach, to make contact, was baffled. At the same time I felt that I ought to have known that she wouldn't like reading. After all, what need was there for her to read? When one is life itself, one has no use for mere books. Years later she admitted that she had always made an exception for the novels of Gene Stratton-Porter. When I was seventeen she went to live with another set of relations in South Africa.

Time passed. I thought of her constantly. All that I read of love in the poets arranged itself significantly round the memory of that lovely and secretly smiling face. My friends would boast about their little adventures. I smiled unenviously, knowing not merely in theory but by actual experience that that sort of thing was not love. Once, when I was a freshman at the university, I myself, at the end of a tipsy evening in a night club, lapsed from the purity in which I had lived up till then. Afterwards, I was horribly ashamed. And I felt that I had made myself unworthy of love. In consequence — the link of cause and effect seems to me now somewhat difficult to discover, but at the time, I know, I found my action logical enough — in consequence I overworked myself, won two university prizes, became an ardent revolutionary and devoted many hours of



my leisure to 'social service' in the college Mission. I was not a good social servant, got on only indifferently well with fierce young adolescents from the slums and thoroughly disliked every moment I spent in the Mission. But it was precisely for that reason that I stuck to the job. Once or twice, even, I consented to join in the morris dancing in my mother's garden. I was making myself worthy — for what? I hardly know. The possibility of marriage seemed almost infinitely remote; and somehow I hardly desired it. I was fitting myself to go on loving and loving, and incidentally to do great things.

Then came the war. From France I wrote her a letter, in which I told her all the things I had lacked the power to say in her presence. I sent the letter to the only address I knew — she had left it years before — not expecting, not even hoping very much, that she would receive it. I wrote it for my own satisfaction, in order to make explicit all that I felt. I had no doubt that I should soon be dead. It was a letter addressed not so much to a woman as to God, a letter of explanation and apology posted to the universe.

In the winter of 1916 I was wounded. At the end of my spell in hospital I was reported unfit for further active service and appointed to a post in the contracts department of the Air Board. I was put in charge of chemicals, celluloid, rubber tubing, castor oil, linen and balloon fabrics. I spent my time haggling with German Jews over the price of chemicals and celluloid, with Greek brokers over the castor oil, with Ulstermen over the linen. Spectacled Japanese came to visit me with samples of *crêpe de Chine* which they tried to persuade me — and they offered choice cigars — would be both better and cheaper than cotton for the manufacture of balloons. Of every one of the letters I dictated first eleven, then seventeen, and finally, when the department had flowered to the height of its prosperity, twenty-two copies were made, to be noted and filed by the various sub-sections of the ministry concerned. The Hotel Cecil was filled with clerks. In basements two stories down beneath the surface of the ground, in attics above the level of the surrounding chimney-pots, hundreds of young women tapped away at typewriters. In a subterranean ball-room, that looked like the setting for Belshazzar's feast, a thousand cheap lunches were daily consumed. In the hotel's best bedrooms overlooking the Thames sat the professional civil servants of long standing with letters after their names, the big business men who were helping to win the war, the staff officers. A fleet of very large motor cars waited for them in the courtyard. Sometimes, when I entered the office of a morning, I used to imagine myself a visitor from Mars. .

. .

One morning — it was after I had been at the Air Board for several months — I found myself faced with a problem which could only be solved after consultation with an expert in the Naval Department. The naval people lived in the range of buildings on the opposite side of the courtyard from that in which our offices were housed. It was only after ten minutes of labyrinthine wanderings that I at last managed to find the man I was looking for. He was a genial fellow, I remember; asked me how I liked Bolo House (which was the nickname among the knowing of our precious Air Board office), gave me an East Indian cheroot and even offered whiskey and soda. After that

we settled down to a technical chat about non-inflammable celluloid. I left him at last, much enlightened.

‘So long,’ he called after me. ‘And if ever you want to know any mortal thing about acetone or any other kind of bloody dope, come to me and I’ll tell you.’

‘Thanks,’ I said. ‘And if by any chance you should happen to want to know about Apollonius Rhodius, shall we say, or Chaucer, or the history of the three-pronged fork . . .’

He roared very heartily. ‘I’ll come to you,’ he concluded.

Still laughing, I shut the door behind me and stepped out into the corridor. A young woman was hurrying past with a thick bundle of papers in her hand, humming softly as she went. Startled by my sudden emergence, she turned and looked at me. As though with fear, my heart gave a sudden thump, then seemed to stop for a moment altogether, seemed to drop down within me.

‘Barbara!’

At the sound of the name she halted and looked at me with that steady unwavering gaze between the narrowed eyelids that I knew so well. A little frown appeared on her forehead; puzzled, she pursed her lips. Then all at once her face brightened, she laughed; the light in the dark eyes joyously quivered and danced.

‘Why, it’s Francis Chelifer,’ she exclaimed. ‘I didn’t know you for the first minute. You’ve changed.’

‘You haven’t,’ I said. ‘You’re just the same.’

She said nothing, but smiled, close-lipped, and from between her lashes looked at me as though from an ambush. In her young maturity she was more beautiful than ever. Whether I was glad or sorry to see her again, I hardly know. But I do know that I was moved, profoundly; I was shaken and troubled out of whatever equanimity I possessed. That memory of a kind of symbolic loveliness for which and by which I had been living all these years was now reincarnated and stood before me, no longer a symbol, but an individual; it was enough to make one feel afraid.

‘I thought you were in South Africa,’ I went on. ‘Which is almost the same as saying I thought you didn’t exist.’

‘I came home a year ago.’

‘And you’ve been working here ever since?’

Barbara nodded.

‘And you’re working in Bolo House too?’ she asked.

‘For the last six months.’

‘Well I never! And to think we never met before! But how small the world is — how absurdly small.’

We met for luncheon.

‘Did you get my letter?’ I summoned up courage to ask her over the coffee.

Barbara nodded. ‘It was months and months on its way,’ she said; and I did not know whether she made the remark deliberately, in order to stave off for a moment the inevitable discussion of the letter, or if she made it quite spontaneously and without

afterthought, because she found it interesting that the letter should have been so long on its way. 'It went to South Africa and back again,' she explained.

'Did you read it?'

'Of course.'

'Did you understand what I meant?' As I asked the question I wished that I had kept silence. I was afraid of what the answer might be.

She nodded and said nothing, looking at me mysteriously, as though she had a secret and profound comprehension of everything.

'It was something almost inexpressible,' I said. Her look encouraged me to go on. 'Something so deep and so vast that there were no words to describe it. You understood? You really understood?'

Barbara was silent for some time. Then with a little sigh she said: 'Men are always silly about me. I don't know why.'

I looked at her. Could she really have uttered those words? She was still smiling as life itself might smile. And at that moment I had a horrible premonition of what I was going to suffer. Nevertheless I asked how soon I might see her again. To-night? Could she dine with me to-night? Barbara shook her head; this evening she was engaged. What about lunch to-morrow? 'I must think.' And she frowned, she pursed her lips. No, she remembered in the end, to-morrow was no good. Her first moment of liberty was at dinner-time two days later.

I returned to my work that afternoon feeling particularly Martian. Eight thick files relating to the Imperial Cellulose Company lay on my desk. My secretary showed me the experts' report on proprietary brands of castor oil, which had just come in. A rubber tubing man was particularly anxious to see me. And did I still want her to get a trunk call through to Belfast about that linen business? Pensively I listened to what she was saying. What was it all for?

'Are men often silly about you, Miss Masson?' it suddenly occurred to me to ask. I looked up at my secretary, who was waiting for me to answer her questions and tell her what to do.

Miss Masson became surprisingly red and laughed in an embarrassed, unnatural way. 'Why, no,' she said. 'I suppose I'm an ugly duckling.' And she added: 'It's rather a relief. But what makes you ask?'

She had reddish hair, bobbed and curly, a very white skin and brown eyes. About twenty-three, I supposed; and she wasn't an ugly duckling at all. I had never talked to her except about business, and seldom looked at her closely, contenting myself with being merely aware that she was there — a secretary, most efficient.

'What makes you ask?' A strange expression that was like a look of terror came into Miss Masson's eyes.

'Oh, I don't know. Curiosity. Perhaps you'll see if you can get me through to Belfast some time in the afternoon. And tell the rubber tubing man that I can't possibly see him.'

Miss Masson's manner changed. She smiled at me efficiently, secretarially. Her eyes became quite impassive. 'You can't possibly see him,' she repeated. She had a habit of repeating what other people had just said, even reproducing like an echo opinions or jokes uttered an instant before as though they were her own. She turned away and walked towards the door. I was left alone with the secret history of the Imperial Cellulose Company, the experts' report on proprietary brands of castor oil, and my own thoughts.

Two days later Barbara and I were dining very expensively at a restaurant where the diners were able very successfully to forget that the submarine campaign was in full swing and that food was being rationed.

'I think the decorations are so pretty,' she said, looking round her. 'And the music.' (Mrs. Cloudesley Shove thought the same of the Corner Houses.)

While she looked round at the architecture, I looked at her. She was wearing a rose-coloured evening dress, cut low and without sleeves. The skin of her neck and shoulders was very white. There was a bright rose in the opening of her corsage. Her arms without being bony were still very slender, like the arms of a little girl; her whole figure was slim and adolescent.

'Why do you stare at me like that?' she asked, when the fascination of the architecture was exhausted. She had heightened the colour of her cheeks and faintly smiling lips. Between the darkened eyelids her eyes looked brighter than usual.

'I was wondering why you were so happy. Secretly happy, inside, all by yourself. What's the secret? That's what I was wondering.'

'Why shouldn't I be happy?' she asked. 'But, as a matter of fact,' she added an instant later, 'I'm not happy. How can one be happy when thousands of people are being killed every minute and millions more are suffering?' She tried to look grave, as though she were in church. But the secret joy glittered irrepressibly through the slanting narrow openings of her eyes. Within its ambush her soul kept incessant holiday.

I could not help laughing. 'Luckily,' I said, 'our sympathy for suffering is rarely strong enough to prevent us from eating dinner. Do you prefer lobster or salmon?'

'Lobster,' said Barbara. 'But how stupidly cynical you are! You don't believe what I say. But I do assure you, there's not a moment when I don't remember all those killed and wounded. And poor people too: the way they live — in the slums. One can't be happy. Not really.' She shook her head.

I saw that if I pursued this subject of conversation, thus forcing her to continue her pretence of being in church, I should ruin her evening and make her thoroughly dislike me. The waiter with the wine list made a timely diversion. I skimmed the pages. 'What do you say to a quart of champagne cup?' I suggested.

'That would be delicious,' she said, and was silent, looking at me meanwhile with a questioning, undecided face that did not know how to adjust itself — whether to continued gravity or to a more natural cheerfulness.

I put an end to her indecision by pointing to a diner at a neighbouring table and whispering: 'Have you ever seen anything so like a tapir?'

She burst into a peal of delighted laughter; not so much because what I had said was particularly funny, but because it was such a tremendous relief to be allowed to laugh again with a good conscience.

‘Or wouldn’t you have said an ant-eater?’ she suggested, looking in the direction I had indicated and then leaning across the table to speak the words softly and intimately into my ear. Her face approached, dazzlingly beautiful. I could have cried aloud. The secret happiness in her eyes was youth, was health, was uncontrollable life. The close lips smiled with a joyful sense of power. A rosy perfume surrounded her. The red rose between her breasts was brilliant against the white skin. I was aware suddenly that under the glossy silk of her dress was a young body, naked. Was it for this discovery that I had been preparing myself all these years?

After dinner we went to a music hall, and when the show was over to a night club where we danced. She told me that she went dancing almost every night. I did not ask with whom. She looked appraisingly at all the women who came in, asked me if I didn’t think this one very pretty, that most awfully attractive; and when, on the contrary, I found them rather repulsive, she was annoyed with me for being insufficiently appreciative of her sex. She pointed out a red-haired woman at another table and asked me if I liked women with red hair. When I said that I preferred Buckle’s History of Civilization, she laughed as though I had said something quite absurdly paradoxical. It was better when she kept silence; and fortunately she had a great capacity for silence, could use it even as a defensive weapon, as when, to questions that at all embarrassed or nonplussed her, she simply returned no answer, however often they were repeated, smiling all the time mysteriously and as though from out of another universe.

We had been at the night club about an hour, when a stoutish and flabby young man, very black-haired, very dark-skinned, with a large fleshy nose and a nostril curved in an opulent oriental volute, came sauntering in with a lordly air of possession. He wore a silver monocle in his left eye, and among the irrepressible black stubbles of his chin the grains of poudre de riz glittered like little snowflakes. Catching sight of Barbara he smiled, lavishly, came up to our table and spoke to her. Barbara seemed very glad to see him.

‘Such a clever man,’ she explained, when he had moved away to another table with the red-haired lady to whom I preferred the History of Civilization. ‘He’s a Syrian. You ought to get to know him. He writes poetry too, you know.’

I was unhappy the whole evening; but at the same time I wished it would never end. I should have liked to go on for ever sitting in that stuffy cellar, where the jazz band sounded so loud that it seemed to be playing inside one’s head. I would have breathed the stale air and wearily danced for ever, I would even have listened for ever to Barbara’s conversation — for ever, so that I might have been allowed to be near her, to look at her, to speculate, until she next spoke, on the profound and lovely mysteries behind her eyes, on the ineffable sources of that secret joy which kept her faintly and yet how intently and how rapturously smiling.

The weeks passed. I saw her almost every day. And every day I loved her more violently and painfully, with a love that less and less resembled the religious passion of my boyhood. But it was the persistent memory of that passion which made my present desire so parching and tormenting, that filled me with a thirst that no possible possession could assuage. No possible possession, since whatever I might possess, as I realized more and more clearly each time I saw her, would be utterly different from what I had desired all these years to possess. I had desired all beauty, all that exists of goodness and truth, symbolized and incarnate in one face. And now the face drew near, the lips touched mine; and what I had got was simply a young woman with a 'temperament,' as the euphemists who deplore the word admiringly and lovingly qualify the lascivious thing. And yet, against all reason, in spite of all the evidence, I could not help believing that she was somehow and secretly what I had imagined her. My love for her as a symbol strengthened my desire for her as an individual woman.

All this, were it to happen to me now, would seem perfectly natural and normal. If I were to make love to a young woman, I should know precisely what I was making love to. But that, in those days, was something I still had to learn. In Barbara's company I was learning it with a vengeance. I was learning that it is possible to be profoundly and slavishly in love with some one for whom one has no esteem, whom one does not like, whom one regards as a bad character and who, finally, not only makes one unhappy but bores one. And why not, I might now ask, why not? That things should be like this is probably the most natural thing in the world. But in those days I imagined that love ought always to be mixed up with affection and admiration, with worship and an intellectual rapture, as unflagging as that which one experiences during the playing of a symphony. Sometimes, no doubt, love does get involved with some or all of these things; sometimes these things exist by themselves, apart from love. But one must be prepared to swallow one's love completely neat and unadulterated. It is a fiery, crude and somewhat poisonous draught.

Every hour I spent with Barbara brought fresh evidence of her inability to play the ideal part my imagination had all these years been assigning to her. She was selfish, thirsty for pleasures of the most vulgar sort, liked to bask in an atmosphere of erotic admiration, amused herself by collecting adorers and treating them badly, was stupid and a liar — in other words, was one of the normal types of healthy young womanhood. I should have been less disturbed by these discoveries if only her face had been different. Unfortunately, however, the healthy young woman who now revealed herself had the same features as that symbolic child on the memory of whose face I had brooded through all an ardent adolescence. And the contrast between what she was and what — with that dazzling and mysteriously lovely face — she ought to have been, what in my imagination she indeed had been, was a perpetual source of surprise and pain. And at the same time the nature of my passion for her had changed — changed inevitably and profoundly, the moment she ceased to be a symbol and became an individual. Now, I desired her; before, I had loved her for God's sake and almost as though she were herself divine. And contrasting this new love with the love I had felt before, I was

ashamed, I fancied myself unworthy, base, an animal. And I tried to persuade myself that if she seemed different it was because I felt differently and less nobly towards her. And sometimes, when we sat silent through long summer twilights under the trees in the Park, or at my Chelsea rooms, looking out on to the river, I could persuade myself for a precarious moment that Barbara was what she had been in my imagination and that I felt towards her now what I had felt towards the memory of her. In the end, however, Barbara would break the magic silence and with it the illusion.

‘It’s such a pity,’ she would say pensively, ‘that July hasn’t got an r in it. Otherwise we might have had supper in an oyster bar.’

Or else, remembering that I was a literary man, she would look at the gaudy remains of the sunset and sigh. ‘I wish I were a poet,’ she would say.

And I was back again among the facts, and Barbara was once more a tangible young woman who bored me, but whom I desired — with what a definite and localized longing! — to kiss, to hold fast and caress.

It was a longing which, for some time, I rigorously suppressed. I fought against it as against an evil thing, too horribly unlike my previous love, too outrageously incompatible with my conception of Barbara’s higher nature. I had not yet learned to reconcile myself to the fact that Barbara’s higher nature was an invention of my own, a figment of my proper imagination.

One very hot evening in July I drove her to the door of the house in Regent Square, Bloomsbury, in which she occupied a little flat under the roof. We had been dancing and it was late; a hunch-backed moon had climbed a third of the way up the sky and was shining down into the square over the shoulder of the church that stands on its eastern side. I paid off the cabman and we were left alone on the pavement. I had been bored and irritated the whole evening; but at the thought that I should have to bid her good-night and walk off by myself I was filled with such an anguish that the tears came into my eyes. I stood there in silent irresolution, looking into her face. It was calmly and mysteriously smiling as though to itself and for some secret reason; her eyes were very bright. She too was silent, not restlessly, not irresolutely as I was silent, but easily, with a kind of majesty. She could live in silence, when she so desired, like a being in its proper element.

‘Well,’ I brought myself to say at last, ‘I must go.’

‘Why not come in for a final cup of tea?’ she suggested.

Actuated by that spirit of perversity which makes us do what we do not want to do, what we know will make us suffer as much as it is possible in the given circumstance to suffer, I shook my head. ‘No,’ I said. ‘I must get back.’

I had never longed for anything more passionately than I longed to accept Barbara’s invitation.

She repeated it. ‘Do come in,’ she said. ‘It won’t take a minute to make tea on the gas ring.’

Again I shook my head, in too much anguish, this time, to be able to speak. My trembling voice, I was afraid, would have betrayed me. Instinctively I knew that if I

went into the house with her we should become lovers. My old determination to resist what had seemed the baser desires strengthened my resolution not to go in.

‘Well, if you won’t,’ she shrugged her shoulders, ‘then good-night.’ Her voice had a note of annoyance in it.

I shook her hand and walked dumbly away. When I had gone ten yards my resolution abjectly broke down. I turned. Barbara was still standing on the doorstep, trying to fit the latchkey into the lock.

‘Barbara,’ I called in a voice that sounded horribly unnatural in my own ears. I hurried back. She turned to look at me. ‘Do you mind if I change my mind and accept your invitation after all? I find I really am rather thirsty.’ What a humiliation, I thought.

She laughed. ‘What a goose you are, Francis.’ And she added in a bantering tone: ‘If you weren’t such a silly old dear I’d tell you to go to the nearest horse-trough and drink there.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said. Standing once more close to her, breathing once again her rosy perfume, I felt as I had felt when, a child, I had run down from my terrifying night nursery to find my mother sitting in the dining-room — reassured, relieved of a hideous burden, incredibly happy, but at the same time profoundly miserable in the consciousness that what I was doing was against all the rules, was a sin, the enormity of which I could judge from the very mournful tenderness of my mother’s eyes and the severe, portentous silence out of which, as though from a thundercloud, my huge and bearded father looked at me like an outraged god. I was happy, being with Barbara; I was utterly miserable because I was not with her, so to speak, in the right way: I was not I; she, for all that the features were the same, was no longer herself. I was happy at the thought that I should soon be kissing her; miserable because that was not how I wanted to love my imaginary Barbara; miserable too, when I secretly admitted to myself the existence of the real Barbara, because I felt it an indignity to be the slave of such a mistress.

‘Of course, if you want me to go,’ I said, reacting feebly again towards revolt, ‘I’ll go.’ And desperately trying to be facetious, ‘I’m not sure that it wouldn’t be best if I drowned myself in that horse-trough,’ I added.

‘As you like,’ she said lightly. The door was open now; she walked into the darkness. I followed her, closing the door behind me carefully. We groped our way up steep dark stairs. She unlocked another door, turned a switch. The sudden light was dazzling.

‘All’s well that ends well,’ she said, smiling at me, and she slipped the cloak from off her bare shoulders.

On the contrary, I thought, it was the tragedy of errors. I stepped towards her, I stretched out my hands and gripped her by her two thin arms a little below the shoulder. I bent down and kissed her averted cheek; she turned her face towards me, and it was her mouth.

There is no future, there is no more past;  
No roots nor fruits, but momentary flowers.



Lie still, only lie still and night will last  
Silent and dark, not for a space of hours,  
But everlastingly. Let me forget  
All but your perfume, every night but this,  
The shame, the fruitless weeping, the regret.  
Only lie still: this faint and quiet bliss  
Shall flower upon the brink of sleep and spread  
Till there is nothing else but you and I  
Clasped in a timeless silence. But like one  
Who, doomed to die, at morning will be dead,  
I know, though night seem dateless, that the sky  
Must brighten soon before to-morrow's sun.

It was then that I learned to live only in the moment — to ignore causes, motives, antecedents, to refuse responsibility for what should follow. It was then that I learned, since the future was always bound to be a painful repetition of what had happened before, never to look forward for comfort or justification, but to live now and here in the heart of human reality, in the very centre of the hot dark hive. But there is a spontaneous thoughtlessness which no thoughtful pains can imitate. Being what I am, I shall never rival with those little boys who throw their baby sisters over the cliff for the sake of seeing the delightful splash; never put a pistol to my head and for the mere fun of the thing pull the trigger; never, looking down from the gallery at Covent Garden at the thronged Wagnerites or Saint-Saënsians in the stalls below, lightly toss down that little hand-grenade (however piercingly amusing the jest might be), which I still preserve, charged with its pound of high explosive, in my hat-box, ready for all emergencies. Such gorgeous carelessness of all but the immediate sensation I can only remotely imitate. But I do my best, and I did it always conscientiously with Barbara. Still, the nights always did come to an end. And even during them, lapped in the temperament, I could never, even for an instant, be quite unaware of who she was, who I was and had been and would be to-morrow. The recollection of these things deprived every rapture of its passionate integrity and beneath the surface of every calm and silent trance spread out a profound uneasiness. Kissing her I wished that I were not kissing her, holding her in my arms I wished that it were somebody else I was holding. And sometimes in the dark quiet silences I thought that it would be better if I were dead.

Did she love me? At any rate she often said so, even in writing. I have all her letters still — a score of scribbled notes sent up by messenger from one wing of the Hotel Cecil to the other and a few longer letters written when she was on her holiday or week-ending somewhere apart from me. Here, I spread out the sheets. It is a competent, well-educated writing; the pen rarely leaves the paper, running on from letter to letter, from word to word. A rapid writing, flowing, clear and legible. Only here and there, generally towards the ends of her brief notes, is the clarity troubled; there are scrawled words made up of formless letters. I pore over them in an attempt to interpret their

meaning. 'I adore you, my beloved . . . kiss you a thousand times . . . long for it to be night . . . love you madly.' These are the fragmentary meanings I contrive to disengage from the scribbles. We write such things illegibly for the same reason as we clothe our bodies. Modesty does not permit us to walk naked, and the expression of our most intimate thoughts, our most urgent desires and secret memories, must not — even when we have so far done violence to ourselves as to commit the words to paper — be too easily read and understood. Pepys, when he recorded the most scabrous details of his loves, is not content with writing in cipher; he breaks into bad French as well. And I remember, now that I mention Pepys, having done the same sort of thing in my own letters to Barbara; winding up with a 'Bellissima, ti voglio un bene enorme,' or a 'Je t'embrasse un peu partout.'

But did she love me? In a kind of way I think she did. I gratified her vanity. Her successes so far had mostly been with genial young soldiers. She had counted few literary men among her slaves. And being infected with the queer snobbery of those who regard an artist, or any one calling himself by that name, as somehow superior to other beings — she was more impressed by a Café Royal loafer than by an efficient officer, and considered that it was a more arduous and finer thing to be able to paint, or even appreciate, a cubist picture or play a piece by Bartok on the piano than to run a business or plead in a court of law — being therefore deeply convinced of my mysterious importance and significance — she was flattered to have me abjectly gambolling around her. There is a German engraving of the sixteenth century, made at the time of the reaction against scholasticism, which represents a naked Teutonic beauty riding on the back of a bald and bearded man, whom she directs with a bridle and urges on with a switch. The old man is labelled Aristotle. After two thousand years of slavery to the infallible sage it was a good revenge. To Barbara, no doubt, I appeared as a kind of minor Aristotle. But what made the comparison somewhat less flattering to me was the fact that she was equally gratified by the attentions of another literary man, the swarthy Syrian with the blue jowl and the silver monocle. Even more gratified, I think; for he wrote poems which were frequently published in the monthly magazines (mine, alas, were not) and, what was more, he never lost an opportunity of telling people that he was a poet; he was for ever discussing the inconveniences and compensating advantages of possessing an artistic temperament. That, for a time at any rate, she preferred me to the Syrian was due to the fact that I was quite unattached and far more hopelessly in love with Barbara than he. The red-haired and, to me, inferior substitute for Buckle's History engrossed the greater part of his heart at this time. Moreover, he was a calm and experienced lover who did not lose his head about trifles. From me Barbara got passion of a kind she could not have hoped for from the Syrian — a passion which, in spite of my reluctance, in spite of my efforts to resist it, reduced me to a state of abjection at her feet. It is pleasant to be worshipped, to command and inflict pain; Barbara enjoyed these things as much as any one.

It was the Syrian who in the end displaced me. I had noticed in October that friends from South Africa, with whom it was necessary for Barbara to lunch and dine, kept arriving in ever increasing quantities. And when it wasn't friends from South Africa it was Aunt Phoebe, who had become suddenly importunate. Or old Mr. Goble, the one who had known her grandfather so well.

When I asked her to describe these festivities, she either said: 'Oh, it was dreadfully dull. We talked about the family,' or merely smiled, shrugged her shoulders and retired into her impregnable silence.

'Why do you lie to me?' I asked.

She preserved her silence and her secret smile.

There were evenings when I insisted that she should throw over the friends from South Africa and dine with me. Reluctantly she would consent; but she took her revenge on these occasions by talking about all the jolly men she had known.

One evening, when, in spite of all my entreaties, my threats and commands, she had gone to dine with Aunt Phoebe in Golders Green and stay the night, I kept watch in Regent Square. It was a damp, cold night. From nine o'clock till past midnight I remained at my post, marching up and down opposite the house where she lived. As I walked I ran the point of my stick with a rattling noise along the railings which surrounded the gardens in the middle of the square; that rattling accompanied my thoughts. From the dank black trees overhead an occasional heavy drop would fall. I must have walked twelve miles that evening.

In those three hours I thought of many things. I thought of the suddenly leaping bonfire and the young face shining in the darkness. I thought of my boyish love, and then how I had seen that face again and the different love it had inspired in the man. I thought of kisses, caresses, whispers in the darkness. I thought of the Syrian with his black eyebrows and his silver monocle, his buttery dark skin damply shining through the face-powder, and the powder snowy white among the black stubbles of his jowl. She was probably with him at this moment. Monna Vanna, Monna Bice— 'Love's not so pure and abstract as they use to say, who have no mistress but their Muse.' Reality gives imagination the lie direct. Barbara is the truth, I thought, and that she likes the man with the silver monocle is the truth, and that I have slept with her is the truth, and that he has too is quite probably the truth.

And it is the truth that men are cruel and stupid and that they suffer themselves to be driven even to destruction by shepherds as stupid as themselves. I thought of my passion for universal justice, of my desire that all men should be free, leisured, educated, of my imaginations of a future earth peopled by human beings who should live according to reason. But of what use is leisure, when leisure is occupied with listening-in and going to football matches? freedom, when men voluntarily enslave themselves to politicians like those who now rule the world? education, when the literate read the evening papers and the fiction magazines? And the future, the radiant future — supposing that it should differ from the past in anything but the spread of material comfort and spiritual uniformity, suppose it conceivably were to be in some

way superior, what has that to do with me? Nothing whatever. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

I was interrupted in my meditations by a policeman who came up to me, politely touched his helmet and asked me what I was doing. 'I seen you walking up and down here for the last hour,' he said. I gave him half a crown and told him I was waiting for a lady. The policeman laughed discreetly. I laughed too. Indeed, the joke was a marvellously good one. When he was gone, I went on with my walking.

And this war, I thought. Was there the slightest prospect that any good would come of it? The war to end war! The argument was forcible enough this time; it was backed up with a kick in the breech, the most terrific kick ever administered. But would it convince humanity more effectively than any other argument had ever done?

Still, men are courageous, I thought, are patient, kind, self-sacrificing. But they are all the contradictory things, as well — and both, good and bad, because they can't help it. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. Everything arises from a great primeval animal stupidity. That is the deepest of all realities — stupidity, the being unaware.

And the aware, the not stupid — they are the odd exceptions, they are irrelevant to the great reality, they are lies like the ideal of love, like dreams of the future, like belief in justice. To live among their works is to live in a world of bright falsehoods, apart from the real world; it is to escape. Escape is cowardly; to be comforted by what is untrue or what is irrelevant to the world in which we live is stupid.

And my own talents, such as they are, are irrelevant. So is the art to whose service I devote them, a lying consolation. A Martian would find the writing of phrases containing words of similar sound at fixed recurrent intervals as queer as buying castor oil for the lubrication of machines of destruction. I remembered the lines I had written for Barbara — the cheerful comic-amorous lines — at the time of the last epidemic of air raids. The octo-syllables jingled in my head.

But when the next full moon invites  
New bugaboos and fly-by-nights,  
Let us seek out some deep alcove,  
Some immemorial haunt of love.  
There we'll retire with cakes and wine  
And dare the imbecile to shine. . . .

I was just repeating them to myself, when a taxi turned into the quiet square, rolled slowly along the curb and came to a halt in front of the house where Barbara lived. By the dim light of a muffled street lamp I saw two people stepping out of it, a man and a woman. The masculine silhouette moved forward and, bending over his hand, began to count money by the light of the little lamp at the recording clock-face. In the narrow beam I saw the glitter of a monocle. Money clinked, the taxi drove away. The two figures mounted the steps; the door opened before them, they passed into the house.

I walked away, repeating to myself every injurious and abusive word that can be applied to a woman. I felt, if anything, rather relieved. It pleased me to think that all was over, all was now definitely and for ever done with.

‘ ’Night, sir.’

It was the friendly policeman; I thought I heard an almost imperceptible note of amusement in his voice.

For the next four days I made no sign of life. Every day I hoped that she would write or telephone to ask what had become of me. She did nothing of the kind. My sense of relief had turned into a feeling of misery. On the fifth day, as I was going out to lunch, I met her in the courtyard. She made no reference to the unprecedented length of my silence. I said none of the bitter things that I had planned to say in the event of just such an accidental meeting as this. Instead, I asked her, I implored her even, to come to lunch. Barbara declined the invitation; she had a South African engagement.

‘Come to dinner, then,’ I abjectly begged. Humiliation, I felt, could go no further. I would give anything to be received back into grace.

Barbara shook her head. ‘I wish I could,’ she said. ‘But that tiresome old Mr. Goble ...’

## Chapter VI

SUCH, THEN, WERE the phantoms that my recitation called up to dance on the surface of the Tyrrhenian. Salutarily they reminded me that I was only on my holiday, that the landscape in the midst of which I was now floating was hardly better than an illusion and that life was only real and earnest during the eleven months of each year which I spent between Gog’s Court and Miss Carruthers’s. I was a democratic Englishman and a Londoner at that, living in an age when the Daily Mail sells two million copies every morning; I had no right to so much sunlight, so tepid and clear a sea, such spiky mountains, such clouds, such blue expanses of sky; I had no right to Shelley; and if I were a true democrat, then I ought not even to think. But again I must plead my congenital weakness.

Couched on the water, I was dreaming of the ideal democratic state where no irrelevant Holy Ghost-possessed exception should trouble the flat serenity of the rule — the rule of Cloudesley and Carruthers, Fluffy and the alert, inimitable Brimstone — when all at once I became aware that a sailing-boat was coming up behind me, was right on top of me, in fact. The white sail towered over me; with a little sizzling ripple at the prow, with a clop clop of tiny waves against its flanks, the brown varnished boat bore quickly down on me. It is a horrible thing to be afraid, to be shaken by that sudden spasm of fear which cannot be controlled because it comes so quickly that the controlling forces of the mind are taken unaware. Every cell in the body, it seems, feels terror; from a man one is humiliated for a moment into a congeries of shrinking

amoebae. One descends the scale of being; one drops down the evolutionary gamut to become for a second no more than a startled and terrified beast. One moment I had been dozing on my translucent mattress, like a philosopher; the next I was inarticulately shouting, frantically moving my limbs to escape from the approaching and now inevitable peril.

‘Hi!’ I was yelling, and then something caught me a fearful crack on the side of the head and pushed me down into the water. I was conscious of swallowing a vast quantity of brine, of breathing water into my lungs and violently choking. Then for a time I knew nothing; the blow must momentarily have stunned me. I became more or less conscious again, to find myself just coming to the surface, my face half in, half out of water. I was coughing and gasping — coughing to get rid of the water that was in my lungs, gasping for air. Both processes, I now perceive, achieved exactly the contrary of what they were intended to achieve. For I coughed up all the stationary air that was in my lungs and, my mouth being under water, I drew in fresh gulps of brine. Meanwhile my blood, loaded with carbonic acid gas, kept rushing to my lungs in the hope of exchanging the deadly stuff for oxygen. In vain; there was no oxygen to exchange it for.

I felt an extraordinary pain in the back of my neck — not excruciating, but dull; dull and far-reaching and profound, and at the same time strangely disgusting — a sickening, revolting sort of pain. The nerves controlling my respiratory system were giving up in despair; that disgusting pain in my neck was their gesture of farewell, their last spasm of agony. Slowly I ceased to be conscious; I faded gradually out of life like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. The last thing that was left of me, that continued to hang in my consciousness when everything else had vanished, was the pain.

In the circumstances, I know, it would have been the classical thing if all my past life had unwound itself in a flash before the mind’s eye. Whiz — an uninteresting drama in thirty-two reels ought duly to have run its course and I should have remembered everything, from the taste of the baby food in my bottle to the taste of yesterday’s marsala at the Grand Hotel, from my first caning to my last kiss. In point of fact, however, none of the correct things happened. The last thoughts I remember thinking as I went down were about the *Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette* and my mother. In a final access of that conscientiousness which has haunted and handicapped me all my life long, I reflected that I ought to have another leading article ready by next Friday. And it struck me very forcibly that my mother would be most seriously inconvenienced when she arrived in a few days’ time to find that I was no longer in a position to accompany her on her journey to Rome.

When I next came to my senses I was lying face downwards on the beach with somebody sitting astride of my back, as though we were playing horses, using Professor Schaefer’s method of producing artificial respiration. ‘Uno, due, tre, quattro’ — and at every ‘quattro’ the man on my back threw his weight forward on to his hands, which were resting, one on either side of the spine, on my lower ribs. The contents of my lungs

were violently expelled. Then my rescuer straightened himself up again, the pressure was relaxed and my lungs replenished themselves with air. 'Uno, due, tre, quattro' — the process began again.

'He's breathing! He's all right. He's opening his eyes!'

Carefully, as though I were a crate of very valuable china, they turned me right way up. I was aware of the strong sunshine, of a throbbing headache centred somewhere above the left temple, of a crowd of people standing round. With deliberation and consciously I breathed the air; loud voices shouted instructions. Two people began to rub the soles of my feet. A third ran up with a child's bucket full of sun-scorched sand and poured it on the pit of my stomach. This happy thought immediately had an immense success. All the curious and sympathetic spectators who had been standing round my corpse, looking on while Professor Schaefer was being applied to me and wishing that they could do something to help, now discovered that there was actually something helpful that they could do. They could help to restore my circulation by sprinkling hot sand on me. In a moment I had a dozen sympathizers busy around me, skimming the cream off the hot tideless beach in little buckets, with spades or in the palms of their scooping hands, to pour it over me. In a few seconds I was almost buried under a mound of burning grey sand. On the faces of all my good Samaritans I noticed an expression of child-like earnestness. They rushed backwards and forwards with their little buckets as though there were nothing more serious in life than building sand castles on the stomachs of drowned men. And the children themselves joined in. Horrified at first by the spectacle of my limp and livid corpse, they had clung to paternal hands, shrunk away behind protecting skirts, looking on while Professor Schaefer was being practised on me, with a reluctant and disgusted curiosity. But when I had come alive again, when they saw their elders burying me with sand and understood that it was really only a tremendously good game, then how violent was their reaction! Shrilly laughing, whooping with excitement and delight, they rushed on me with their little implements. It was only with difficulty that they could be prevented from throwing handfuls of sand in my face, from pouring it into my ears, from making me eat it. And one small boy, ambitious to do something that nobody else had done, rushed down to the sea, filled his bucket with water and stale foam, ran back and emptied its contents, with what a shout of triumph! plop, from a height on to my solar plexus.

That was too much for my gravity. I began to laugh. But I did not get very far with my laughter. For after the first outburst of it, when I wanted to take breath for the next, I found that I had forgotten how to breathe, and it was only after a long choking struggle that I managed to reacquire the art. The children were frightened; this was no part of the delightful game. The grown-ups stopped being helpful and allowed themselves to be driven away from my corpse by the competent authorities. An umbrella was planted in the sand behind me. Within its rosy shadow I was left in peace to make secure my precarious footing on existence. For a long time I lay with my eyes shut. An immensely long way off, it seemed, somebody was still rubbing my feet.

Periodically, somebody else pushed a spoon with brandy and milk in it into my mouth. I felt very tired, but wonderfully comfortable. And it seemed to me at that moment that there could be nothing more exquisitely pleasurable than merely breathing.

After a while, I felt sufficiently strong and sufficiently safe in my strength to open my eyes again and look about me. How novel, how wonderfully charming everything seemed! The first thing I saw was a half-naked young giant crouching obsequiously at my feet, rubbing my bloodless soles and ankles. Under his shining copper skin there was a sliding of muscles. His face was like a Roman's, his hair jet black and curly. When he noticed that I had opened my eyes and was looking at him he smiled, and his teeth were brilliantly white, his brown eyes flashed from a setting of shiny bluish enamel.

A voice asked me in Italian how I was feeling. I looked round. A stout man with a large red, rubbery face and a black moustache was sitting beside me. In one hand he held a teacup, in the other a spoon. He was dressed in white duck. The sweat was pouring off his face; he looked as though he had been buttered. From all round his very bright black eyes little wrinkles spread out like rays from a gloria. He proffered the spoon. I swallowed. The backs of his large brown hands were covered with fine hairs.

'I am the doctor,' he explained, and smiled.

I nodded and smiled back. It seemed to me that I had never seen such a lovely doctor before.

And then, when I looked up, there was the blue sky, beautifully scalloped by the edge of the pink umbrella. And lowering my eyes I saw people standing round looking at me — all smiling. Between them I caught glimpses of the blue sea.

'Belli sono,' I said to the doctor, and shut my eyes again.

And many men so beautiful. . . . In the blood-red darkness behind my eyelids I listened to their voices. Slowly, voluptuously, I breathed the salty air. The young giant went on rubbing my feet. With an effort I lifted one of my hands and laid it on my chest. Lightly, like a blind man feeling for the sense of a page of Braille, I ran my fingers over the smooth skin. I felt the ribs and the little depressions between them. And all at once, under my finger tips, I was aware of a hardly perceptible throbbing — pulse, pulse, pulse — it was that I had been searching for. The blind fingers creeping across the page had spelled out a strange word. I did not try to interpret it. It was enough to be glad that the word was there. For a long time I lay quite still, feeling my beating heart.

'Si sente meglio?' asked the doctor.

I opened my eyes. 'Mi sento felice.' He smiled at me. The rays round the twin bright glories of his eyes emphasized themselves. It was as though the holy symbol had somehow suddenly become more holy.

'It is good not to be dead,' he said.

'It is very good.'

And I looked once more at the sky and the pink umbrella overhead. I looked at the young giant, so strong and yet so docile at my feet. I turned my eyes to right and left.



The circle of curious spectators had dissolved. Out of danger, I had ceased to be an object of sympathy or curiosity. The holiday-makers were going about their business as usual. I watched them, happily.

A young couple in bathing dresses walked slowly past me towards the sea. Their faces, their necks and shoulders, their bare arms and legs were burned to a soft transparent brown. They walked slowly, holding hands, walked with such a grace, such an easy majesty that I felt like weeping. They were very young, they were tall, slender and strong. They were beautiful as a couple of young thoroughbred horses; gracefully, idly, majestically they seemed to be walking in a world that was beyond good and evil. It did not matter what they might do or say; they were justified by the mere fact that they existed. They paused, looked at me for a moment, one with brown eyes, one with grey, flashed at me with their white teeth, asked how I was, and when I told them that I was better, smiled again and passed on.

A little girl dressed in a primrose-coloured garment that was paler in tone than her dark face and limbs came running up, halted two or three yards away and began to look at me earnestly. Her eyes were very large and fringed by absurdly long black lashes. Above them there expanded an immense domed forehead that would have done credit to a philosopher. Her snub nose was so small that you hardly noticed it was there at all. Black and frizzy, her hair stood out, in a state of permanent explosion, round her head. For a long time she stared at me. I stared back.

‘What do you want?’ I asked at last.

And suddenly, at the sound of my voice, the child was overwhelmed by shyness. She covered her face with her forearm as though she were warding off a blow. Then, after a second or two, she peeped out at me cautiously from under her elbow. Her face had become quite red. I called again. It was once too often. She turned and ran away, ran back to her family, who were sitting, twenty yards down the beach, in the precarious and shifting oasis of shadow cast by a large striped umbrella. I saw her hurl herself into the arms of a large placid mother in white muslin. Then, having successfully abolished my existence by burying her face in the comfortable bosom, she slid down again from her mother’s knee and went on playing with her little sister, serenely, as though the untoward incident had never occurred.

Mournfully, from somewhere in the distance, came the long, suspended cry of the vendor of doughnuts. ‘Bomboloni.’ Two young American marchesas in purple bathing gowns went past, talking together on one note, in indefatigable even voices. ‘. . . and he has such a lovely mentality,’ I heard one of them saying. ‘But what I like,’ said the other, who seemed to have acquired more completely the Latin habit of mind, ‘what I like is his teeth.’ A middle-aged man, with the large stomach that comes of too much pasta, and a very thin little boy of twelve now entered my field of vision, all wet and shiny from the sea. The hot sand burned their feet and they went hopping across the scorching beach with an agility which it was good to see. But the soles of mad Concetta’s feet were made of hornier stuff. Barefooted, she walked down every morning from the mountains, carrying her basket of fruit over one arm and holding

in the other hand a long staff. She hawked her wares along the beach, she went the round of the villas until her basket was empty. Then she walked back again, across the plain and up into the hills. Turning from the fat man and the little thin boy I saw her standing before me. She was dressed in a stained and tattered old dress. Her grey hair escaped in wisps from under a wide straw hat. Her old face was eager, thin and sharp; the wrinkled skin was like brown parchment stretched over the bones. Leaning on her staff, she looked at me for a little in silence.

‘So you’re the drowned foreigner,’ she said at last.

‘If he were drowned, how could he be alive?’ asked the doctor. The young giant found this exquisitely witty; he laughed profoundly, out of the depths of his huge chest. ‘Go away now, Concetta,’ the doctor went on. ‘He must be kept quiet. We can’t have you treating him to one of your discourses.’

Concetta paid no attention to him. She was used to this sort of thing.

‘The mercy of God,’ she began, shaking her head, ‘where should we be without it? You are young, signorino. You still have time to do much. God has preserved you. I am old. But I lean on the cross.’ And straightening herself up, she lifted her staff. A cross-piece of wood had been nailed near the top of it. Affectionately she kissed it. ‘I love the cross,’ she said. ‘The cross is beautiful, the cross is . . .’ But she was interrupted by a young nurserymaid who came running up to ask for half a kilo of the best grapes. Theology could not be allowed to interfere with business. Concetta took out her little steelyard, put a bunch of grapes in the pan and moved the weight back and forth along the bar in search of equilibrium. The nurserymaid stood by. She had a round face, red cheeks, dimples, black hair and eyes like black buttons. She was as plump as a fruit. The young giant looked up at her in frank admiration. She rolled the buttons towards him — for an instant, then utterly ignored him, and humming nonchalantly to herself as though she were alone on a desert island and wanted to keep her spirits up, she gazed pensively away at the picturesque beauties of nature.

‘Six hundred grammes,’ said Concetta.

The nurserymaid paid for them, and still humming, still on her desert island, she walked off, taking very small steps, undulating rotundly, like a moon among wind-driven clouds. The young giant stopped rubbing my feet and stared after her. With the moon’s beauty and the moon’s soft pace the nurserymaid tottered along, undulating unsteadily on her high heels across the sand.

Rabear, I thought: old Skeat was perfectly right to translate the word as he did.

‘Bella grassa,’ said the doctor, voicing what were obviously the young giant’s sentiments. Mine too; for after all, she was alive, obeyed the laws of her nature, walked in the sun, ate grapes and rabear’d. I shut my eyes again. Pulse, pulse, pulse; the heart beat steadily under my fingers. I felt like Adam, newly created and weak like a butterfly fresh from its chrysalis — the red clay still too wet and limp to allow of my standing upright. But soon, when it had dried to firmness, I should arise and scamper joyously about this span new world, and be myself a young giant, a graceful and majestic thoroughbred, a child, a wondering Bedlamite.

There are some people who contrive to pass their lives in a state of permanent convalescence. They behave at every moment as though they had been miraculously preserved from death the moment before; they live exhilaratedly for the mere sake of living and can be intoxicated with happiness just because they happen not to be dead. For those not born convalescent it may be that the secret of happiness consists in being half-drowned regularly three times a day before meals. I recommend it as a more drastic alternative to my 'water-shoot-in-every-office' remedy for ennui.

'You're alone here?' asked the doctor.

I nodded.

'No relations?'

'Not at present.'

'No friends of any kind?'

I shook my head.

'H'm,' he said.

He had a wart growing on one side of his nose where it joined the cheek. I found myself studying it intently; it was a most interesting wart, whitish, but a little flushed on its upper surface. It looked like a small unripe cherry. 'Do you like cherries?' I asked.

The doctor seemed rather surprised. 'Yes,' he said, after a moment's silence and with great deliberation, as though he had been carefully weighing the matter in his mind.

'So do I.' And I burst out laughing. This time, however, my breathing triumphantly stood the strain. 'So do I. But not unripe ones,' I added, gasping with mirth. It seemed to me that nothing funnier had ever been said.

And then Mrs. Aldwinkle stepped definitely into my life. For, looking round, still heaving with the after-swell of my storm of laughter, I suddenly saw the Chinese lantern lady of the patino standing before me. Her flame-coloured costume, a little less radiant now that it was wet, still shone among the aquarium shadows of her green parasol, and her face looked as though it were she who had been drowned, not I.

'They tell me that you're an Englishman,' she said in the same ill-controlled, unmusical voice I had heard, not long since, misquoting Shelley.

Still tipsy, still light-headed with convalescence, I laughingly admitted it.

'I hear you were nearly drowned.'

'Quite right,' I said, still laughing; it was such a marvellous joke.

'I'm most sorry to hear . . .' She had a way of leaving her sentences unfinished. The words would tail off into a dim inarticulate blur of sound.

'Don't mention it,' I begged her. 'It isn't at all disagreeable, you know. Afterwards, at any rate . . .' I stared at her affectionately and with my convalescent's boundless curiosity. She stared back at me. Her eyes, I thought, must have the same bulge as those little red lenses one screws to the rear forks of bicycles; they collected all the light diffused around them and reflected it again with a concentrated glitter.

'I came to ask whether I could be of any assistance,' said the Chinese lantern lady. 'Most kind.'

‘You’re alone here?’

‘Quite, for the present.’

‘Then perhaps you might care to come and stay a night or two at my house, until you’re entirely . . .’ She mumbled, made a gesture that implied the missing word and went on. ‘I have a house over there.’ She waved her hand in the direction of the mountainous section of the Shelleian landscape.

Gleefully, in my tipsy mood, I accepted her invitation. ‘Too delightful,’ I said. Everything, this morning, was too delightful. I should have accepted with genuine, unmixed pleasure an invitation to stay with Miss Carruthers or Mr. Brimstone.

‘And your name?’ she asked. ‘I don’t know that yet.’

‘Chelifer.’

‘Chelifer? Not Francis Chelifer?’

‘Francis Chelifer,’ I affirmed.

‘Francis Chelifer!’ Positively, her soul was in my name. ‘But how wonderful! I’ve wanted to meet you for years.’

For the first time since I had risen intoxicated from the dead I had an awful premonition of to-morrow’s sobriety. I remembered for the first time that round the corner, only just round the corner, lay the real world.

‘And what’s your name?’ I asked apprehensively.

‘Lilian Aldwinkle,’ said the Chinese lantern lady; and she shaped her lips into a smile that was positively piercing in its sweetness. The blue lamps that were her eyes glittered with such a focussed intensity that even the colour-blind chauffeurs who see green omnibuses rolling down Piccadilly and in the Green Park blood-coloured grass and vermilion trees would have known them for the danger signals they were.

An hour later I was reclining on cushions in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s Rolls-Royce. There was no escape.

## Chapter VII

NO ESCAPE. . . . But I was still tipsy enough not seriously to desire escape. My premonition of sobriety had been no more than a momentary flash. It came and it passed again, almost immediately, as I became once more absorbed in what seemed to me the endless and lovely comedy that was being acted all around me. It was enough for me that I existed and that things were happening to me. I was carried by two or three young giants to the hotel, I was dressed, my clothes were packed for me. In the entrance hall, while I was waiting for Mrs. Aldwinkle to come and fetch me, I made some essays at walking; the feebleness of my legs was a source to me of delighted laughter.

Dressed in pale yellow tussore with a large straw hat on her head, Mrs. Aldwinkle finally appeared. Her guests, she explained, had gone home in another machine; I

should be able to lie flat, or very nearly, in her empty car. And in case I felt bad — she shook a silver brandy flask at me. Escape? I did not so much as think of it, I was enchanted.

Luxuriously I reclined among the cushions. Mrs. Aldwinkle tapped the forward-looking window. The chauffeur languidly moved his hand and the machine rolled forward, nosing its way through the crowd of admiring car-fanciers which, in Italy, collects as though by magic round every stationary automobile. And Mrs. Aldwinkle's was a particularly attractive specimen. Young men called to their friends: 'Venite. È una Ro-Ro.' And in awed voices little boys whispered to one another: 'Una Ro-Ro.' The crowd reluctantly dispersed before our advance; we glided away from before the Grand Hotel, turned into the main street, crossed the piazza, in the centre of which, stranded high and dry by the receding sea, stood the little pink fort which had been built by the Princes of Massa Carrara to keep watch on a Mediterranean made dangerous by Barbary pirates, and rolled out of the village by the road leading across the plain towards the mountains.

Shuffling along in a slowly moving cloud of dust, a train of white oxen advanced, shambling and zig-zagging along the road to meet us. Eight yoke of them there were, a long procession, with half a dozen drivers shouting and tugging at the leading ropes and cracking their whips. They were dragging a low truck, clamped to which was a huge monolith of flawless white marble. Uneasily, as we crawled past them, the animals shook their heads, turning this way and that, as though desperately seeking some way of escape. Their long curving horns clashed together; their soft white dewlaps shook; and into their blank brown eyes there came a look of fear, an entreaty that we should take pity on their invincible stupidity and remember that they simply could not, however hard they tried, get used to motor cars.

Mrs. Aldwinkle pointed at the monolith. 'Imagine what Michelangelo could have made out of that,' she said. Then, noticing that her pointing hand still grasped the silver flask, she became very solicitous. 'You're sure you wouldn't like a sip of this?' she asked, leaning forward. The twin blue danger signals glittered in my face. Her garments exhaled a scent in which there was ambergris. Her breath smelt of heliotrope cachous. But even now I did not take fright; I made no effort to escape. Guided by their invincible stupidity, the white oxen had behaved more sensibly than I.

We rolled on. The hills came nearer. The far-away peaks of bare limestone were hidden by the glowing mass of the tilled and wooded foot-hills. Happily I looked at those huge hilly forms. 'How beautiful!' I said. Mrs. Aldwinkle seemed to take my words as a personal compliment.

'I'm so glad you think so. So awfully . . .' she replied in the tone of an author to whom you have just said that you enjoyed his last book so much.

We drew nearer; the hills towered up, they opposed themselves like a huge wall. But the barrier parted before us; we passed through the gates of a valley that wound up into the mountain. Our road now ran parallel with the bed of a torrent. In the flanks of the hill to our right a marble quarry made a huge bare scar, hundreds of feet long. The

crest of the hill was fringed with a growth of umbrella pines. The straight slender tree trunks jetted up thirty feet without a branch; their wide-spreading flattened domes of foliage formed a thin continuous silhouette, between which and the dark mass of the hill one could see a band of sky, thinly barred by the bare stems. It was as though, to emphasize the outlines of his hills, an artist had drawn a fine and supple brush stroke parallel with the edge of the silhouette and a little apart from it.

We rolled on. The high road narrowed into the squalid street of a little town. The car crept along, hooting as it went.

‘Vezza,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle explained. ‘Michelangelo used to come here for his marbles.’

‘Indeed?’ I was charmed to hear it.

Over the windows of a large shop filled with white crosses, broken columns and statues, I read the legend: ‘Anglo-American Tombstone Company.’ We emerged from the narrow street on to an embankment running along the edge of a river. From the opposite bank the ground rose steeply.

‘There,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle on a note of triumph as we crossed the bridge, ‘that’s my house.’ She pointed up. From the hill-top a long façade stared down through twenty windows; a tall tower pricked the sky. ‘The palace was built in 1630,’ she began. I even enjoyed the history lesson.

We had crossed the bridge, we were climbing by a steep and winding road through what was almost a forest of olive trees. The abrupt grassy slope had been built up into innumerable little terraces on which the trees were planted. Here and there, in the grey luminous shadow beneath the trees, little flocks of sheep were grazing. The barefooted children who attended them came running to the side of the road to watch us passing.

‘I like to think of these old princely courts,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle was saying. ‘Like abbeys of . . . abbeys of . . .’ She shook her brandy flask impatiently. ‘You know . . . in Thingummy.’

‘Abbeys of Thelema,’ I suggested.

‘That’s it,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘Sort of retiring-places where people were free to live intelligently. That’s what I want to make this house. I’m so delighted to have met you like this. You’re exactly the sort of person I want.’ She leaned forward, smiling and glittering. But even at the prospect of entering the Abbey of Thelema I did not blench.

At this moment the car passed through a huge gateway. I caught a glimpse of a great flight of steps, set between cypresses, mounting up past a series of terraced landings to a carved doorway in the centre of the long façade. The road turned, the car swung round and the vista was closed. By an ilex avenue that wound round the flank of the hill we climbed more gradually towards the house, which we approached from the side. The road landed us finally in a large square court opposite a shorter reproduction of the great façade. At the head of a double flight of steps, curving horse-shoe fashion from the landing at its threshold, a tall pompous doorway surmounted by a coat of arms cavernously invited. The car drew up.

And about time too, as I notice on re-reading what I have written. Few things are more profoundly boring and unprofitable than literary descriptions. For the writer, it is true, there is a certain amusement to be derived from the hunt for apt expressive words. Carried away by the excitement of the chase he dashes on, regardless of the poor readers who follow toilsomely through his stiff and clayey pages like the runners at the tail of a hunt, seeing nothing of the fun. All writers are also readers — though perhaps I should make exceptions in favour of a few of my colleagues who make a speciality of native wood-notes — and must therefore know how dreary description is. But that does not prevent them from inflicting upon others all that they themselves have suffered. Indeed I sometimes think that some authors must write as they do purely out of a desire for revenge.

Mrs. Aldwinkle's other guests had arrived and were waiting for us. I was introduced and found them all equally charming. The little niece rushed to Mrs. Aldwinkle's assistance; the young man who had rowed the patino rushed in his turn to the little niece's and insisted on carrying all the things of which she had relieved her aunt. The old man with the red face, who had talked about the clouds, looked on benevolently at this little scene. But another elderly gentleman with a white beard, whom I had not seen before, seemed to view it with a certain disapproval. The young lady who had talked about the whiteness of her legs and who turned out to be my distinguished colleague, Miss Mary Thriplow, was now dressed in a little green frock with a white turned-down collar, white cuffs and buttons, which made her look like a schoolgirl in a comic opera by Offenbach. The brown young man stood near her.

I got out of the car, refused all proffered assistance and contrived, a little wamblingly, it is true, to mount the steps.

'You must be very careful for a little,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle with a maternal solicitude. 'These,' she added, waving her hand in the direction of a vista of empty saloons, the entrance to which we were just then passing, 'these are the apartments of the Princesses.'

We walked right through the house into a great quadrangle surrounded on three sides by buildings and on the fourth, towards the rising hill, by an arcade. On a pedestal in the centre of the court stood a more than life-sized marble statue, representing, my hostess informed me, the penultimate Prince of Massa Carrara, wearing a very curly full-bottomed wig, Roman kilts, buskins, and one of those handsome classical breastplates which have the head of a Gorgon embossed in the middle of the chest and a little dimple to indicate the position of the navel in the middle of the round and polished belly. With the expression of one who is about to reveal a delightful secret and who can hardly wait until the moment of revelation comes to give vent to his pleasure, Mrs. Aldwinkle, smiling as it were below the surface of her face, led me to the foot of the statue. 'Look!' she said. It was one of those pretty peep-shows on which, for the sake of five minutes' amusement and titillation of the eye, Grand Monarchs used to spend the value of a rich province. From the central arch of the arcade a flight of marble steps climbed up to where, set against a semi-circle of cypresses, at the crest

of the hill, a little round temple played gracefully at paganism, just as the buskined and corseleted statue in the court below played heroically at Plutarch.

‘And now look here!’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle; and taking me round to the other side of the statue, she led me towards a great door in the centre of the long range of buildings opposite the arcade. It was open; a vaulted corridor, like a tunnel, led clean through the house. Through it I could see the blue sky and the remote horizon of the sea. We walked along it; from the further threshold I found myself looking down the flight of steps which I had seen from below, at the entrance gate. It was a stage scene, but made of solid marble and with growing trees.

‘What do you think of that?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘Magnificent,’ I answered, with an enthusiasm that was beginning to be tempered by a growing physical weariness.

‘Such a view,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, poking at it with the tip of her sunshade. ‘The contrast between the cypresses and the olive trees . . .’

‘But the view’s still lovelier from the temple,’ said the little niece, who was evidently very anxious to make me realize the full pricelessness of her Aunt Lilian’s possessions.

Mrs. Aldwinkle turned on her. ‘How utterly thoughtless you are!’ she said severely. ‘Do try to remember that poor Mr. Chelifer is still suffering from the effects of his accident. And you expect him to go climbing up to the temple!’

The little niece blushed and drooped beneath the reproach. We sat down.

‘How are you feeling now?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, remembering once more to be solicitous. . . . ‘Too appalling to think,’ she added, ‘how nearly . . . And I’ve always so enormously admired your work.’

‘So have I,’ declared my colleague in the green frock. ‘Most awfully. Still, I confess, I find some of your things a little, how shall I say, a little alembicated. I like my poetry to be rather straightforward.’

‘A very sophisticated desire,’ said the red-faced gentleman. ‘Really simple, primitive people like their poetry to be as complicated, conventional, artificial and remote from the language of everyday affairs as possible. We reproach the eighteenth century with its artificiality. But the fact is that Beowulf is couched in a diction fifty times more complicated and unnatural than that of the Essay on Man. And when you compare the Icelandic Sagas with Dr. Johnson, you find that it’s the Doctor who lisps and prattles. Only the most complicated people, living in the midst of the most artificial surroundings, desire their poetry to be simple and straightforward.’

I shut my eyes and allowed the waves of conversation to roll over me. And what a classy conversation! Prince Papadiamantopoulos could hardly have kept the ball rolling on a higher level. Fatigue was sobering me.

Fatigue, the body’s weariness — some industrious little scientific emmet ought to catalogue and measure all its various effects. All — for it isn’t enough to show that when wage-slaves have worked too long they tend to fall into the machines and get pulped. The fact is interesting, no doubt; but there are other facts of no less significance. There is the fact, for example, that slight fatigue increases our capacity for sentiment.



Those compromising love letters are always written in the small hours; it is at night, not when we are fresh and reposed, that we talk about ideal love and indulge our griefs. Under the influence of slight fatigue we feel more ready than at other times to discuss the problems of the universe, to make confidences, to dogmatize about the nature of God and to draw up plans for the future. We are also inclined to be more languidly voluptuous. When, however, the fatigue is increased beyond a certain point, we cease entirely to be sentimental, voluptuous, metaphysical or confiding. We cease to be aware of anything but the decrepitude of our being. We take no further interest in other people or the outside world — no further interest unless they will not leave us in peace, when we come to hate them with a deep but ineffectual loathing, mingled with disgust.

With me, fatigue had almost suddenly passed the critical point. My convalescent's delight in the world evaporated. My fellow beings no longer seemed to me beautiful, strange and amiable. Mrs. Aldwinkle's attempts to bring me into the conversation exasperated me; when I looked at her, I thought her a monster. I realized, too late (which made the realization the more vexatious), what I had let myself in for when I accepted Mrs. Aldwinkle's invitation. Fantastic surroundings, art, classy chats about the cosmos, the intelligentsia, love. . . . It was too much, even on a holiday.

I shut my eyes. Sometimes, when Mrs. Aldwinkle interpellated me, I said yes or no, without much regard to the sense of her remark. Discussion raged around me. From the alembication of my poetry they had gone on to art in general. Crikey, I said to myself, crikey. . . . I did my best to close the ears of my mind; and for some little time I did, indeed, contrive to understand nothing of what was said. I thought of Miss Carruthers, of Fluffy and Mr. Brimstone, of Gog's Court and Mr. Bosk.

Mrs. Aldwinkle's voice, raised by irritation to a peculiar loudness, made itself audible to my muffled mind. 'How often have I told you, Cardan,' it said, 'that you understand nothing of modern art?'

'At least a thousand times,' Mr. Cardan replied cheerfully. 'But bless your heart,' he added (and I opened my eyes in time to see his benevolent smile), 'I never mind at all.'

The smile was evidently too much for Mrs. Aldwinkle's patience. With the gesture of a queen who implies that the audience is at an end she rose from her seat. 'Just time,' she said, looking at her watch, 'there's just time. I really must give Mr. Chelifer some idea of the inside of the palace before lunch. You'd like to come?' She smiled at me like a siren.

Too polite to remind her of her recent outburst against the little niece, I declared myself delighted by the idea. Wamblingly I followed her into the house. Behind me I heard the young rower exclaiming on a note of mingled astonishment and indignation: 'But a moment ago she was saying that Mr. Chelifer was too ill to . . .'

'Ah, but that was different,' said the voice of the red-faced man.

'Why was it different?'

‘Because, my young friend, the other fellow is in all cases the rule; but I am invariably the exception. Shall we follow?’

Mrs. Aldwinkle made me look at painted ceilings till I almost fell down from giddiness. She dragged me through room after baroque room; then drove me up dark stairs into the Middle Ages. By the time we were back in the trecento I was so much exhausted that I could hardly stand. My knees trembled, I felt sick.

‘This is the old armoury,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle with mounting enthusiasm. ‘And there are the stairs leading up to the tower.’ She pointed to a low archway, through which, in a dusty twilight, the bottom of a steep stair could be seen corkscrewing up to unknown heights. ‘There are two hundred and thirty-two steps,’ she added.

At this moment the gong for luncheon rumbled remotely from the other end of the huge empty house.

‘Thank God!’ said the red-faced man devoutly.

But our hostess, it was evident, had no feeling for punctuality. ‘What a bore!’ she exclaimed. ‘But never mind. We can make time. I wanted just to run up the tower before lunch. There’s such a wonderful bird’s-eye . . .’ She looked inquiringly round. ‘What do you think, all of you? Shouldn’t we just dash up? It won’t take a minute.’ She repeated the siren smile. ‘Do let’s. Do!’ And without waiting for the result of her plebiscite she walked rapidly towards the stairs.

I followed her. But before I had taken five steps, the floor, the walls of the room seemed to fade into the distance. There was a roaring in my ears. It grew suddenly dark. I felt myself falling. For the second time since breakfast I lost consciousness.

When I came to, I was lying on the floor, with my head on Mrs. Aldwinkle’s knees; and she was dabbing my forehead with a wet sponge. The first objects of which I was aware were her bright blue eyes hanging over me, very close, very bright and alarming. ‘Poor fellow,’ she was saying, ‘poor fellow.’ Then, looking up, she shouted angrily to the owners of the various legs and skirts which I distinguished mistily to right and left of me: ‘Stand back, you must stand back! Do you want to suffocate the poor fellow?’

# Part III. The Loves of the Parallels

## Chapter I

DO ALL HE could, Lord Hovenden had somehow found it impossible, these last few days, to get Irene for a moment to himself. The change had come about almost suddenly, just after that fellow Chelifer had made his appearance. Before he came, there had been a time — beginning, strangely enough, almost as suddenly as it had ended — a time of blissful happiness. Whenever during those days an opportunity for a tête-à-tête presented itself Irene had been always at hand and, what was more, always delighted to seize the opportunity. They had been for long walks together, they had swum together far out into the sea, sat together in the gardens, sometimes talking, sometimes silent; but very happy, whether they spoke or not. He had talked to her about motoring and dancing and shooting, and occasionally, feeling rather shamefaced and embarrassed by the disquieting gravity of the subject, about the working classes. And Irene had listened with pleasure to everything he said and had talked too. They found that they had many tastes in common. It had been an enchantment while it lasted. And then, all at once, with the coming of that creature Chelifer, it all came to an end. Irene was never on the spot when opportunities offered, she never suggested spontaneously, as once or twice, during the heavenly time, she had actually done, that they should go for a walk together. She had no time to talk to him; her thoughts, it seemed, were elsewhere, as with grave and preoccupied face she hurried mysteriously about the palace and the gardens. With an extreme anguish of spirit Lord Hovenden observed that it was always in the direction of Chelifer that Irene seemed to be hurrying. Did he slip out unobtrusively into the garden after lunch, Irene was sure, a moment later, to slip out after him. When he proposed a stroll with Calamy or Mr. Cardan, Irene always asked, shyly but with the pallid resolution of one who by an effort of will overcomes a natural weakness for the sake of some all-important cause, to be allowed to join the party. And if ever Chelifer and Miss Thriplow happened to find themselves for a moment together, Irene was always certain to come gliding silently after them.

For all this Lord Hovenden could find only one explanation. She was in love with the man. True, she never made any effort to talk to him when she was in his company; she seemed even rather intimidated by his polished silences, his pointedly insincere formulas of courtesy and compliment. And for his part Chelifer, as far as his rival could see, behaved with a perfect correctitude. Too correctly, indeed, in Hovenden's opinion. He couldn't tolerate the fellow's sarcastic politeness; the man ought to be more

human with little Irene. Lord Hovenden would have liked to wring his neck; wring it for two mutually exclusive offences — luring the girl on and being too damned standoffish. And she looked so wretched. Looking out of its square window in the thick bright bell of copper hair, the little face, so childish in the largeness and limpidity of the eyes, in the shortness of the upper lip, had been, these last days, the face of a pathetic, not a merry child. Lord Hovenden could only suppose that she was pining with love for that creature — though what the devil she contrived to see in him he, for one, couldn't imagine. And it was so obvious, too, that old Lilian was also quite gone on the fellow and making a fool of herself about him. Did she want to compete with her Aunt Lilian? There'd be the devil and all to pay if Mrs. Aldwinkle discovered that Irene was trying to cut her out. The more he thought of the wretched business, the wretcheder it seemed. Lord Hovenden was thoroughly miserable.

So too was Irene. But not for the reasons Lord Hovenden supposed. It was true that she had spent most of her days since Chelifer's arrival in following the new guest like an unhappy shadow. But it had not been on her own account, not at her own desire. Chelifer did indeed intimidate her; so far Lord Hovenden had guessed aright. He had been hopelessly at fault in imagining that Irene adored the man in spite of her fear of him. If she followed him about, it was because Mrs. Aldwinkle had asked her to. And if she looked unhappy, it was because Aunt Lilian was unhappy — and a little, too, because the task which Aunt Lilian had set her was a disagreeable one; disagreeable not only in itself, but because it prevented her from continuing those pleasant talks with Hovenden. Ever since that evening when Aunt Lilian twitted her on her coldness and her blindness, Irene had made a point of seeing Hovenden as much as she could. She wanted to prove that Aunt Lilian had been wrong. She wasn't cold, she wasn't blind; she could see as clearly as any one when people liked her, and she could be as warmly appreciative. And really, after the episodes with Jacques, Mario and Peter, it wasn't fair of Aunt Lilian to tease her like that. It simply wasn't. Moved by an indignant desire to confute Aunt Lilian as quickly as possible, she had positively made advances to Hovenden; he was so shy that, if she hadn't, it would have been months before she could have offered her aunt anything like convincing rebuttal of her imputation. She had talked with him, gone for walks with him, quite prepared to feel at any moment the infinitude of passion. But the affair passed off, somehow, very differently from the others. She began to feel something indeed, but something quite unlike that which she had felt for Peter and Jacques. For them it had been a fizzy, exciting, restless feeling, intimately connected with large hotels, jazz bands, coloured lights and Aunt Lilian's indefatigable desire to get everything out of life, her haunting fear that she was missing something, even in the heart of the fun. 'Enjoy yourself, let yourself go,' Aunt Lilian was always telling her. And 'How handsome he is! what a lovely fellow!' she would say as one of the young men passed. Irene had done her best to take Aunt Lilian's advice. And it had seemed to her, sometimes, when she was dancing and the lights, the music, the moving crowd had blended together into a single throbbing whole, it had seemed to her that she had indeed climbed to the peak of happiness. And the

young man, the Peter or Jacques whom Aunt Lilian had hypnotized her into thinking a marvel among young men, was regarded as the source of this bliss. Between the dances, under the palm trees in the garden, she had even suffered herself to be kissed; and the experience had been rather momentous. But when the time came for them to move on, Irene departed without regret. The fizzy feeling had gone flat. But with Hovenden it was different. She just liked him quietly, more and more. He was so nice and simple and eager and young. So young — she liked that particularly. Irene felt that he was really younger, in spite of his age, than she. The other ones had all been older, more knowing and accomplished; all rather bold and insolent. But Hovenden wasn't in the least like that. One felt very secure with him, Irene thought. And there was somehow no question of love when one was with him — at any rate the question wasn't at all pressing or urgent. Aunt Lilian used to ask her every evening how they were getting on and if it were getting exciting. And Irene never quite knew what to answer. She found very soon that she didn't want to talk about Hovenden; he was so different from the others, and their friendship had nothing infinite about it. It was just a sensible friendship. She dreaded Aunt Lilian's questions; and she found herself almost disliking Aunt Lilian when, in that dreadful bantering way of hers, she ruthlessly insisted on putting them. In some ways, indeed, the coming of Chelifer had been a relief; for Aunt Lilian became at once so profoundly absorbed in her own emotions that she had no time or inclination to think of any one else's. Yes, that had been a great relief. But on the other hand, the work of supervision and espionage to which Aunt Lilian had set her made it all but impossible for Irene ever to talk to Hovenden. She might as well not be there, Irene sadly reflected. Still, poor Aunt Lilian was so dreadfully unhappy. One must do all one could for her. Poor Aunt Lilian!

'I want to know what he thinks of me,' Aunt Lilian had said to her in the secret hours of the night. 'What does he say about me to other people?' Irene answered that she had never heard him say anything about her. 'Then you must listen, you must keep your ears open.'

But however much she listened, Irene never had anything to report. Chelifer never mentioned Aunt Lilian. For Mrs. Aldwinkle that was almost worse than if he had spoken badly of her. To be ignored was terrible. 'Perhaps he likes Mary,' she had suggested. 'I thought I saw him looking at her to-day in a strange, intent sort of way.' And Irene had been ordered to watch them. But for all she could discover, Mrs. Aldwinkle's jealousies were utterly unfounded. Between Chelifer and Mary Thriplow there passed no word or look that the most suspicious imagination could interpret in terms of amorous intimacy. 'He's queer, he's an extraordinary creature.' That was the refrain of Mrs. Aldwinkle's talk about him. 'He seems to care for nothing. So cold, such a fixed, frigid mask. And yet one has only to look at him — his eyes, his mouth — to see that underneath . . .' And Mrs. Aldwinkle would shake her head and sigh. And her speculations about him would go rambling on and on, round and round, treading the same ground again and again, arriving nowhere. Poor Aunt Lilian! She was dreadfully unhappy.

In her own mind Mrs. Aldwinkle had begun by saving Chelifer's life. She saw herself standing there on the beach between sea and sky, and with the mountains in the middle distance, looking like one of those wonderfully romantic figures who, in the paintings of Augustus John, stand poised in a meditative and passionate ecstasy against a cosmic background. She saw herself — a John down even to her flame-coloured tunic and her emerald-green parasol. And at her feet, like Shelley, like Leander washed up on the sands of Abydos, lay the young poet, pale, naked and dead. And she had bent over him, had called him back to life, had raised him up and, figuratively speaking, had carried him off in maternal arms to a haven of peace where he should gather new strength and, for his poetry, new inspiration.

Such were the facts as they appeared to Mrs. Aldwinkle, after passing through the dense refractive medium of her imagination. Given these facts, given the resultant situation, given her character, it was almost necessary and inevitable that Mrs. Aldwinkle should feel romantically towards her latest guest. The mere fact that he was a new arrival, hitherto unknown, and a poet at that, would have been enough in any circumstances to make Mrs. Aldwinkle take a lively interest in the young man. But seeing that she had saved him from a watery grave and was now engaged in supplying him with inspiration, she felt something more than interest. She would have been disobeying the laws of her being if she had not fallen in love with him. Moreover, he made it easier for her by being so darkly and poetically handsome. And then he was queer — queer to the point of mysteriousness. His very coldness attracted while it filled her with despair.

'He can't really be so utterly indifferent to everything and everybody as he makes out,' she kept insisting to Irene.

The desire to break down his barriers, enter into his intimacy and master his secret quickened her love.

From the moment of her discovery of him, in those romantic circumstances which her imagination had made so much more romantic, Mrs. Aldwinkle had tried to take possession of Chelifer; she had tried to make him as much her property as the view, or Italian art. He became at once the best living poet; but it followed as a corollary that she was his only interpreter. In haste she had telegraphed to London for copies of all his books.

'When I think,' she would say, leaning forward embarrassingly close and staring into his face with those bright, dangerous eyes of hers, 'when I think how nearly you were drowned. Like Shelley . . .' She shuddered. 'It's too appalling.'

And Chelifer would bend his full Egyptian lips into a smile and answer: 'They'd have been inconsolable on the staff of the Rabbit Fancier,' or something of the sort. Oh, queer, queer, queer!

'He slides away from one,' Mrs. Aldwinkle complained to her young confidante of the small hours.

She might try to take his barriers by storm, might try to creep subtly into his confidence from the flank, so to speak; but Chelifer was never to be caught napping.

He evaded her. There was no taking possession of him. It was for nothing, so far as Mrs. Aldwinkle was concerned, that he was the best living poet and she his propheticess.

He evaded her — evaded her not merely mentally and spiritually, but even in the flesh. For after a day or two in the Cybo Malaspina palace he developed an almost magical faculty for disappearing. One moment he'd be there, walking about in the garden or sitting in one of the saloons; something would distract Mrs. Aldwinkle's attention, and the next moment, when she turned back towards the place where he had been, he was gone, he was utterly vanished. Mrs. Aldwinkle would search; there was no trace of him to be found. But at the next meal he'd walk in, punctual as ever; he would ask his hostess politely if she had had an agreeable morning or afternoon, whichever the case might be, and when she asked him where he had been, would answer vaguely that he'd gone for a little walk, or that he'd been writing letters.

After one of these disappearances Irene, who had been set by her aunt to hunt for him, finally ran him to earth on the top of the tower. She had climbed the two hundred and thirty-two steps for the sake of the commanding view of the whole garden and hillside to be obtained from the summit. If he was anywhere above ground, she ought to see him from the tower. But when at last, panting, she emerged on to the little square platform from which the ancient marquesses had dropped small rocks and molten lead on their enemies in the court below, she got a fright that nearly made her fall backwards down the steps. For as she came up through the trap-door into the sunlight, she suddenly became aware of what seemed, to eyes that looked up from the level of the floor, a gigantic figure advancing, toweringly, towards her.

Irene uttered a little scream; her heart jumped violently and seemed to stop beating.

'Allow me,' said a very polite voice. The giant bent down and took her by the hand. It was Chelifer. 'So you've climbed up for a bird's-eye view of the picturesque beauties of nature?' he went on, when he had helped her up through the hatchway. 'I'm very partial to bird's-eye views myself.'

'You gave me such a start,' was all that Irene could say. Her face was quite pale.

'I'm exceedingly sorry,' said Chelifer. There was a long and, for Irene, embarrassing silence.

After a minute she went down again.

'Did you find him?' asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, when her niece emerged a little while later on to the terrace.

Irene shook her head. Somehow she lacked the courage to tell Aunt Lilian the story of her adventure. It would make her too unhappy to think that Chelifer was prepared to climb two hundred and thirty-two steps for the sake of getting out of her way.

Mrs. Aldwinkle tried to guard against his habit of vanishing by never, so far as it was practicable, letting him out of her sight. She arranged that he should always sit next to her at table. She took him for walks and drives in the motor car, she made him sit with her in the garden. It was with difficulty and only by the employment of stratagems that Chelifer managed to procure a moment of liberty and solitude. For the first few days of his stay Chelifer found that 'I must go and write' was a good

excuse to get away. Mrs. Aldwinkle professed such admiration for him in his poetical capacity that she could not decently refuse to let him go. But she soon found a way of controlling such liberty as he could get in this way by insisting that he should write under the ilex trees, or in one of the mouldering sponge-stone grottoes hollowed in the walls of the lower terrace. Vainly Chelifer protested that he loathed writing or reading out of doors.

‘These lovely surroundings,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle insisted, ‘will inspire you.’

‘But the only surroundings that really inspire me,’ said Chelifer, ‘are the lower middle class quarters of London, north of the Harrow Road, for example.’

‘How can you say such things?’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘But I assure you,’ he protested, ‘it’s quite true.’

None the less, he had to go and write under the ilexes or in the grotto. Mrs. Aldwinkle, at a moderate distance, kept him well in sight. Every ten minutes or so she would come tip-toeing into his retreat, smiling, as she imagined, like a sibyl, her finger on her lips, to lay beside his permanently virgin sheet of paper a bunch of late-flowering roses, a dahlia, some Michaelmas daisies or a few pink berries from the spindle tree. Courteously, in some charming and frankly insincere formula, Chelifer would thank her for the gift, and with a final smile, less sibylline, but sweeter, tenderer, Mrs. Aldwinkle would tip-toe away again, like Egeria bidding farewell to King Numa, leaving her inspiration to do its work. It didn’t seem to do its work very well, however. For whenever she asked him how much he had written, he regularly answered ‘Nothing,’ smiling at her meanwhile that courteous and Sphingine smile which Mrs. Aldwinkle always found so baffling, so pre-eminently ‘queer.’

Often Mrs. Aldwinkle would try to lead the conversation upwards on to those high spiritual planes from which the most satisfactory and romantic approach to love is to be made. Two souls that have acclimatized themselves to the thin air of religion, art, ethics or metaphysics have no difficulty in breathing the similar atmosphere of ideal love, whose territory lies contiguous to those of the other inhabitants of high mental altitudes. Mrs. Aldwinkle liked to approach love from the heights. One landed, so to speak, by aeroplane on the snowy summit of Popocatepetl, to descend by easy stages into the tropical tierra caliente in the plains below. But with Chelifer it was impossible to gain a footing on any height at all. When, for example, Mrs. Aldwinkle started rapturously on art and the delights of being an artist, Chelifer would modestly admit to being a tolerable second-rate halma player.

‘But how can you speak like that?’ cried Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘How can you blaspheme so against art and your own talent? What’s your talent for?’

‘For editing the Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette, it appears,’ Chelifer answered, courteously smiling.

Sometimes she started on the theme of love itself; but with no greater success. Chelifer just politely agreed with everything she said, and when she pressed him for a definite opinion of his own replied, ‘I don’t know.’



‘But you must know,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle insisted, ‘you must have some opinion. You have had experience.’

Chelifer shook his head. ‘Alas,’ he deplored, ‘never.’

It was hopeless.

‘What am I to do?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle despairingly in the small hours.

Wise in the experience of eighteen years, Irene suggested that the best thing to do would be to think no more about him — in that way.

Mrs. Aldwinkle only sighed and shook her head. She had started loving because she believed in love, because she wanted to love and because a romantic opportunity had presented itself. She had rescued a Poet from death. How could she help loving him? The circumstances, the person were her invention; she had fallen in love, deliberately almost, with the figments of her own imagination. But there was no deliberately falling out again. The romantic yearnings had aroused those profounder instincts of which they were but the polite and literary emanation. The man was young, was beautiful — these were facts, not imaginings. These deep desires once started by the conscious mind from their sleep, once made aware of their quarry, how could they be held back? ‘He is a poet. For the love of poetry, for the love of passion and because I saved him from death, I love him.’ If that had been all, it might have been possible for Mrs. Aldwinkle to take Irene’s advice. But from the obscure caves of her being another voice was speaking. ‘He is young, he is beautiful. The days are so few and short. I am growing old. My body is thirsty.’ How could she cease to think of him?

‘And suppose he did come to love me a little,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, taking a perverse delight in tormenting herself in every possible way, ‘suppose he should come to love me just a little for what I am and think and do — should come to love me because, to begin with, I love him and admire his work, and because I understand what an artist feels and can sympathize with him — suppose all that, wouldn’t he be repelled at the same time by the fact that I’m old?’ She peered into the mirror. ‘My face looks terribly old,’ she said.

‘No, no,’ protested Irene encouragingly.

‘He’d be disgusted,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on. ‘It would be enough to drive him away even if he were attracted in some other way.’ She sighed profoundly. The tears trickled slowly down her sagging cheeks.

‘Don’t talk like that, Aunt Lilian,’ Irene implored her. ‘Don’t talk like that.’ She felt the tears coming into her own eyes. At that moment she would have done anything, given anything to make Aunt Lilian happy. She threw her arms round Mrs. Aldwinkle’s neck and kissed her. ‘Don’t be unhappy,’ she whispered. ‘Don’t think any more about it. What does it matter about that man? What does it matter? You must think only of the people who do love you. I love you, Aunt Lilian. So much, so much.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle suffered herself to be a little comforted. She dried her eyes. ‘I shall make myself look still uglier,’ she said, ‘if I go on crying.’ There was a silence. Irene went on brushing her aunt’s hair; she hoped that Aunt Lilian had turned her thoughts elsewhere.

‘At any rate,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle at last, breaking the long silence, ‘my body is still young.’

Irene was distressed. Why couldn’t Aunt Lilian think of something else? But her distress turned into an uneasy sense of embarrassment and shame as Mrs. Aldwinkle pursued the subject started by her last words into more and more intimate detail. In spite of her five years’ training in Aunt Lilian’s school, Irene felt profoundly shocked.

## Chapter II

‘WE TWO,’ SAID Mr. Cardan one late afternoon some fortnight after Chelifer’s arrival, ‘we two seem to be rather left out of it.’

‘Left out of what?’ asked Mr. Falx.

‘Out of love,’ said Mr. Cardan. He looked down over the balustrade. On the next terrace below, Chelifer and Mrs. Aldwinkle were walking slowly up and down. On the terrace below that strolled the diminished and foreshortened figures of Calamy and Miss Thriplow. ‘And the other two,’ said Mr. Cardan, as if continuing aloud the enumeration which he and his companion had made in silence, with the eye alone, ‘your young pupil and the little niece, have gone for a walk in the hills. Can you ask what we’re left out of?’

Mr. Falx nodded. ‘To tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘I don’t much like the atmosphere of this house. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s an excellent woman, of course, in many respects. But . . .’ he hesitated.

‘Yes; but . . .’ Mr. Cardan nodded. ‘I see your point.’

‘I shall be rather glad when I have got young Hovenden away from here,’ said Mr. Falx.

‘If you get him alone I shall be surprised.’

Mr. Falx went on, shaking his head: ‘There’s a certain moral laxity, a certain self-indulgence. . . . I confess I don’t like this way of life. I may be prejudiced; but I don’t like it.’

‘Every one has his favourite vice,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘You forget, Mr. Falx, that we probably don’t like your way of life.’

‘I protest,’ said Mr. Falx hotly. ‘Is it possible to compare my way of life with the way of life in this house? Here am I, working incessantly for a noble cause, devoting myself to the public good . . .’

‘Still,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘they do say that there’s nothing more intoxicating than talking to a crowd of people and moving them the way you want them to go; they do say, too, that it’s piercingly delicious to listen to applause. And people who have tried both have told me that the joys of power are far preferable, if only because they are a good deal more enduring, to those one can derive from wine or love. No, no, Mr. Falx; if we chose to climb on to our high horses we should be as amply justified in disapproving

of your laxity and self-indulgence as you are in disapproving of ours. I always notice that the most grave and awful denunciations of obscenity in literature are to be found precisely in those periodicals whose directors are most notoriously alcoholic. And the preachers and politicians with the greatest vanity, the most inordinate itch for power and notoriety, are always those who denounce most fiercely the corruptions of the age. One of the greatest triumphs of the nineteenth century was to limit the connotation of the word “immoral” in such a way that, for practical purposes, only those were immoral who drank too much or made too copious love. Those who indulged in any or all of the other deadly sins could look down in righteous indignation on the lascivious and the gluttonous. And not only could but can — even now. This exaltation of two out of the seven deadly sins is most unfair. In the name of all lechers and boozers I most solemnly protest against the invidious distinction made to our prejudice. Believe me, Mr. Falx, we are no more reprehensible than the rest of you. Indeed, compared with some of your political friends, I feel I have a right to consider myself almost a saint.’

‘Still,’ said Mr. Falx, whose face, where it was not covered by his prophetic white beard, had become very red with ill-suppressed indignation, ‘you won’t persuade me out of my conviction that these are not the most healthy surroundings for a young fellow like Hovenden at the most impressionable period of his life. Be as paradoxical and ingenious as you like: you will not persuade me, I repeat.’

‘No need to repeat, I assure you,’ said Mr. Cardan, shaking his head. ‘Did you think I ever supposed I could persuade you? You don’t imagine I’d waste my time trying to persuade a full-grown man with fixed opinions of the truth of something he doesn’t already believe? If you were twelve years old, even if you were twenty, I might try. But at your age — no, no.’

‘Then why do you argue, if you don’t want to persuade?’ asked Mr. Falx.

‘For the sake of argument,’ Mr. Cardan replied, ‘and because one must murder the time somehow.’

Come ingannar questi noiosi e lenti  
Giorni di vita cui si lungo tedio  
E fastidio insoffribile accompagna  
Or io t’insegnerò.

I could write a better handbook of the art than old Parini.’

‘I’m sorry,’ said Mr. Falx, ‘but I don’t know Italian.’

‘Nor should I,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘if I had your unbounded resources for killing time. Unhappily, I was born without much zeal for the welfare of the working classes.’

‘Working classes . . .’ Mr. Falx swooped down on the words. Passionately he began to talk. What was that text, thought Mr. Cardan, about the measure with which ye mete? How fearfully applicable it was! For the last ten minutes he’d been boring poor old Mr. Falx. And now Mr. Falx had turned round and was paying him back with his own measure — but, oh Lord, pressed down and, heaven help us! running over. He looked down over the balustrade. On the lower terraces the couples were still parading

up and down. He wondered what they were saying; he wished he were down there to listen. Boomingly, Mr. Falx played his prophetic part.

## Chapter III

IT WAS A pity that Mr. Cardan could not hear what his hostess was saying. He would have been delighted; she was talking about herself. It was a subject on which he specially loved to hear her. There were few people, he used to say, whose Authorized Version of themselves differed so strikingly from that Revised, formed of them by others. It was not often, however, that she gave him a chance to compare them. With Mr. Cardan she was always a little shy; he had known her so long.

‘Sometimes,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle was saying, as she walked with Chelifer on the second of the three terraces, ‘sometimes I wish I were less sensitive. I feel everything so acutely — every slightest thing. It’s like being . . . like being . . .’ she fumbled in the air with groping fingers, feeling for the right word, ‘like being flayed,’ she concluded triumphantly, and looked at her companion.

Chelifer nodded sympathetically.

‘I’m so fearfully aware,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, ‘of other people’s thoughts and feelings. They don’t have to speak to make me know what they’ve got in their minds. I know it, I feel it just by seeing them.’

Chelifer wondered whether she felt what was going on in his mind. He ventured to doubt it. ‘A wonderful gift,’ he said.

‘But it has its disadvantages,’ insisted Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘For example, you can’t imagine how much I suffer when people round me are suffering, particularly if I feel myself in any way to blame. When I’m ill, it makes me miserable to think of servants and nurses and people having to sit up without sleep and run up and down stairs, all because of me. I know it’s rather stupid; but, do you know, my sympathy for them is so . . . so . . . profound, that it actually prevents me from getting well as quickly as I should. . . .’

‘Dreadful,’ said Chelifer in his polite, precise voice.

‘You’ve no idea how deeply all suffering affects me.’ She looked at him tenderly. ‘That day, that first day, when you fainted — you can’t imagine . . .’

‘I’m sorry it should have had such a disagreeable effect on you,’ said Chelifer.

‘You would have felt the same yourself — in the circumstances,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, uttering the last words in a significant tone.

Chelifer shook his head modestly. ‘I’m afraid,’ he answered, ‘I’m singularly stoical about other people’s sufferings.’

‘Why do you always speak against yourself?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle earnestly. ‘Why do you malign your own character? You know you’re not what you pretend to be. You pretend to be so much harder and dryer than you really are. Why do you?’

Chelifer smiled. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'it's to re-establish the universal average. So many people, you see, try to make themselves out softer and damper than they are. Don't they?'

Mrs. Aldwinkle ignored his question. 'But you,' she insisted, 'I want to know about you.' She stared into his face. Chelifer smiled and said nothing. 'You won't tell me?' she went on. 'But it doesn't matter. I know already. I have an intuition about people. It's because I'm so sensitive. I feel their character. I'm never wrong.'

'You're to be envied,' said Chelifer.

'It's no good thinking you can deceive me,' she went on. 'You can't. I understand you.' Chelifer sighed, inwardly; she had said that before, more than once. 'Shall I tell you what you are really like?'

'Do.'

'Well, to begin with,' she said, 'you're sensitive, just as sensitive as I am. I can see that in your face, in your actions. I can hear it when you speak. You can pretend to be hard and . . . and . . . armour-plated, but I . . .'

Wearily, but with patience, Chelifer listened. Mrs. Aldwinkle's hesitating voice, moving up and down from note to unrelated note, sounded in his ears. The words became blurred and vague. They lost their articulateness and sense. They were no more than the noise of the wind, a sound that accompanied, but did not interrupt his thoughts. Chelifer's thoughts, at the moment, were poetical. He was engaged in putting the finishing touches to a little 'Mythological Incident,' the idea of which had recently occurred to him and to which, during the last two days, he had been giving its definite form. Now it was finished; a little polishing, that was all it needed now.

Through the pale skeleton of woods  
Orion walks. The north wind lays  
Its cold lips to the twin steel flutes  
That are his gun and plays.  
Knee-deep he goes where, penny-wiser  
Than all his kind who steal and hoard,  
Year after year, some sylvan miser  
His copper wealth has stored.  
The Queen of Love and Beauty lays  
In neighbouring beechen aisles her baits —  
Bread-crumbs and the golden maize.  
Patiently she waits.  
And when the unwary pheasant comes  
To fill his painted maw with crumbs,  
Accurately the sporting Queen  
Takes aim. The bird has been.  
Secure, Orion walks her way.  
The Cyprian loads, presents, makes fire.  
He falls. 'Tis Venus all entire

Attached to her recumbent prey.

Chelifer repeated the verses to himself and was not displeased. The second stanza was a little too 'quaint,' perhaps; a little too — how should he put it? — too Walter-Crane's-picture-book. One might omit it altogether, perhaps; or substitute, if one could think of it, something more perfectly in harmony with the silver-age, allusive elegance of the rest. As for the last verse, that was really masterly. It gave Racine his *raison d'être*; if Racine had never existed, it would have been necessary to invent him, merely for the sake of those last lines.

He falls. 'Tis Venus all entire

Attached to her recumbent prey.

Chelifer lingered over them in ecstasy. He became aware, all at once, that Mrs. Aldwinkle was addressing herself to him more directly. From inharmoniously Aeolian, her voice became once more articulate.

'That's what you're like,' she was saying. 'Tell me I'm right. Say I understand you.'

'Perhaps,' said Chelifer, smiling.

Meanwhile, on the terrace below, Calamy and Miss Thriplow strolled at leisure. They were discussing a subject about which Miss Thriplow professed a special competence; it was — to speak in the language of the examination room — her Special Subject. They were discussing Life. 'Life's so wonderful,' Miss Thriplow was saying. 'Always. So rich, so gay. This morning, for instance, I woke up and the first thing I saw was a pigeon sitting on the window sill — a big fat grey pigeon with a captive rainbow pinned to his stomach.' (That phrase, peculiarly charming and felicitous, Miss Thriplow thought, had already been recorded for future reference in her note-books.) 'And then high up on the wall above the washstand there was a little black scorpion standing tail-upwards, looking quite unreal, like something out of the signs of the Zodiac. And then Eugenia came in to call me — think of having one's hot water brought by a maid called Eugenia to begin with! — and spent a quarter of an hour telling me about her fiancé. It seems that he's so dreadfully jealous. So should I be, if I were engaged to a pair of such rolling eyes. But think of all that happening before breakfast, just casually! What extravagance! But Life's so generous, so copious.' She turned a shining face to her companion.

Calamy looked down at her, through half-closed eyes, smiling, with that air of sleepy insolence, of indolent power, characteristic of him, especially in his relations with women. 'Generous!' he repeated. 'Yes, I should think it was. Pigeons before breakfast. And at breakfast it offers you.'

'As if I were a broiled kipper,' said Miss Thriplow, laughing.

But Calamy was not disturbed by her laughter. He continued to look at her between his puckered eyelids with the same steady insolence, the same certainty of power — a certainty so complete that he could afford to make no exertions; placidly, drowsily, he could await the inevitable triumph. He disquieted Miss Thriplow. That was why she liked him.

They strolled on. Fifteen days ago they could never have walked like this, two on a terrace, talking at leisure of Miss Thriplow's Special Subject. Their hostess would have put an end to any such rebellious attempt at independence in the most prompt and ruthless fashion. But since the arrival of Chelifer Mrs. Aldwinkle had been too much preoccupied with the affairs of her own heart to be able to take the slightest interest in the doings, the sayings, the comings and goings of her guests. Her gaoler's vigilance was relaxed. Her guests might talk together, might wander off alone or in couples, might say good-night when they pleased; Mrs. Aldwinkle did not care. So long as they did not interfere with Chelifer, they might do what they liked. *Fay ce que voudras* had become the rule in Cybo Malaspina's palace.

'I can never understand,' Miss Thriplow went on, meditatively pursuing her Special Subject, 'I can never understand how it is that everybody isn't happy — I mean fundamentally happy, underneath; for of course there's suffering, there's pain, there are a thousand reasons why one can't always be consciously happy, on the top, if you see what I mean. But fundamentally happy, underneath — how can any one help being that? Life's so extraordinary, so rich and beautiful — there's no excuse for not loving it always, even when one's consciously miserable. Don't you think so?' She was fairly carried away by her love of Life. She was young, she was ardent; she saw herself as a child who goes and turns head over heels, out of pure joy, in the perfumed haycocks. One could be as clever as one liked, but if one had that genuine love of Life it didn't matter; one was saved.

'I agree,' said Calamy. 'It's always worth living, even at the worst of times. And if one happens to be in love, it's really intoxicating.'

Miss Thriplow glanced at him. Calamy was walking with bent head, his eyes fixed on the ground. There was a faint smile on his lips; his eyelids were almost closed, as though he were too drowsy to keep them apart. Miss Thriplow felt annoyed. He made a remark like that and then didn't even take the trouble to look at her.

'I don't believe you've ever been in love,' she said.

'I can't remember ever having been out of it,' Calamy answered.

'Which is the same thing as saying that you've never really been in. Not really,' Miss Thriplow repeated. She knew what the real thing was like.

'And you?' asked Calamy.

Mary Thriplow did not answer. They took two or three turns in silence. It was a folly, Calamy was thinking. He wasn't really in love with the woman. It was a waste of time and there were other things far more important to be done, to be thought about. Other things. They loomed up enormously behind the distracting bustle of life, silently on the further side of the noise and chatter. But what were they? What was their form, their name, their meaning? Through the fluttering veil of movement it was impossible to do more than dimly guess; one might as well try to look at the stars through the London smoke. If one could stop the movement, or get away from it, then surely one would be able to see clearly the large and silent things beyond. But there was no stopping the movement and there was, somehow, no escaping from it. To check

it was impossible; and the gesture of escape was ludicrous. The only sensible thing to do was to go on in the usual way and ignore the things outside the world of noise. That was what Calamy tried to do. But he was conscious, none the less, that the things were still there. They were still calmly and immutably there, however much he might agitate himself and distractedly pretend to ignore them. Mutely they claimed attention. They had claimed it, of late, with a most irritating persistence. Calamy's response had been to make love to Mary Thriplow. That was something which ought to keep him well occupied. And up to a point it did. Up to a point. The best indoor sport, old Cardan had called it; but one demanded something better. Could he go on like this? Or if not, what should he do? The questions exasperated him. It was because the things were there, outside the tumult, that he had to ask them. They forced themselves on him, those questions. But it was intolerable to be bullied. He refused to let himself be bullied. He'd do what he damned well liked. But then, did he really like philandering with Mary Thriplow? In a way, no doubt, up to a point. But the real answer was no; frankly, no. But yes, yes, he insisted with another part of his mind. He did like it. And even if he didn't, he'd damned well say that he did. And if necessary he'd damned well do what he didn't like — just because he chose to. He'd do what he didn't like; and that was the end of it. He worked himself up into a kind of fury.

'What are you thinking about?' Miss Thriplow suddenly asked.

'You,' he said; and there was a savage exasperation in his voice, as though he passionately resented the fact that he was thinking about Mary Thriplow.

'Tiens!' she said on a note of polite curiosity.

'What would you say if I told you I was in love with you?' he asked.

'I should say that I didn't believe you.'

'Do you want me to compel you to believe?'

'I'd be most interested to know, at any rate, how you proposed to set about it.'

Calamy halted, put his hand on Mary Thriplow's shoulder and turned her round towards him. 'By force, if necessary,' he said, looking into her face.

Miss Thriplow returned his stare. He looked insolent still, still arrogantly conscious of power; but all the drowsiness and indolence that had veiled his look were now fallen away, leaving his face bare, as it were, and burning with a formidable and satanic beauty. At the sight of this strange and sudden transformation Miss Thriplow felt at once exhilarated and rather frightened. She had never seen that expression on a man's face before. She had aroused passions, but never a passion so violent, so dangerous as this seemed to be.

'By force?' By the tone of her voice, by the mockery of her smile she tried to exasperate him into yet fiercer passion.

Calamy tightened his grip on her shoulder. Under his hand the bones felt small and fragile. When he spoke, he found that he had been clenching his teeth. 'By force,' he said. 'Like this.' And taking her head between his two hands he bent down and kissed her, angrily, again and again. Why do I do this? he was thinking. This is a folly. There are other things, important things. 'Do you believe me now?' he asked.



Mary Thriplow's face was flushed. 'You're insufferable,' she said. But she was not really angry with him.

## Chapter IV

'WHY HAVE YOU been so funny all these days?' Lord Hovenden had at last brought himself to put the long-premeditated question.

'Funny?' Irene echoed on another note, trying to make a joke of it, as though she didn't understand what he meant. But of course she did understand, perfectly well.

They were sitting in the thin luminous shadow of the olive trees. The bright sky looked down at them between the sparse two-coloured leaves. On the parched grass about the roots of the trees the sunlight scattered an innumerable golden mintage. They were sitting at the edge of a little terrace scooped out of the steep slope, their legs dangling, their backs propped against the trunk of a hoary tree.

'You know,' said Hovenden. 'Why did you suddenly avoid me?'

'Did I?'

'You know you did.'

Irene was silent for a moment before she admitted: 'Yes, perhaps I did.'

'But why,' he insisted, 'why?'

'I don't know,' she answered unhappily. She couldn't tell him about Aunt Lilian.

Her tone emboldened Lord Hovenden to become more insistent. 'You don't know?' he repeated sarcastically, as though he were a lawyer carrying out a cross-examination. 'Perhaps you were walking in your sleep all the time.'

'Don't be stupid,' she said in a weary little voice.

'At any rate, I'm not too stupid to see that you were running after that fellow Chelifer.' Lord Hovenden became quite red in the face as he spoke. For the sake of his manly dignity, it was a pity that his words should sound quite so childish.

Irene said nothing, but sat quite still, her head bent, looking down at the slanting grove of olives. Framed within the square-cut hair, her face was sad.

'If you were so much interested in him, why did you suggest that we should go for a walk this afternoon?' he asked. 'Perhaps you thought I was Chelifer.' He was possessed by an urgent desire to say disagreeable and hurting things. And yet he was perfectly aware, all the time, that he was making a fool of himself and being unfair to her. But the desire was irresistible.

'Why do you try to spoil everything?' she asked with an exasperating sadness and patience.

'I don't try to spoil anything,' Hovenden answered irritably. 'I merely ask a simple question.'

'You know I don't take the slightest interest in Chelifer,' she said.

'Then why do you trot after him all day long, like a little dog?'

The boy's stupidity and insistence began to annoy her. 'I don't,' she said angrily. 'And in any case it's no business of yours.'

'Oh, it's no business of mine, is it?' said Hovenden in a provocative voice. 'Fanks for ve information.' And he was pointedly silent.

For a long time neither of them spoke. Some dark brown sheep with bells round their necks came straying between the trees a little way down the slope. With set, sad faces the two young people looked at them. The bells made a tinkling as the creatures moved. The sweet thin noise sounded, for some reason, extremely sad in their ears. Sad, too, was the bright sky between the leaves; profoundly melancholy the redder, richer light of the declining sun, colouring the silver leaves, the grey trunks, the parched thin grass. It was Hovenden who at last broke silence. His anger, his desire to say hurting, disagreeable things had utterly evaporated; there remained only the conviction that he had made a fool of himself and been unfair — only that and the profound aching love which had given his anger, his foolish cruel desire such force. 'You know I don't take the slightest interest in Chelifer.' He hadn't known but now that she had said so, and in that tone of voice, now he knew. One couldn't doubt; and even if one could, was it worth doubting?

'Look here,' he said at last, in a muffled voice, 'I made a fool of myself, I'm afraid. I've said stupid things. I'm sorry, Irene. Will you forgive me?'

Irene turned towards him the little square window in her hair. Her face looked out of it smiling. She gave him her hand. 'One day I'll tell you,' she said.

They sat there hand in hand for what seemed to them at once a very long time and a timeless instant. They said nothing, but they were very happy. The sun set. A grey half-night came creeping in under the trees. Between the black silhouetted leaves the sky looked exceedingly pale. Irene sighed.

'I think we ought to be getting back,' she said reluctantly.

Hovenden was the first to scramble to his feet. He offered Irene his hand. She took it and raised herself lightly up, coming forward as she rose towards him. They stood for a moment very close together. Lord Hovenden suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her again and again. Irene uttered a cry. She struggled, she pushed him away.

'No, no,' she entreated, averting her face, leaning back, away from his kisses. 'Please.' And when he let her go, she covered her face with her hands and began to cry. 'Why did you spoil it again?' she asked through her tears. Lord Hovenden was overwhelmed with remorse. 'We'd been so happy, such friends.' Irene dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief; but her voice still came sobbingly.

'I'm a brute,' said Hovenden; and he spoke with such a passion of self-condemnation that Irene couldn't help laughing. There was something positively comic about a repentance so sudden and whole-hearted.

'No, you're not a brute,' she said. Her sobs and her laughter were getting curiously mixed up together. 'You're a dear and I like you. So much, so much. But you mustn't do that, I don't know why. It spoils everything. I was a goose to cry. But somehow . .

.’ She shook her head. ‘I like you so much,’ she repeated. ‘But not like that. Not now. Some day, perhaps. Not now. You won’t spoil it again? Promise.’

Lord Hovenden promised devoutly. They walked home through the grey night of the olive orchard.

That evening at dinner the conversation turned on feminism. Under pressure from Mr. Cardan, Mrs. Aldwinkle reluctantly admitted that there was a considerable difference between Maud Valerie White and Beethoven and that Angelica Kauffmann compared unfavourably with Giotto. But she protested, on the other hand, that in matters of love women were, definitely, treated unfairly.

‘We claim all your freedom,’ she said dramatically.

Knowing that Aunt Lilian liked her to take part in the conversation, and remembering — for she had a good memory — a phrase that her aunt used at one time to employ frequently, but which had recently faded out of the catalogue of her favourite locutions, Irene gravely brought it out. ‘Contraception,’ she pronounced, ‘has rendered chastity superfluous.’

Mr. Cardan leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter.

But across the prophetic face of Mr. Falx there passed a pained expression. He looked anxiously at his pupil, hoping that he had not heard, or at least had not understood what had just been said. He caught Mr. Cardan’s winking eye and frowned. Could corruption and moral laxity go further? his glance seemed to inquire. He looked at Irene; that such a youthful, innocent appearance should be wedded to so corrupt a mind appalled him. He felt glad, for Hovenden’s sake, that their stay in this bad house was not to last much longer. If it were not for the necessity of behaving politely, he would have left the place at once; like Lot, he would have shaken the dust of it from his feet.

## Chapter V

‘WHEN THE BUTCHER’S boy tells you in confidence, and with an eye to a tip, that the grocer’s brother has a very fine piece of very old sculpture which he is prepared to part with for a moderate consideration, what do you suppose he means?’ Walking slowly up-hill among the olive trees, Mr. Cardan meditatively put the question.

‘I suppose he means what he says,’ said Miss Thriplow.

‘No doubt,’ said Mr. Cardan, halting for a moment to wipe his face, which shone, even though the sun came only slantingly through the thin foliage of the olive trees, with an excess of heat. Miss Thriplow in the green uniform of the musical comedy schoolgirl looked wonderfully cool and neat beside her unbuttoned companion. ‘But the point is this: what exactly is it that he says? What is a butcher’s boy likely to mean when he says that a piece of sculpture is very beautiful and very old?’ They resumed their climbing. Below them, through a gap in the trees, they could see the

roofs and the slender tower of the Cybo Malaspina palace, and below these again the dolls' village of Vezza, the map-like plain, the sea.

'I should ask him, if you want to know.' Miss Thriplow spoke rather tartly; it was not to talk of butchers' boys that she had accepted Mr. Cardan's invitation to go for a walk with him. She wanted to hear Mr. Cardan's views on life, literature and herself. He knew a thing or two, it seemed to her, about all these subjects. Too many things, and not exactly the right ones at that, about the last. Too many — it was precisely for that reason that Miss Thriplow liked to talk with him. Horrors always exercise a fascination. And now, after the prolonged silence, he was starting on butchers' boys.

'I have asked him,' said Mr. Cardan. 'But do you suppose there's anything intelligible to be got out of him? All I can gather is that the sculpture represents a man — not a whole man, part of a man, and that it's made of marble. Beyond that I can discover nothing.'

'Why do you want to discover?' asked Miss Thriplow.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'Alas,' he said, 'for sordid reasons. You remember what the poet wrote?

I have been in love, in debt and in drink  
This many and many a year;  
And these are three evils too great, one would think,  
For one poor mortal to bear.  
'Twas love that first drove me to drinking,  
And drinking first drove me to debt,  
And though I have struggled and struggled and strove,  
I cannot get out of them yet.  
There's nothing but money can cure me  
And ease me of all my pain;  
'Twill pay all my debts and remove all my lets,  
And my mistress who cannot endure me  
Will turn to and love me again,  
Will turn to and love me again.

There's a summary of a lifetime for you. One has no regrets, of course. But still, one does need cash — needs it the more, alas, the older one grows, and has less of it. What other reason, do you think, would send me sweating up this hill to talk with the village grocer about his brother's statuary?'

'You mean that you'd buy it if it were worth anything?'

'At the lowest possible price,' confirmed Mr. Cardan. 'And sell it at the highest. If I had ever adopted a profession,' he continued, 'I think it would have been art dealing. It has the charm of being more dishonest than almost any other form of licensed brigandage in existence. And dishonest, moreover, in a much more amusing way. Financiers, it is true, can swindle on a larger scale; but their swindling is mostly impersonal. You may ruin thousands of trusting investors; but you haven't the pleasure of knowing your victims. Whereas if you're an art dealer, your swindling, though less

extensive, is most amusingly personal. You meet your victims face to face and do them down. You take advantage of the ignorance or urgent poverty of the vendor to get the work for nothing. You then exploit the snobbery and the almost equally profound ignorance of the rich buyer to make him take the stuff off your hands at some fantastic price. What huge elation one must feel when one has succeeded in bringing off some splendid coup! bought a blackened panel from some decayed gentleman in need of a new suit, cleaned it up and sold it again to a rich snob who thinks that a collection and the reputation of being a patron of the ancient arts will give him a leg up in society — what vast Rabelaisian mirth! No, decidedly, if I were not Diogenes and idle, I would be Alexander, critic and dealer. A really gentlemanly profession.'

'Can you never be serious?' asked Miss Thriplow, who would have preferred the conversation to turn on something more nearly related to her own problems.

Mr. Cardan smiled at her. 'Can anybody fail to be serious when it's a question of making money?'

'I give you up,' said Miss Thriplow.

'I'm sorry,' Mr. Cardan protested. 'But perhaps it's all for the best. Meanwhile, what about that butcher's boy? What does he mean by a bit of very old sculpture? Is it the head of some rich Etruscan cheese-monger of Lunae that they've dug up? Some long-nosed primitive oriental with a smile of imbecile rapture on his face? Or a fragment of one of his Hellenized posterity, reclining on the lid of his sarcophagus as though along his prandial couch and staring blankly out of a head that might, if Praxiteles had carved it, have been Apollo's, but which the Etruscan mason has fattened into an all too human grossness? Or perhaps it's a Roman bust, so thoroughly real, life-like and up-to-date that, but for the toga, we might almost take it for our old friend Sir William Midrash, the eminent civil servant. Or perhaps — and I should like that better — perhaps it dates from that strange, grey Christian dawn that followed the savage night into which the empire went down. I can imagine some fragment from Modena or Toscanella — some odd, unpredictable figure bent by excess of faith into the most profoundly expressive and symbolic of attitudes: a monster physically, a barbarism, a little mumbo-jumbo, but glowing so passionately with inward life — it may be lovely, it may be malignant — that it is impossible to look at it with indifference or merely as a shape, ugly or beautiful. Yes. I should like the thing to be a piece of Romanesque carving. I'd give the butcher's boy an extra five francs if it were. But if it turned out to be one of those suave Italian Gothic saints elegantly draped and leaning a little sideways, like saplings in the mystical breeze — and it might be, you never can tell — I'd deduct five francs. Not but what it mightn't fetch just as much in the American market. But how they bore me, those accomplished Gothicisms, how they bore me!'

They were at the top of the hill. Emerging from the sloping forest of olive trees, the road now ran along a bare and almost level ridge. Some little way off, where the ground began to rise once more towards further heights, one could see a cluster of houses and a church tower. Mr. Cardan pointed.

‘There,’ he said, ‘we shall find out what the butcher’s boy really did mean. But in the meantime it’s amusing to go on speculating. For example, suppose it were a chunk of a bas-relief designed by Giotto. Eh? Something so grand, so spiritually and materially beautiful that you could fall down and worship it. But I’d be very well pleased, I assure you, with a bit of a sarcophagus from the earliest renaissance. Some figure marvellously bright, ethereal and pure, like an angel, but an angel, not of the kingdom of heaven; an angel of some splendid and, alas, imaginary kingdom of earth. Ah,’ pursued Mr. Cardan, shaking his head, ‘that’s the kingdom one would like to live in — the kingdom of ancient Greece, purged of every historical Greek that ever existed, and colonized out of the imaginations of modern artists, scholars and philosophers. In such a world one might live positively, so to speak — live with the stream, in the direction of the main current — not negatively, as one has to now, in reaction against the general trend of existence.’

Positive and negative living. Miss Thriplow made a mental note of the notions. It might be an idea to work up in an article. It might even throw light on her own problems. Perhaps what one suffered from was the sense of being negative and in reaction. More positiveness — that was what one needed. The conversation, she thought, seemed to be growing more serious. They walked on for a moment in silence. Mr. Cardan broke it at last.

‘Or can it possibly be,’ he said, ‘that the grocer’s brother has lighted on some fragmentary rough-hewing by Michelangelo, begun in a frenzy while he was living among these mountains and abandoned when he left them? Some tormented Slave, struggling to free himself more of his inward than his outward chains; straining with more than human violence, but at the same time pensively, with a passion concentrated upon itself instead of explosively dissipated, as in the baroque, which all too fatally and easily developed out of him? And after all our hopes and speculations, that’s what my treasure will probably resolve itself into — a bit of seventeenth-century baroque. I picture the torso of a waltzing angel in the middle of a whirlwind of draperies turning up to heaven the ecstatic eye of the clergyman in a Lyceum melodrama; or perhaps a Bacchus, dancing by a miracle of virtuosity on one marble leg, his mouth open in a tipsy laugh and the fingers of both hands splayed out to their fullest extent, just to show what can be done by a sculptor who knows his business; or the bust of a prince, prodigiously alive and characteristic, wearing a collar of Brussels lace imitated in stone down to the finest thread. The butcher’s boy kept on insisting that the thing was very beautiful as well as very old. And it’s obvious, now I come to think of it, that he’d really and sincerely like baroque and baroque only, just because it would be so familiar to him, because it would be just like everything he had been brought up to admire. For by some strange and malignant fate the Italians, once arrived at baroque, seem to have got stuck there. They are still up to the eyes in it. Consider their literature, their modern painting and architecture, their music — it’s all baroque. It gesticulates rhetorically, it struts across stages, it sobs and bawls in its efforts to show you how passionate it is. In the midst, like a huge great Jesuit church, stands d’Annunzio.’

‘I should have thought,’ said Miss Thriplow with barbed ingenuousness, ‘that you’d have liked that sort of elaboration and virtuosity. It’s “amusing” — isn’t that the word?’

‘True,’ answered Mr. Cardan, ‘I like being amused. But I demand from my art the added luxury of being moved. And, somehow, one can’t feel emotion about anything so furiously and consciously emotional as these baroque things. It’s not by making wild and passionate gestures that an artist can awake emotion in the spectator. It isn’t done that way. These seventeenth-century Italians tried to express passion by making use of passionate gestures. They only succeeded in producing something that either leaves us cold — though it may, as you say, amuse us — or which actually makes us laugh. Art which is to move its contemplator must itself be still; it is almost an aesthetic law. Passion must never be allowed to dissipate itself in wild splashings and boilings over. It must be shut up, so to speak, and compressed and moulded by the intellect. Concentrated within a calm, untroubled form, its strength will irresistibly move. Styles that protest too much are not fit for serious, tragical use. They are by nature suited to comedy, whose essence is exaggeration. That is why good romantic art is so rare. Romanticism, of which the seventeenth-century baroque style is a queer sub-species, makes violent gestures; it relies on violent contrasts of light and shade, on stage effects; it is ambitious to present you with emotion in the raw and palpitating form. That is to say, the romantic style is in essence a comic style. And, except in the hands of a few colossal geniuses, romantic art is, in point of historical fact, almost always comic. Think of all the hair-raising romances written during the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries; now that the novelty has worn off them, we perceive them for what they are — the broadest comedies. Even writers of a great and genuine talent were betrayed by the essentially comic nature of the style into being farcical when they meant to be romantically tragical. Balzac, for example, in a hundred serious passages; George Sand in all her earlier novels; Beddoes, when he tries to make his *Death’s Jest Book* particularly blood-curdling; Byron in *Cain*; de Musset in *Rolla*. And what prevents Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* from being a really great book is precisely the pseudo-Shakespearean idiom in which what are meant to be the most tragical passages are couched — an idiom to whose essential suitability to comedy the exceptional tragic successes of Shakespeare himself, of Marlowe and a few others has unfortunately blinded all their imitators. Moreover, if the romantic style is essentially fitted to comedy, it is also true, conversely, that the greatest comic works have been written in a romantic style. *Pantagruel* and the *Contes Drolatiques*; the conversation of Falstaff and Wilkins Micawber; Aristophanes’ *Frogs*; *Tristram Shandy*. And who will deny that the finest passages in Milton’s reverberating prose are precisely those where he is writing satirically and comically? A comic writer is a very large and copious man with a zest for all that is earthy, who unbuttons himself and lets himself freely go, following wherever his indefatigably romping spirit leads him. The unrestrained, exaggerated, wildly gesticulating manner which is the romantic manner exactly fulfils his need.’

Miss Thriplow listened with growing attention. This was serious; moreover, it seemed really to touch her own problems. In her new novel she had done her best to throw off the light satiric vestments in which, in the past, she had clothed her tenderesses; this time, she had decided to give the public her naked heart. Mr. Cardan was making her wonder whether she wasn't exposing it in too palpitating a manner.

'When you come to pictorial art,' Mr. Cardan went on, 'you find that seriousness and romanticism are even less frequently combined than in literature. The greatest triumphs of the nineteenth-century romantic style are to be found precisely among the comedians and the makers of grotesques. Daumier, for example, produced at once the most comic and the most violently romantic pictures ever made. And Doré, when he ceased from trying to paint serious pictures in the romantic style — with what involuntarily ludicrous results I leave you to recall to mind — and applied himself to illustrating *Don Quixote* and the *Contes Drolatiques* in the same romantic terms, Doré produced masterpieces. Indeed, the case of Doré quite clinches my argument. Here was a man who did precisely the same romantic things in both his serious and his comic works, and who succeeded in making what was meant to be sublime ludicrous and what was meant to be ludicrous sublime in its rich, extravagant, romantic grotesqueness.'

They had passed the outlying houses of the village and were walking slowly up its single, steep street.

'That's very true,' said Miss Thriplow pensively. She was wondering whether she oughtn't to tone down a little that description in her new novel of the agonies of the young wife when she discovers that her husband had been unfaithful to her. A dramatic moment, that. The young wife has just had her first baby — with infinite suffering — and now, still very frail, but infinitely happy, lies convalescent. The handsome young husband, whom she adores and who, she supposes, adores her, comes in with the afternoon post. He sits down by her bed, and putting the bunch of letters on the counterpane begins opening his correspondence. She opens hers too. Two boring notes. She tosses them aside. Without looking at the address, she opens another envelope, unfolds the sheet within and reads: 'Doodlums darling, I shall be waiting for you tomorrow evening in our love-nest. . . .' She looks at the envelope; it is addressed to her husband. Her feelings . . . Miss Thriplow wondered; yes, perhaps, in the light of what Mr. Cardan had been saying, the passage was a little too palpitating. Particularly that bit where the baby is brought in to be suckled. Miss Thriplow sighed; she'd read through the chapter critically when she got home.

'Well,' said Mr. Cardan, interrupting the course of her thoughts, 'here we are. It only remains to find out where the grocer lives, and to find out from the grocer where his brother lives, and to find out from the brother what his treasure is and how much he wants for it, and then to find some one to buy it for fifty thousand pounds — and we'll live happily ever after. What?'

He stopped a passing child and put his question. The child pointed up the street. They walked on.



At the door of his little shop sat the grocer, unoccupied at the moment, taking the sun and air and looking on at such stray drops from the flux of life as trickled occasionally along the village street. He was a stout man with a large fleshy face that looked as though it had been squeezed perpendicularly, so broadly it bulged, so close to one another the horizontal lines of eyes, nose and mouth. His cheeks and chin were black with five days' beard — for to-day was Thursday and shaving-time only came round on Saturday evening. Small, sly, black eyes looked out from between pouchy lids. He had thick lips, and his teeth when he smiled were yellow. A long white apron, unexpectedly clean, was tied at neck and waist and fell down over his knees. It was the apron that struck Miss Thriplow's imagination — the apron and the thought that this man wore it, draped round him like an ephod, when he was cutting up ham and sausages, when he was serving out sugar with a little shovel. . . .

'How extraordinarily nice and jolly he looks!' she said enthusiastically, as they approached.

'Does he?' asked Mr. Cardan in some surprise. To his eyes the man looked like a hardly mitigated ruffian.

'So simple and happy and contented!' Miss Thriplow went on. 'One envies them their lives.' She could almost have wept over the little shovel — momentarily the masonic emblem of pre-lapsarian ingenuousness. 'We make everything so unnecessarily complicated for ourselves, don't we?'

'Do we?' said Mr. Cardan.

'These people have no doubts, or after-thoughts,' pursued Miss Thriplow, 'or — what's worse than after-thoughts — simultaneous-thoughts. They know what they want and what's right; they feel just what they ought to feel by nature — like the heroes in the Iliad — and act accordingly. And the result is, I believe, that they're much better than we are, much gooder, we used to say when we were children; the word's more expressive. Yes, much gooder. Now you're laughing at me!'

Mr. Cardan twinkled at her with benevolent irony. 'I assure you I'm not,' he declared.

'But I shouldn't mind if you were,' said Miss Thriplow. 'For after all, in spite of all that you people may say or think, it's the only thing that matters — being good.'

'I entirely agree,' said Mr. Cardan.

'And it's easier if you're like that.' She nodded in the direction of the white apron. Mr. Cardan nodded, a little dubiously.

'Sometimes,' Miss Thriplow continued, with a gush of confidence that made her words come more rapidly, 'sometimes, when I get on a bus and take my ticket from the conductor, I suddenly feel the tears come into my eyes at the thought of this life, so simple and straightforward, so easy to live well, even if it is a hard one — and perhaps, too, just because it is a hard one. Ours is so difficult.' She shook her head.

By this time they were within a few yards of the shopkeeper, who, seeing that they were proposing to enter his shop, rose from his seat at the door and darted in to take up his stand, professionally, behind the counter.

They followed him into the shop. It was dark within and filled with a violent smell of goat's milk cheese, pickled tunny, tomato preserve and highly flavoured sausage.

'Whee-ew!' said Miss Thriplow, and pulling out a small handkerchief, she took refuge with the ghost of Parma violets. It was a pity that these simple lives in white aprons had to be passed amid such surroundings.

'Rather deafening, eh?' said Mr. Cardan, twinkling. 'Puzza,' he added, turning to the shopkeeper. 'It stinks.'

The man looked at Miss Thriplow, who stood there, her nose in the oasis of her handkerchief, and smiled indulgently. 'I forestieri sono troppo delicati. Troppo delicati,' he repeated.

'He's quite right,' said Mr. Cardan. 'We are. In the end, I believe, we shall come to sacrifice everything to comfort and cleanliness. Personally, I always have the greatest suspicion of your perfectly hygienic and well-padded Utopias. As for this particular stink,' he sniffed the air, positively with relish, 'I don't really know what you have to object to it. It's wholesome, it's natural, it's tremendously historical. The shops of the Etruscan grocers, you may be sure, smelt just as this does. No, on the whole, I entirely agree with our friend here.'

'Still,' said Miss Thriplow, speaking in a muffled voice through the folds of her handkerchief, 'I shall stick to my violets. However synthetic.'

Having ordered a couple of glasses of wine, one of which he offered to the grocer, Mr. Cardan embarked on a diplomatic conversation about the object of his visit. At the mention of his brother and the sculpture, the grocer's face took on an expression of altogether excessive amiability. He bent his thick lips into smiles; deep folds in the shape of arcs of circles appeared in his fat cheeks. He kept bowing again and again. Every now and then he joyously laughed, emitting a blast of garlicky breath that smelt so powerfully like acetylene that one was tempted to put a match to his mouth in the hope that he would immediately break out into a bright white flame. He confirmed all that the butcher's boy had said. It was all quite true; he had a brother; and his brother had a piece of marble statuary that was beautiful and old, old, old. Unfortunately, however, his brother had removed from this village and had gone down to live in the plain, near the lake of Massaciuccoli, and the sculpture had gone with him. Mr. Cardan tried to find out from him what the work of art looked like; but he could gather nothing beyond the fact that it was beautiful and old and represented a man.

'It isn't like this, I suppose?' asked Mr. Cardan, bending himself into the attitude of a Romanesque demon and making a demoniac grimace.

The grocer thought not. Two peasant women who had come in for cheese and oil looked on with a mild astonishment. These foreigners . . .

'Or like this?' He propped his elbow on the counter and, half reclining, conjured up, by his attitude and his fixed smile of imbecile ecstasy, visions of Etruscan revelry.

Again the grocer shook his head.

'Or like this?' He rolled his eyes towards heaven, like a baroque saint.

But the grocer seemed doubtful even of this.

Mr. Cardan wiped his forehead. 'If I could make myself look like a Roman bust,' he said to Miss Thriplow, 'or a bas-relief of Giotto, or a renaissance sarcophagus, or an unfinished group by Michelangelo, I would. But it's beyond my powers.' He shook his head. 'For the moment I give it up.'

He took out his pocket-book and asked for the brother's address. The grocer gave directions; Mr. Cardan carefully took them down. Smiling and bowing, the grocer ushered them out into the street, Miss Thriplow veiled her handkerchief and drew a breath of air — redolent, however, even here, of organic chemistry.

'Patience,' said Mr. Cardan, 'tenacity of purpose. One needs them here.'

They walked slowly down the street. They had only gone a few yards when the noise of a violent altercation made them turn round. At the door of the shop the grocer and his two customers were furiously disputing. Voices were raised, the grocer's deep and harsh, the women's shrill; hands moved in violent and menacing gestures, yet gracefully withal, as was natural in the hands of those whose ancestors had taught the old masters of painting all they ever knew of expressive and harmonious movement.

'What is it?' asked Miss Thriplow. 'It looks like the preliminaries of a murder.'

Mr. Cardan smiled and shrugged his shoulders. 'It's nothing,' he said. 'They're just calling him a robber; that's all.' He listened for a moment more to the shouting. 'A little question of short weight, it seems.' He smiled at Miss Thriplow. 'Should we go on?'

They turned away; the sound of the dispute followed them down the street. Miss Thriplow did not know whether to be grateful to Mr. Cardan for saying nothing more about her friend in the white apron. These simple folk . . . the little shovel for the sugar . . . so much better, so much gooder than we. . . . In the end she almost wished that he would say something about it. Mr. Cardan's silence seemed more ironic than any words.

## Chapter VI

THE SUN HAD set. Against a pale green sky the blue and purple mountains lifted a jagged silhouette. Mr. Cardan found himself alone in the middle of the flat plain at their feet. He was standing on the bank of a broad ditch, brimming with gleaming water, that stretched away in a straight line apparently for miles across the land, to be lost in the vague twilight distance. Here and there a line of tall thin poplars marked the position of other dykes, intersecting the plain in all directions. There was not a house in sight, not a human being, not even a cow or a grazing donkey. Far away on the slopes of the mountains, whose blue and purple were rapidly darkening to a uniform deep indigo, little yellow lights began to appear, singly or in clusters, attesting the presence of a village or a solitary farm. Mr. Cardan looked at them with irritation;

very pretty, no doubt, but he had seen it done better on many musical comedy stages. And in any case, what was the good of a light six or seven miles away, on the hills, when he was standing in the middle of the plain, with nobody in sight, night coming on, and these horrible ditches to prevent one from taking the obvious bee-line towards civilization? He had been a fool, he reflected, three or four times over: a fool to refuse Lilian's offer of the car and go on foot (this fetish of exercise! still, he would certainly have to cut down his drinking if he didn't take it); a fool to have started so late in the afternoon; a fool to have accepted Italian estimates of distance; and a fool to have followed directions for finding the way given by people who mixed up left and right and, when you insisted on knowing which they meant, told you that either would bring you where you wanted to go. The path which Mr. Cardan had been following seemed to have come to a sudden end in the waters of this ditch; perhaps it was a suicides' path. The lake of Massaciuccoli should be somewhere on the further side of the ditch; but where? and how to get across? The twilight rapidly deepened. In a few minutes the sun would have gone down its full eighteen degrees below the horizon and it would be wholly dark. Mr. Cardan swore; but that got him no further. In the end he decided that the best thing to do would be to walk slowly and cautiously along this ditch, in the hope that in time one might arrive, at any rate somewhere. Meanwhile, it would be well to fortify oneself with a bite and a sup. He sat down on the grass and opening his jacket, dipped into the capacious poacher's pockets excavated in its lining, producing first a loaf, then a few inches of a long polony, then a bottle of red wine; Mr. Cardan was always prepared against emergencies.

The bread was stale, the sausage rather horsey and spiced with garlic; but Mr. Cardan, who had had no tea, ate with a relish. Still more appreciatively he drank. In a little while he felt a little more cheerful. Such are the little crosses, he reflected philosophically, the little crosses one has to bear when one sets out to earn money. If he got through the evening without falling into a ditch, he'd feel that he had paid lightly for his treasure. The greatest bore was these mosquitoes; he lighted a cigar and tried to fumigate them to a respectful distance. Without much success, however. Perhaps the brutes were malarial, too. There might be a little of the disease still hanging about in these marshes; one never knew. It would be tiresome to end one's days with recurrent fever and an enlarged spleen. It would be tiresome, for that matter, to end one's days anyhow, in one's bed or out, naturally or unnaturally, by the act of God or of the King's enemies. Mr. Cardan's thoughts took on, all at once, a dismal complexion. Old age, sickness, decrepitude; the bath-chair, the doctor, the bright efficient nurse; and the long agony, the struggle for breath, the thickening darkness, the end, and then — how did that merry little song go?

More work for the undertaker,  
'Nother little job for the coffin-maker.  
At the local cemetery they are  
Very very busy with a brand new grave.  
He'll keep warm next winter.

Mr. Cardan hummed the tune to himself cheerfully enough. But his tough, knobbly face became so hard, so strangely still, an expression of such bitterness, such a profound melancholy, appeared in his winking and his supercilious eye, that it would have startled and frightened a man to look at him. But there was nobody in that deepening twilight to see him. He sat there alone.

At the local cemetery they are

Very very busy with a brand new grave . .

He went on humming. 'If I were to fall sick,' he was thinking, 'who would look after me? Suppose one were to have a stroke. Hemorrhage on the brain; partial paralysis; mumbling speech; the tongue couldn't utter what the brain thought; one was fed like a baby; clysters; such a bright doctor, rubbing his hands and smelling of disinfectant and eau-de-Cologne; saw nobody but the nurse; no friends; or once a week, perhaps, for an hour, out of charity; 'Poor old Cardan, done for, I'm afraid; must send the old chap a fiver — hasn't a penny, you know; get up a subscription; what a bore; astonishing that he can last so long. . . .'

He'll keep warm next winter.

The tune ended on a kind of trumpet call, rising from the dominant to the tonic — one dominant, three repeated tonics, drop down again to the dominant and then on the final syllable of 'winter' the last tonic. Finis, and no da capo, no second movement.

Mr. Cardan took another swig from his bottle; it was nearly empty now.

Perhaps one ought to have married. Kitty, for example. She would be old now and fat; or old and thin, like a skeleton very imperfectly disguised. Still, he had been very much in love with Kitty. Perhaps it would have been a good thing if he had married her. Pooh! with a burst of mocking laughter Mr. Cardan laughed aloud savagely. Marry indeed! She looked very coy, no doubt; but you bet, she was a little tart underneath, and lascivious as you make them. He remembered her with hatred and contempt. Portentous obscenities reverberated through the chambers of his mind.

He thought of arthritis, he thought of gout, of cataract, of deafness. . . . And in any case, how many years were left him? Ten, fifteen, twenty if he were exceptional. And what years, what years!

Mr. Cardan emptied the bottle and replacing the cork threw it into the black water beneath him. The wine had done nothing to improve his mood. He wished to God he were back at the palace, with people round him to talk to. Alone, he was without defence. He tried to think of something lively and amusing; indoor sports, for example. But instead of indoor sports he found himself contemplating visions of disease, decrepitude, death. And it was the same when he tried to think of reasonable, serious things: what is art, for example? and what was the survival value to a species of eyes or wings or protective colouring in their rudimentary state, before they were developed far enough to see, fly or protect? Why should the individuals having the first and still quite useless variation in the direction of something useful have survived more effectively than those who were handicapped by no eccentricity? Absorbing themes. But Mr. Cardan couldn't keep his attention fixed on them. General paralysis of the insane,

he reflected, was luckily an ailment for which he had not qualified in the past; luckily! miraculously, even! But stone, but neuritis, but fatty degeneration, but diabetes. . . . Lord, how he wished he had somebody to talk to!

And all at once, as though in immediate answer to his prayer, he heard the sound of voices approaching through the now complete darkness. 'Thank the Lord!' said Mr. Cardan, and scrambling to his feet he walked in the direction from which the voices came. Two black silhouettes, one tall and masculine, the other, very small, belonging to a woman, loomed up out of the dark. Mr. Cardan removed the cigar from his mouth, took off his hat and bowed in their direction.

'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,' he began,  
'mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,  
che la diritta via era smarrita.'

How lucky that Dante should also have lost his way, six hundred and twenty-four years ago! 'In a word,' Mr. Cardan went on, 'ho perso la mia strada — though I have my doubts whether that's very idiomatic. Forse potrebbero darmi qualche indicazione.' In the presence of the strangers and at the sound of his own voice conversing, all Mr. Cardan's depression had vanished. He was delighted by the fantastic turn he had managed to give the conversation at its inception. Perhaps with a little ingenuity he would be able to find an excuse for treating them to a little Leopardi. It was so amusing to astonish the natives.

The two silhouettes, meanwhile, had halted at a little distance. When Mr. Cardan had finished his macaronic self-introduction, the taller of them answered in a harsh and, for a man's, a shrill voice: 'There's no need to talk Italian. We're English.'

'I'm enchanted to hear it,' Mr. Cardan protested. And he explained at length and in his mother tongue what had happened to him. It occurred to him, at the same time, that this was a very odd place to find a couple of English tourists.

The harsh voice spoke again. 'There's a path to Massarosa through the fields,' it said. 'And there's another, in the opposite direction, that joins the Viareggio road. But they're not very easy to find in the dark, and there are a lot of ditches.'

'One can but perish in the attempt,' said Mr. Cardan gallantly.

This time it was the woman who spoke. 'I think it would be better,' she said, 'if you slept at our house for the night. You'll never find the way. I almost tumbled into the ditch myself just now.' She laughed shrilly and more loudly, Mr. Cardan thought, at greater length, than was necessary.

'But have we room?' asked the man in a tone which showed that he was very reluctant to receive a guest.

'But you know we've got room,' the feminine voice answered in a tone of child-like astonishment. 'It's rough, though.'

'That doesn't matter in the least,' Mr. Cardan assured her. 'I'm most grateful to you for your offer,' he added, making haste to accept the invitation before the man could take it back. He had no desire to go wandering at night among these ditches.

Moreover, the prospect of having company, and odd company, he guessed, was alluring. 'Most grateful,' he repeated.

'Well, if you think there's room,' said the man grudgingly.

'Of course there is,' the feminine voice replied, and laughed again. 'Isn't it six spare rooms that we've got? or is it seven? Come with us, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .'

'Cardan.'

' . . . Mr. Cardan. We're going straight home. Such fun,' she added, and repeated her excessive laughter.

Mr. Cardan accompanied them, talking as agreeably as he could all the time. The man listened in a gloomy silence. But his sister — Mr. Cardan had discovered that they were brother and sister and that their name was Elver — laughed heartily at the end of each of Mr. Cardan's sentences, as though everything he said were a glorious joke; laughed extravagantly and then made some remark which showed that she could have had no idea what Mr. Cardan had meant. Mr. Cardan found himself making his conversation more and more elementary, until as they approached their destination it was frankly addressed to a child of ten.

'Here we are at last,' she said, as they emerged from the denser night of a little wood of poplar trees. In front of them rose the large square mass of a house, utterly black but for a single lighted window.

To the door, when they knocked, came an old woman with a candle. By its light Mr. Cardan saw his hosts for the first time. That the man was tall and thin he had seen even without the light; he revealed himself now as a stooping, hollow-chested creature of about forty, with long spidery legs and arms and a narrow yellow face, long-nosed, not too powerfully chinned, and lit by small and furtive grey eyes that looked mostly on the ground and seemed afraid of encountering other eyes. Mr. Cardan fancied there was something faintly clerical about his appearance. The man might be a broken-down clergyman — broken-down and possibly, when one considered the furtive eyes, unfrocked as well. He was dressed in a black suit, well cut and not old, but baggy at the knees and bulgy about the pockets of the coat. The nails of his long bony hands were rather dirty and his dark brown hair was too long above the ears and at the back of his neck.

Miss Elver was nearly a foot shorter than her brother; but she looked as though Nature had originally intended to make her nearly as tall. For her head was too large for her body and her legs too short. One shoulder was higher than the other. In face she somewhat resembled her brother. One saw in it the same long nose, but better shaped, the same weakness of chin; compensated for, however, by an amiable, ever-smiling mouth and large hazel eyes, not at all furtive or mistrustful, but on the contrary exceedingly confiding in their glance, albeit blank and watery in their brightness and not more expressive than the eyes of a young child. Her age, Mr. Cardan surmised, was twenty-eight or thirty. She wore a queer little shapeless dress, like a sack with holes in it for the head and arms to go through, made of some white material with a large design, that looked like an inferior version of the willow pattern, printed on it in bright

red. Round her neck she wore two or three sets of gaudy beads. There were bangles on her wrists, and she carried a little reticule made of woven gold chains.

Using gesture to supplement his scanty vocabulary, Mr. Elver gave instructions to the old woman. She left him the candle and went out. Holding the light high, he led the way from the hall into a large room. They sat down on hard uncomfortable chairs round the empty hearth.

‘Such an uncomfy house!’ said Miss Elver. ‘You know I don’t like Italy much.’

‘Dear, dear,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘That’s bad. Don’t you even like Venice? All the boats and gondolas?’ And meeting those blank infantile eyes, he felt that he might almost go on about there being no gee-gees. The cat is on the mat; the pig in the gig is a big pig; the lass on the ass a crass lass. And so on.

‘Venice?’ said Miss Elver. ‘I’ve not been there.’

‘Florence, then. Don’t you like Florence?’

‘Nor there, either.’

‘Rome? Naples?’

Miss Elver shook her head.

‘We’ve only been here,’ she said. ‘All the time.’

Her brother, who had been sitting, bent forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped in front of him, looking down at the floor, broke silence. ‘The fact is,’ he said in his harsh high voice, ‘my sister has to keep quiet; she’s doing a rest cure.’

‘Here?’ asked Mr. Cardan. ‘Doesn’t she find it a bit hot? Rather relaxing?’

‘Yes, it’s awfully hot, isn’t it?’ said Miss Elver. ‘I’m always telling Philip that.’

‘I should have thought you’d have been better at the sea, or in the mountains,’ said Mr. Cardan.

Mr. Elver shook his head. ‘The doctors,’ he said mysteriously, and did not go on.

‘And the risk of malaria?’

‘That’s all rot,’ said Mr. Elver, with so much violence, such indignation, that Mr. Cardan could only imagine that he was a landed proprietor in these parts and meant to develop his estate as a health resort.

‘Oh, of course it’s mostly been got rid of,’ he said mollifyingly. ‘The Maremma isn’t what it was.’

Mr. Elver said nothing, but scowled at the floor.

## Chapter VII

THE DINING-ROOM WAS also large and bare. Four candles burned on the long narrow table; their golden brightness faded in the remoter corners to faint twilight; the shadows were huge and black. Entering, Mr. Cardan could fancy himself Don Juan walking down to supper in the Commander’s vault.



Supper was at once dismal and exceedingly lively. While his sister chattered and laughed unceasingly with her guest, Mr. Elver preserved throughout the meal an unbroken silence. Gloomily he ate his way through the mixed and fragmentary meal which the old woman kept bringing in, relay after unexpected relay, on little dishes from the kitchen. Gloomily too, with the air of a weak man who drinks to give himself courage and the illusion of strength, he drank glass after glass of the strong red wine. He kept his eyes fixed most of the time on the table-cloth in front of his plate; but every now and then he would look up for a second to dart a glance at the other two — for a moment only, then, fearful of being caught in the act and looked at straight in the face, he turned away again.

Mr. Cardan enjoyed his supper. Not that the food was particularly good; it was not. The old woman was one of those inept practitioners of Italian cookery who disguise their short-comings under floods of tomato sauce, with a pinch of garlic thrown in to make the disguise impenetrable. No, what Mr. Cardan enjoyed was the company. It was a long time since he had sat down with such interesting specimens. One's range, he reflected, is altogether too narrowly limited. One doesn't know enough people; one's acquaintanceship isn't sufficiently diversified. Burglars, for example, millionaires, imbeciles, clergymen, Hottentots, sea captains — one's personal knowledge of these most interesting human species is quite absurdly small. To-night, it seemed to him, he was doing something to widen his range.

'I'm so glad we met you,' Miss Elver was saying. 'In the dark — such a start you gave me too!' She shrieked with laughter. 'We were getting so dull here. Weren't we, Phil?' She appealed to her brother; but Mr. Elver said nothing, did not even look up. 'So dull. I'm awfully glad you were there.'

'Not so glad as I am, I assure you,' said Mr. Cardan gallantly.

Miss Elver looked at him for a moment, coyly and confidentially; then putting up her hand to her face, as though she were screening herself from Mr. Cardan's gaze, she turned away, tittering. Her face became quite red. She peeped at him between her fingers and tittered again.

It occurred to Mr. Cardan that he'd be in for a breach of promise case very soon if he weren't careful. Tactfully he changed the subject; asked her what sort of food she liked best and learned that her favourites were strawberries, cream ice and mixed chocolates.

The dessert had been eaten. Mr. Elver suddenly looked up and said: 'Grace, I think you ought to go to bed.'

Miss Elver's face, from having been bright with laughter, became at once quite overcast. A film of tears floated up into her eyes, making them seem more lustrous; she looked at her brother appealingly. 'Must I go?' she said. 'Just this once!' She tried to coax him. 'This once!'

But Mr. Elver was not to be moved. 'No, no,' he said sternly. 'You must go.'

His sister sighed and made a little whimpering sound. But she got up, all the same, and walked obediently towards the door. She was almost on the threshold, when she

halted, turned and ran back to say good-night to Mr. Cardan. 'I'm so glad,' she said, 'that we found you. Such fun. Good-night. But you mustn't look at me like that.' She put up her hand again to her face. 'Oh, not like that.' And still giggling, she ran out of the room.

There was a long silence.

'Have some wine,' said Mr. Elver at last, and pushed the flask in Mr. Cardan's direction.

Mr. Cardan replenished his glass and then, politely, did the same for his host. Wine — it was the only thing that was likely to make this dismal devil talk. With his practised and professional eye, Mr. Cardan thought he could detect in his host's expression certain hardly perceptible symptoms of incipient tipsiness. A spidery creature like that, thought Mr. Cardan contemptuously, couldn't be expected to hold his liquor well; and he had been putting it down pretty steadily all through supper. A little more and, Mr. Cardan was confident, he'd be as clay in the hands of a sober interrogator (and Mr. Cardan could count on being sober for at least three bottles longer than a poor feeble creature like this); he'd talk, he'd talk; the only difficulty would be to get him to stop talking.

'Thanks,' said Mr. Elver, and gloomily gulped down the replenished glass.

That's the style, thought Mr. Cardan; and in his liveliest manner he began to tell the story of the grocer's brother's statue and of his pursuit of it, ending up with an account, already more florid than the previous version, of how he lost himself.

'I console myself superstitiously,' he concluded, 'by the reflection that fate wouldn't have put me to these little troubles and inconveniences if it weren't intending to do something handsome by me in the end. I'm paying in advance; but I trust I'm paying for something round and tidy. All the same, what a curse this hunt for money is!'

Mr. Elver nodded. 'It's the root of all evil,' he said, and emptied his glass. Unobtrusively Mr. Cardan replenished it.

'Quite right,' he confirmed. 'And it's twice cursed, if you'll allow me to play Portia for a moment: it curses him that hath — can you think of a single really rich person of your acquaintance who wouldn't be less avaricious, less tyrannous, self-indulgent and generally porkish if he didn't pay super-tax? And it also curses him that hath not, making him do all manner of absurd, humiliating, discreditable things which he'd never think of doing if the hedgerows grew breadfruit and bananas and grapes enough to keep one in free food and liquor.'

'It curses him that hath not the most,' said Mr. Elver with a sudden savage animation. This was a subject, evidently, on which he felt deeply. He looked sharply at Mr. Cardan for a moment, then turned away to dip his long nose once more in his tumbler.

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Cardan judicially. 'At any rate there are more complaints about this curse than about the other. Those that have not complain about their own fate. Those that have do not, it is only those in contact with them — and since the havers are few these too are few — who complain of the curse of having. In my time I have belonged to both categories. Once I had; and I can see that to my fellow men I must

then have been intolerable. Now' — Mr. Cardan drew a deep breath and blew it out between trumpeting lips, to indicate the way in which the money had gone— 'now I have not. The curse of insolence and avarice has been removed from me. But what low shifts, what abjections this not-having has, by compensation, reduced me to! Swindling peasants out of their artistic property, for example!'

'Ah, but that's not so bad,' cried Mr. Elver excitedly, 'as what I've had to do. That's nothing at all. You've never been an advertisement canvasser.'

'No,' Mr. Cardan admitted, 'I've never been an advertisement canvasser.'

'Then you can't know what the curse of not-having really is. You can't have an idea. You've no right to talk about the curse.' Mr. Elver's harsh, unsteady voice rose and fell excitedly as he talked. 'No right,' he repeated.

'Perhaps I haven't,' said Mr. Cardan mollifyingly. He took the opportunity to pour out some more wine for his host. Nobody has a right, he reflected, to be more miserable than we are. Each one of us is the most unhappily circumstanced creature in the world. Hence it's enormously to our credit that we bear up and get on as well as we do.

'Look here,' Mr. Elver went on confidentially, and he tried to look Mr. Cardan squarely in the face as he spoke; but the effort was too great and he had to avert his eyes; 'look here, let me tell you.' He leaned forward eagerly and slapped the table in front of where Mr. Cardan was sitting to emphasize what he was saying and to call his guest's attention to it. 'My father was a country parson,' he began, talking rapidly and excitedly. 'We were very poor — horribly. Not that he minded much: he used to read Dante all the time. That annoyed my mother — I don't know why. You know the smell of very plain cooking? Steamed puddings — the very thought of them makes me sick now.' He shuddered. 'There were four of us then. But my brother was killed in the war and my elder sister died of influenza. So now there's only me and the one you saw to-night.' He tapped his forehead. 'She never grew up, but got stuck somehow. A moron.' He laughed compassionlessly. 'Though I don't know why I need tell you that. For it's obvious enough, isn't it?'

Mr. Cardan said nothing. His host flinched away from his half-winking, half-supercilious gaze, and fortifying himself with another gulp of wine, which Mr. Cardan a moment later unobtrusively made good from the flask, went on:

'Four of us,' he repeated. 'You can imagine it wasn't easy for my father. And my mother died when we were still children. Still, he managed to send us to a rather shabby specimen of the right sort of school, and we'd have gone on to the university if we could have got scholarships. But we didn't.' At this Mr. Elver, on whom the wine seemed quite suddenly to be making its effect, laughed loudly, as though he had made a very good joke. 'So my brother went into an engineering firm, and it was just being arranged, at goodness knows what sort of a sacrifice, that I should be turned into a solicitor, when pop! my father falls down dead with heart failure. Well, he was all right rambling about the Paradiso. But I had to scramble into the nearest job available. That was how I came to be an advertisement canvasser. Oh Lord!' He put his hand over his eyes, as though to shut out some disgusting vision. 'Talk of the curse of not-

having! For a monthly magazine it was — the sort of one with masses of little ads for indigestion cures; and electric belts to make you strong; and art by correspondence; and Why Wear a Truss? and superfluous hair-killers; and pills to enlarge the female figure; and labour-saving washing machines on the instalment system; and Learn to Play the Piano without Practising; and thirty-six reproductions of nudes from the Paris Salon for five bob; and drink cures in plain wrapper, strictly confidential, and all the rest. There were hundreds and hundreds of small advertisers. I used to spend all my days running round to shops and offices, cajoling old advertisers to renew or fishing for new ones. And, God! how horrible it was! Worming one's way in to see people who didn't want to see one and to whom one was only a nuisance, a sort of tiresome beggar on the hunt for money. How polite one had to be to insolent underlings, strong in their office and only too delighted to have an opportunity to play the bully in their turn! And then there was that terrible cheerful, frank, manly manner one had to keep up all the time. The "I put it to you, sir," straight from the shoulder business; the persuasive honesty, the earnestness and the frightful pretence one had to keep up so strenuously and continuously that one believed in what one was talking about, thought the old magazine a splendid proposition and regarded the inventor of advertisements as the greatest benefactor the human race has ever known. And what a presence one had to have! I could never achieve a presence, somehow. I could never even look neat. And you had to try and impress the devils as a keen, competent salesman. God, it was awful! And the way some of them would treat you. As the damndest bore in the world — that was the best you could hope. But sometimes they treated you as a robber and a swindler. It was your fault if an insufficient number of imbeciles hadn't bought galvanic belly bands or learned to play like Busoni without practising. It was your fault; and they'd fly in a rage and curse at you, and you had to be courteous and cheery and tactful and always enthusiastic in the face of it. Good Lord, is there anything more horrible than having to face an angry man? I don't know why, but it's somehow so profoundly humiliating to take part in a squabble, even when one's the aggressor. One feels afterwards that one's no better than a dog. But when one's the victim of somebody else's anger — that's awful. That's simply awful,' he repeated, and brought his hand with a clap on to the table to emphasize his words. 'I'm not built for that sort of thing. I'm not a bully or a fighter. They used to make me almost ill, those scenes. I couldn't sleep, thinking of them — remembering those that were past and looking forward with terror to the ones that were coming. People talk about Dostoevsky's feelings when he was marched out into the barrack square, tied to a post with the firing party lined up in front of him, and then, at the very last second, when his eyes were already bandaged, reprieved. But I tell you I used to go through his experiences half a dozen times a day, nerving myself to face some inevitable interview, the very thought of which made me sick with apprehension. And for me there was no reprieve. The execution was gone through with, to the very end. Good Lord, how often I've hesitated at the door of some old bully's office, all in a bloody sweat, hesitating to cross the threshold. How often I've turned back at the last moment and turned into a

pub for a nip of brandy to steady my nerves, or gone to a chemist for a pick-me-up! You can't imagine what I suffered then!' He emptied his glass, as though to drown the rising horror. 'Nobody can imagine,' he repeated, and his voice quivered with the anguish of his self-pity. 'And then how little one got in return! One suffered daily torture for the privilege of being hardly able to live. And all the things one might have done, if one had had capital! To know for an absolute certainty that — given ten thousand — one could turn them into a hundred thousand in two years; to have the whole plan worked out down to its smallest details, to have thought out exactly how one would live when one was rich, and meanwhile to go on living in poverty and squalor and slavery — that's the curse of not-having. That's what I suffered.' Overcome by wine and emotion, Mr. Elver burst into tears.

Mr. Cardan patted him on the shoulder. He was too tactful to offer the philosophical consolation that such suffering is the lot of nine-tenths of the human race. Mr. Elver, he could see, would never have forgiven such a denial of his dolorous uniqueness. 'You must have courage,' said Mr. Cardan, and pressing the glass into Mr. Elver's hand he added: 'Drink some of this. It'll do you good.'

Mr. Elver drank and wiped his eyes. 'But I'll make them smart for it one day,' he said, banging the table with his fist. The violent self-pity of a moment ago transformed itself into an equally violent anger. 'I'll make them all pay for what I suffered. When I'm rich.'

'That's the spirit,' said Mr. Cardan encouragingly.

'Thirteen years of it I had,' Mr. Elver went on. 'And two and a half years during the war, dressed in uniform and filling up forms in a wooden hut at Leeds; but that was better than touting for advertisements. Thirteen years. Penal servitude with torture. But I'll pay them, I'll pay them.' He banged the table again.

'Still,' said Mr. Cardan, 'you seem to have got out of it now all right. Living here in Italy is a sign of freedom; at least I hope so.'

At these words Mr. Elver's anger against 'them' suddenly dropped. His face took on a mysterious and knowing expression. He smiled to himself what was meant to be a dark, secret and satanic smile, a smile that should be all but imperceptible to the acutest eye. But he found, in his tipsiness, that the smile was growing uncontrollably broader and broader; he wanted to grin, to laugh aloud. Not that what he was secretly thinking about was at all funny; it was not, at any rate when he was sober. But now the whole world seemed to swim in a bubbly sea of hilarity. Moreover, the muscles of his face, when he started to smile satanically, had all at once got out of hand and were insisting on expanding what should have been the expression of Lucifer's darkest and most fearful thoughts into a bumpkin's grin. Hastily Mr. Elver extinguished his face in his glass, in the hope of concealing from his guest that rebellious smile. He emerged again choking. Mr. Cardan had to pat him on the back. When it was all over, Mr. Elver reassumed his mysterious expression and nodded significantly. 'Perhaps,' he said darkly, not so much in response to anything Mr. Cardan had said as on general

principles, so to speak, and to indicate that the whole situation was in the last degree dubious, dark and contingent — contingent on a whole chain of further contingencies.

Mr. Cardan's curiosity was roused by the spectacle of this queer pantomime; he refilled his host's glass. 'Still,' he insisted, 'if you hadn't freed yourself, how would you be staying here—' in this horrible marsh, he had almost added; but he checked himself and said 'in Italy' instead.

The other shook his head. 'I can't tell you,' he said darkly, and again the satanic smile threatened to enlarge itself to imbecility.

Mr. Cardan relapsed into silence, content to wait. From the expression on Mr. Elver's face he could see that the effort of keeping a secret would be, for his host, intolerably great. The fruit must be left to ripen of itself. He said nothing and looked pensively into one of the dark corners of the tomb-like chamber as though occupied with his own thoughts.

Mr. Elver sat hunched up in his chair, frowning at the table in front of him. Every now and then he took a sip of wine. Tipsily mutable, his mood changed all at once from hilarious to profoundly gloomy. The silence, the darkness funereally tempered by the four unwavering candles, worked on his mind. What a moment since had seemed an uproarious joke now presented itself to his thoughts as appalling. He felt a great need to unburden himself, to transfer responsibilities on to other shoulders, to get advice that should confirm him in his course. Furtively, for a glimpse only, he looked at his guest. How abstractedly and regardlessly he was staring into vacancy! Not a thought, no sympathy for poor Philip Elver. Ah, if he only knew. . . .

He broke silence at last. 'Tell me,' he said abruptly, and it seemed to his drunken mind that he was displaying an incredible subtlety in his method of approaching the subject; 'do you believe in vivisection?'

Mr. Cardan was surprised by the question. 'Believe in it?' he echoed. 'I don't quite know how one can believe in vivisection. I think it useful, if that's what you mean.'

'You don't think it's wrong?'

'No,' said Mr. Cardan.

'You think it doesn't matter cutting up animals?'

'Not if the cutting serves some useful human purpose.'

'You don't think animals have got rights?' pursued Mr. Elver with a clarity and tenacity that, in a drunken man, surprised Mr. Cardan. This was a subject, it was clear, on which Mr. Elver must long have meditated. 'Just like human beings?'

'No,' said Mr. Cardan. 'I'm not one of those fools who think that one life is as good as another, simply because it is a life; that a grasshopper is as good as a dog and a dog as good as a man. You must recognize a hierarchy of existences.'

'A hierarchy,' exclaimed Mr. Elver, delighted with the word, 'a hierarchy — that's it. That's exactly it. A hierarchy. And among human beings too?' he added.

'Yes, of course,' Mr. Cardan affirmed. 'The life of the soldier who killed Archimedes isn't worth the life of Archimedes. It's the fundamental fallacy of democracy and humanitarian Christianity to suppose that it is. Though of course,' Mr. Cardan added

pensively, 'one has no justifying reason for saying so, but only one's instinctive taste. For the soldier, after all, may have been a good husband and father, may have spent the non-professional, unsoldierly portions of his life in turning the left cheek and making two blades of grass grow where only one grew before. If, like Tolstoy, your tastes run to good fatherhood, left cheeks and agriculture, then you'll say that the life of the soldier is worth just as much as the life of Archimedes — much more, indeed; for Archimedes was a mere geometrician, who occupied himself with lines and angles, curves and surfaces, instead of with good and evil, husbandry and religion. But if, on the contrary, one's tastes are of a more intellectual cast, then one will think as I think — that the life of Archimedes is worth the lives of several billion of even the most amiable soldiers. But as for saying which point of view is right—' Mr. Cardan shrugged his shoulders. 'Partner, I leave it to you.'

Mr. Elver seemed rather disappointed by the inconclusive turn that his guest's discourse had taken. 'But still,' he insisted, 'it's obvious that a wise man's better than a fool. There is a hierarchy.'

'Well, I personally should say there was,' said Mr. Cardan. 'But I can't speak for others.' He saw that he had been carried away by the pleasures of speculation into saying things his host did not want to hear. To almost all men, even when they are sober, a suspense of judgment is extraordinarily distasteful. And Mr. Elver was far from sober; moreover, Mr. Cardan began to suspect, this philosophic conversation was a tortuous introduction to personal confidences. If one wanted the confidences one must agree with the would-be confider's opinion. That was obvious.

'Good,' said Mr. Elver. 'Then you'll admit that an intelligent man is worth more than an imbecile, a moron; ha ha, a moron. . . .' And at this word he burst into violent and savage laughter, which, becoming more and more extravagant as it prolonged itself, turned at last into an uncontrollable screaming and sobbing.

His chair turned sideways to the table, his legs crossed, the fingers of one hand playing caressingly with his wine glass, the other manipulating his cigar, Mr. Cardan looked on, while his host, the tears streaming down his cheeks, his narrow face distorted almost out of recognition, laughed and sobbed, now throwing himself back in his chair, now covering his face with his hands, now bending forward over the table to rest his forehead on his arms, while his whole body shook and shook with the repeated and uncontrollable spasms. A disgusting sight, thought Mr. Cardan; and a disgusting specimen too. He began to have an inkling of what the fellow was up to. Translate 'intelligent man' and 'moron' into 'me' and 'my sister' — for the general, the philosophical in any man's conversation must always be converted into the particular and personal if you want to understand him — interpret in personal terms what he had said about vivisection, animal rights and the human hierarchy, and there appeared, as the plain transliteration of the cipher — what? Something that looked exceedingly villainous, thought Mr. Cardan.

'Then I suppose,' he said in a very cool and level voice, when the other had begun to recover from his fit, 'I suppose it's your sister who has the liberating cash.'

Mr. Elver glanced at him, with an expression of surprise, almost of alarm, on his face. His eyes wavered away from Mr. Cardan's steady, genial gaze. He took refuge in his tumbler. 'Yes,' he said, when he had taken a gulp. 'How did you guess?'

Mr. Cardan shrugged his shoulders. 'Purely at random,' he said.

'After my father died,' Mr. Elver explained, 'she went to live with her godmother, who was the old lady at the big house in our parish. A nasty old woman she was. But she took to Grace, she kind of adopted her. When the old bird died at the beginning of this year, Grace found she'd been left twenty-five thousand.'

For all comment, Mr. Cardan clicked his tongue against his palate and slightly raised his eyebrows.

'Twenty-five thousand,' the other repeated. 'A half-wit, a moron! What can she do with it?'

'She can take you to Italy,' Mr. Cardan suggested.

'Oh, of course we can live on the interest all right,' said Mr. Elver contemptuously. 'But when I think how I could multiply it.' He leaned forward eagerly, looking into Mr. Cardan's face for a second, then the shifty grey eyes moved away and fixed themselves on one of the buttons of Mr. Cardan's coat, from which they would occasionally dart upwards again to reconnoitre and return. 'I've worked it out, you see,' he began, talking so quickly that the words tumbled over one another and became almost incoherent. 'The Trade Cycle. . . . I can prophesy exactly what'll happen at any given moment. For instance . . .' He rambled on in a series of complicated explanations.

'Well, if you're as certain as all that,' said Mr. Cardan when he had finished, 'why don't you get your sister to lend you the money?'

'Why not?' Mr. Elver repeated gloomily and leaned back again in his chair. 'Because that blasted old hag had the capital tied up. It can't be touched.'

'Perhaps she lacked faith in the Trade Cycle,' Mr. Cardan suggested.

'God rot her!' said the other fervently. 'And when I think of what I'd do with the money when I'd made really a lot. Science, art . . .'

'Not to mention revenge on your old acquaintances,' said Mr. Cardan, cutting him short. 'You've worked out the whole programme?'

'Everything,' said Mr. Elver. 'There'd never have been anything like it. And now this damned fool of an old woman goes and gives the money to her pet moron and makes it impossible for me to touch it.' He ground his teeth with rage and disgust.

'But if your sister were to die unmarried,' said Mr. Cardan, 'the money, I suppose, would be yours.'

The other nodded.

'It's a very hierarchical question, certainly,' said Mr. Cardan. In the vault-like room there was a prolonged silence.

Mr. Elver had reached the final stage of intoxication. Almost suddenly he began to feel weak, profoundly weary and rather ill. Anger, hilarity, the sense of satanic power — all had left him. He desired only to go to bed as soon as possible; at the same time he doubted his capacity to get there. He shut his eyes.



Mr. Cardan looked at the limp and sodden figure with an expert's eye, scientifically observing it. It was clear to him that the creature would volunteer no more; that it had come to a state when it could hardly think of anything but the gradually mounting nausea within it. It was time to change tactics. He leaned forward, and tapping his host's arm launched a direct attack.

'So you brought the poor girl here to get rid of her,' he said.

Mr. Elver opened his eyes and flashed at his tormentor a hunted and terrified look. His face became very pale. He turned away. 'No, no, not that.' His voice had sunk to an unsteady whisper.

'Not that?' Mr. Cardan echoed scornfully. 'But it's obvious. And you've as good as been telling me so for the last half-hour.'

Mr. Elver could only go on whispering: 'No.'

Mr. Cardan ignored the denial. 'How did you propose to do it?' he asked. 'It's always risky, whatever way you choose, and I shouldn't put you down as being particularly courageous. How, how?'

The other shook his head.

Mr. Cardan insisted, ruthlessly. 'Ratsbane?' he queried. 'Steel? — no, you wouldn't have the guts for that. Or did you mean that she should tumble by accident into one of those convenient ditches?'

'No, no. No.'

'But I insist on being told,' said Mr. Cardan truculently, and he thumped the table till the reflections of the candles in the brimming glasses quivered and rocked.

Mr. Elver put his face in his hands and burst into tears. 'You're a bully,' he sobbed, 'a dirty bully, like all the rest.'

'Come, come,' Mr. Cardan protested encouragingly. 'Don't take it so hardly. I'm sorry I upset you. You mustn't think,' he added, 'that I have any of the vulgar prejudices about this affair. I'm not condemning you. Far from it. I don't want to use your answers against you. I merely ask out of curiosity — pure curiosity. Cheer up, cheer up. Try a little more wine.'

But Mr. Elver was feeling too deplorably sick to be able to think of wine without horror. He refused it, shuddering. 'I didn't mean to do anything,' he whispered. 'I meant it just to happen.'

'Just to happen? Yours must be a very hopeful nature,' said Mr. Cardan.

'It's in Dante, you know. My father brought us up on Dante; I loathed the stuff,' he added, as though it had been castor oil. 'But things stuck in my mind. Do you remember the woman who tells how she died: "Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma"? Her husband shut her up in a castle in the Maremma and she died of fever. Do you remember?'

Mr. Cardan nodded.

'That was the idea. I had the quinine: I've been taking ten grains a day ever since I arrived — for safety's sake. But there doesn't seem to be any fever here nowadays,' Mr. Elver added. 'We've been here nine weeks. . . .'

‘And nothing’s happened!’ Mr. Cardan leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter. ‘Well, the moral of that,’ he added, when he had breath enough to begin talking again, ‘the moral of that is: See that your authorities are up to date.’

But Mr. Elver was past seeing a joke. He got up from his chair and stood unsteadily, supporting himself with a hand on the table. ‘Would you mind helping me to my room?’ he faintly begged. ‘I don’t feel very well.’

Mr. Cardan helped him first into the garden. ‘You ought to learn to carry your liquor more securely,’ he said, when the worst was over. ‘That’s another of the evening’s morals.’

When he had lighted his host to bed, Mr. Cardan went to his appointed room and undressed. It was a long time before he fell asleep. The mosquitoes, partly, and partly his own busy thoughts, were responsible for his wakefulness.

## Chapter VIII

NEXT MORNING MR. Cardan was down early. The first thing he saw in the desolate garden before the house was Miss Elver. She was dressed in a frock cut on the same sack-like lines as her last night’s dress, but made of a gaudy, large-patterned material that looked as though it had been designed for the upholstery of chairs and sofas, not of the human figure. Her beads were more numerous and more brilliant than before. She carried a parasol of brightly flowered silk.

Emerging from the house, Mr. Cardan found her in the act of tying a bunch of Michaelmas daisies to the tail of a large white maremma dog that stood, its mouth open, its pink tongue lolling out and its large brown eyes fixed, so it seemed, meditatively on the further horizon, waiting for Miss Elver to have finished the operation. But Miss Elver was very slow and clumsy. The fingers of her stubby little hands seemed to find the process of tying a bow in a piece of ribbon extraordinarily difficult. Once or twice the dog looked round with a mild curiosity to see what was happening at the far end of its anatomy. It did not seem in the least to resent the liberties Miss Elver was taking with its tail, but stood quite still, resigned and waiting. Mr. Cardan was reminded of that enormous tolerance displayed by dogs and cats of even the most fiendish children. Perhaps, in a flash of Bergsonian intuition, the beast had realized the childish essence of Miss Elver’s character, had recognized the infant under the disguise of the full-grown woman. Dogs are good Bergsonians, thought Mr. Cardan. Men, on the other hand, are better Kantians. He approached softly.

Miss Elver had at last succeeded in tying the bow to her satisfaction; the dog’s white tail was tipped with a rosette of purple flowers. She straightened herself up and looked admiringly at her handiwork. ‘There!’ she said at last, addressing herself to the dog. ‘Now you can run away. Now you look lovely.’

The dog took the hint and trotted off, waving his flower-tipped tail.

Mr. Cardan stepped forward. ‘ ”Neat but not gaudy,” ’ he quoted, ‘ ”genteel but not expensive, like the gardener’s dog with a primrose tied to his tail.” Good-morning.’ He took off his hat.

But Miss Elver did not return his salutation. Taken by surprise, she had stood, as though petrified, staring at him with stretched eyes and open mouth while he spoke. At Mr. Cardan’s ‘good-morning,’ which was the first word of his that she had understood, the enchantment of stillness seemed to be lifted from her. She burst into a nervous laugh, covered her blushing face with her hands — for a moment only — then turned and ran down the path, ungainly as an animal moving in an element not its own, to take refuge behind a clump of rank bushes at the end of the garden. Seeing her run, the big dog came bounding after her, joyously barking. One Michaelmas daisy dropped to the ground, then another. In a moment they were all gone and the ribbon with them.

Slowly, cautiously, as though he were stalking a shy bird, and with a reassuring air of being absorbed in anything rather than the pursuit of a runaway, Mr. Cardan walked after Miss Elver down the path. Between the leaves of the bushes he caught glimpses of her bright frock; sometimes, with infinite circumspection, and certain, it was clear, that she was escaping all notice, she peeped at Mr. Cardan round the edge of the bush. Gambolling round her, the dog continued to bark.

Arrived within five or six yards of Miss Elver’s hiding-place, Mr. Cardan halted. ‘Come now,’ he said cajolingly, ‘what’s there so frightening about me? Take a good look at me. I don’t bite. I’m quite tame.’

The leaves of the bushes shook; from behind them came a peal of shrill laughter.

‘I don’t even bark, like your stupid dog,’ Mr. Cardan went on. ‘And if you tied a bunch of flowers on to my tail I should never have the bad manners to get rid of them in the first two minutes like that rude animal.’

There was more laughter.

‘Won’t you come out?’

There was no answer.

‘Oh, very well then,’ said Mr. Cardan, in the tone of one who is deeply offended, ‘I shall go away. Good-bye.’ He retraced his steps for a few yards, then turned off to the right along a little path that led to the garden gate. When he was about three-quarters of the way along it, he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps coming up behind him. He walked on, pretending to notice nothing. There was a touch on his arm.

‘Don’t go. Please.’ Miss Elver’s voice spoke imploringly. He looked round, as though startled. ‘I won’t run away again. But you mustn’t look at me like that.’

‘Like what?’ asked Mr. Cardan.

Miss Elver put up a screening hand and turned away. ‘Like I don’t know what,’ she said.

Mr. Cardan thought he perfectly understood; he pursued the subject no further. ‘Well, if you promise not to run away,’ he said, ‘I won’t go.’

Miss Elver’s face shone with pleasure and gratitude. ‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘Should we go and look at the chickens? They’re round at the back.’

They went round to the back. Mr. Cardan admired the chickens. 'You like animals?' he asked.

'I should think so,' said Miss Elver rapturously, and nodded.

'Have you ever had a parrot of your own?'

'No.'

'Or a monkey?'

She shook her head.

'Not even a Shetland pony?' asked Mr. Cardan on a note of astonishment.

Miss Elver's voice trembled as she again had to answer 'No.' At the thought of all these enchanting things she had never possessed, the tears came into her eyes.

'In my house,' said Mr. Cardan, conjuring up fairy palaces as easily as Aladdin, 'there are hundreds of them. I'll give you some when you come to stay with me.'

Miss Elver's face became bright again. 'Will you?' she said, 'Oh, that would be nice, that would be nice. And do you keep bears?'

'One or two,' said Mr. Cardan modestly.

'Well . . .' Miss Elver looked up at him, her blank bright eyes opened to their fullest extent. She paused, drew a deep breath and let it slowly out again. 'It must be a nice house,' she added at last, turning away and nodding slowly at every word, 'a nice house. That's all I can say.'

'You'd like to come and stay?' asked Mr. Cardan.

'I should think I would,' Miss Elver replied decidedly, looking up at him again. Then suddenly she blushed, she put up her hands. 'No, no, no,' she protested.

'Why not?' asked Mr. Cardan.

She shook her head. 'I don't know.' And she began to laugh.

'Remember the bears,' said Mr. Cardan.

'Yes. But . . .' She left the sentence unfinished. The old woman came to the back door and rang the bell for breakfast. Ungainly as a diving-bird on land, Miss Elver scuttled into the house. Her companion followed more slowly. In the dining-room, less tomb-like in the bright morning light, breakfast was waiting. Mr. Cardan found his hostess already eating with passion, as though her life depended on it.

'I'm so hungry,' she explained with her mouth full. 'Phil's late,' she added.

'Well, I'm not surprised,' said Mr. Cardan, as he sat down and unfolded his napkin.

When he came down at last, it was in the guise of a cleric so obviously unfrocked, so deplorably seedy and broken-down that Mr. Cardan felt almost sorry for him.

'Nothing like good strong coffee,' he said cheerfully, as he filled his host's cup. Mr. Elver looked on, feeling too melancholy and too ill to speak. For a long time he sat motionless in his chair, without moving, lacking the strength to stretch out his hand to his cup.

'Why don't you eat, Phil?' asked his sister, as she decapitated her second egg. 'You generally eat such a lot.'

Goaded, as though by a taunt, Philip Elver reached for his coffee and swallowed down a gulp. He even took some toast and buttered it; but he could not bring himself to eat.

At half-past ten Mr. Cardan left the house. He told his host that he was going in search of his sculpture; and he comforted Miss Elver, who, seeing him put on his hat and take his walking stick, had begun to whimper, by assuring her that he would be back to luncheon. Following the old woman's directions, Mr. Cardan soon found himself on the shores of the shallow lake of Massaciuccoli. A mile away, on the further shore, he could see the clustering pink and whitewashed houses of the village in which, he knew, the grocer's brother lived and kept his treasure. But instead of proceeding directly to the goal of his pilgrimage, Mr. Cardan lighted a cigar and lay down on the grass at the side of the path. It was a bright clear day. Over the mountains floated great clouds, hard-edged against the sky, firm and massive as though carved from marble and seeming more solid than the marble mountains beneath. A breeze stirred the blue water of the lake into innumerable dazzling ripples. It rustled among the leaves of the poplars and the sound was like that of the sea heard from far off. In the midst of the landscape lay Mr. Cardan, pensively smoking his cigar; the smoke of it drifted away along the wind.

Twenty-five thousand pounds, Mr. Cardan was thinking. If one were to invest them in the seven per cent. Hungarian Loan, they would bring in seventeen hundred and fifty a year. And if one lived in Italy that went a long way; one could consider oneself rich on that. A nice house in Siena, or Perugia, or Bologna — Bologna he decided would be the best; there was nothing to compare with Bolognese cooking. A car — one could afford to keep something handsome. Plenty of nice books, nice people to stay with one all the time, jaunts in comfort through Europe. A secure old age; the horrors of decrepitude in poverty for ever averted. The only disadvantage — one's wife happened to be a harmless idiot. Still, she'd obviously be most devoted; she'd do her best. And one would make her happy, one would even allow her a domesticated bear. In fact, Mr. Cardan assured himself, it was the poor creature's only chance of happiness. If she stayed with her brother, he'd find some substitute for the inefficient anopheles sooner or later. If she fell into the hands of an adventurer in need of her money, the chances were that he'd be a great deal more of a scoundrel than Tom Cardan. In fact, Mr. Cardan saw, he could easily make out a case for its being his bounden duty, for the poor girl's sake, to marry her. That would do very nicely for romantic spirits like Lilian Aldwinkle. For them, he'd be the gallant rescuer, the Perseus, the chivalrous St. George. Less enthusiastic souls might look at the twenty-five thousand and smile. But let them smile. After all, Mr. Cardan asked himself, a grin more or less — what does it matter? No, the real problem, the real difficulty was himself. Could he do it? Wasn't it, somehow, a bit thick — an idiot? Wasn't it too — too Russian? Too Stavroginesque?

True, his motive would be different from the Russian's. He would marry his idiot for comfort and a placid old age — not for the sake of strengthening his moral fibres by hard exercise, not in the voluptuous hope of calling new scruples and finer remorse

into existence, or in the religious hope of developing the higher consciousness by leading a low life. But on the other hand, nothing could prevent the life from being, in point of fact, thoroughly low; and he couldn't guarantee his conscience against the coming of strange qualms. Would seventeen hundred and fifty per annum be a sufficient compensation?

For more than an hour Mr. Cardan lay there, smoking, looking at the bright lake, at the ethereal fantastic mountains and the marbly clouds, listening to the wind among the leaves and the occasional far-away sounds of life, and pondering all the time. In the end he decided that seventeen hundred and fifty, or even the smaller income that would result from investment in something a little safer than seven per cent. Hungarian Loan, was a sufficient compensation. He'd do it. Mr. Cardan got up, threw away the stump of his second cigar and walked slowly back towards the house. As he approached it through the little plantation of poplar trees Miss Elver, who had been on the lookout for his return, came running out of the gate to meet him. The gaudy upholstery material blazed up as she passed out of the shade of the house into the sunlight, her coloured beads flashed. Uttering shrill little cries and laughing, she ran towards him. Mr. Cardan watched her as she came on. He had seen frightened cormorants bobbing their heads in a ludicrous anxiety from side to side. He had seen penguins waving their little flappers, scuttling along, undignified, on their short legs. He had seen vultures with trailing wings hobbling and hopping, ungainly, over the ground. Memories of all these sights appeared before his mind's eye as he watched Miss Elver's approach. He sighed profoundly.

'I'm so glad you've come back,' Miss Elver cried breathlessly, as she approached, 'I was really afraid you were going right away.' She shook his hand earnestly and looked up into his face. 'You've not forgotten about the monkeys and the Shetland ponies, have you?' she added, rather anxiously.

Mr. Cardan smiled. 'Of course not,' he answered; and he added gallantly: 'How could I forget anything that gives you pleasure?' He squeezed her hand and, bending down, kissed it.

Miss Elver's face flushed very red, then, the moment after, became exceedingly pale. Her breath came quickly and unsteadily. She shut her eyes. A shuddering ran through her; she wavered on her feet, she seemed on the point of falling. Mr. Cardan caught her by the arm and held her up. This was going to be worse, he thought, than he had imagined; more Stavroginesque. To faint when he kissed her hand — kissed it almost ironically — that was too much. But probably, he reflected, nothing of the kind had ever happened to her before. How many men had ever so much as spoken to her? It was understandable.

'My good child — really now.' He slightly shook her arm. 'Pull yourself together. If you're going to faint like this I shall never be able to trust you with a bear. Come, come.'

Still, the understanding of a thing does not alter it. It remains what it was when it was still uncomprehended. Seventeen hundred and fifty per annum — but at this rate it looked as though that would hardly be enough.

Miss Elver opened her eyes and looked at him. Into their blankness had come that look of anxious, unhappy love with which a child looks at his mother when he thinks that she is going to leave him. Mr. Cardan could not have felt more remorseful if he had committed a murder.

What every weakness, every vice?

Tom Cardan, all were thine.

All the same, there were certain things the doing of which one felt to be an outrage. Still, one had to think of those seventeen hundred and fifty pounds; one had to think of old age in solitude and poverty.

Leaving Miss Elver to play by herself in the garden, Mr. Cardan went indoors. He found his host sitting behind closed jalousies in a greenish twilight, his head on his hand.

‘Feeling better?’ asked Mr. Cardan cheerfully; and getting no answer, he went on to tell a long, bright story of how he had searched for the grocer’s brother, only to find, at last, that he was away from home and would be away till to-morrow. ‘So I hope you won’t mind,’ he concluded, ‘if I trespass on your charming hospitality for another night. Your sister has most kindly told me that I might.’

Mr. Elver turned on him a glance of concentrated loathing and averted his eyes. He said nothing.

Mr. Cardan drew up a chair and sat down. ‘There’s a most interesting little book,’ he said, looking at his host with a genial twinkling expression, ‘by a certain Mr. W. H. S. Jones called “Malaria: a factor in the history of Greece and Rome,” or some such title. He shows how the disease may quite suddenly obtain a footing in countries hitherto immune and in the course of a few generations bring a whole culture, a powerful empire to the ground. Conversely he shows how it is got rid of. Drainage, quinine, wire-netting . . .’ The other stirred uneasily in his chair; but Mr. Cardan went on ruthlessly. When the bell rang for luncheon he was talking to Mr. Elver about the only way in which the Yellow Peril might be permanently averted.

‘First,’ he said, laying the forefinger of his right hand against the thumb of his left, ‘first you must introduce malaria into Japan. Japan’s immune, so far; it’s a crying scandal. You must start by remedying that. And secondly,’ he moved on to the index, ‘you must see that the Chinese never have a chance to stamp out the disease in their country. Four hundred million malarial Chinamen may be viewed with equanimity. But four hundred million healthy ones — that’s a very different matter. The spread of malaria among the yellow races — there’s a cause,’ said Mr. Cardan, rising from his chair, ‘a cause to which some good European might profitably devote himself. You, who take so much interest in the subject, Mr. Elver, you might find a much worse vocation. Shall we go into lunch?’ Mr. Elver rose, tottering. ‘I have a tremendous appetite,’ his guest went on, patting him on his bent back. ‘I hope you have too.’

Mr. Elver at last broke silence. 'You're a damned bully,' he whispered in a passion of misery and futile rage, 'a damned stinking bully.'

'Come, come,' said Mr. Cardan. 'I protest against "stinking." '

## Chapter IX

EARLY THE NEXT morning Mr. Cardan and his hostess left the house and walked rapidly away through the fields in the direction of the lake. They had told the old woman that they would be back to a late breakfast. Mr. Elver was not yet awake; Mr. Cardan had left instructions that he was not to be called before half-past nine.

The ground was still wet with dew when they set out; the poplar trees threw shadows longer than themselves. The air was cool; it was a pleasure to walk. Mr. Cardan strode along at four miles an hour; and like a diver out of water, like a soaring bird reduced to walk the earth, Miss Elver trotted along at his side, rolling and hopping as she walked, as though she were mounted, not on feet, but on a set of eccentric wheels of different diameters. Her face seemed to shine with happiness; every now and then she looked at Mr. Cardan with shy adoration, and if she happened to catch his eye she would blush, turn away her head and laugh. Mr. Cardan was almost appalled by the extent of his success and the ease with which it had been obtained. He might make a slave of the poor creature, might keep her shut up in a rabbit-hutch, and, provided he showed himself now and again to be worshipped, she would be perfectly happy. The thought made Mr. Cardan feel strangely guilty.

'When we're married,' said Miss Elver suddenly, 'shall we have some children?'

Mr. Cardan smiled rather grimly. 'The trouble about children,' he said, 'is that the bears might eat them. You can never be quite sure of bears. Remember Elisha's bears and those bad children.'

Miss Elver's face became thoughtful. She walked on for a long time in silence.

They came to the lake, lying placid and very bright under the pale early-morning sky. At the sight of it Miss Elver clapped her hands with pleasure; she forgot in an instant all her troubles. The fatal incompatibility between bears and children ceased to preoccupy her. 'What lovely water!' she cried, and bending down she picked up a pebble from the path and threw it into the lake.

But Mr. Cardan did not permit her to linger. 'There's no time to lose,' he said, and taking her arm he hurried her on.

'Where are we going to?' asked Miss Elver.

He pointed to the village on the further shore of the lake. 'From there,' he said, 'we'll take some sort of cab or cart.'

The prospect of driving in a cart entirely reconciled Miss Elver to parting at such short notice with the lake. 'That'll be lovely,' she declared, and trotted on so fast that Mr. Cardan had to quicken his pace in order to keep up with her.



While the little carriage was being made ready and the horse put in and harnessed — hastelessly, as these things are always done in Italy, with dignity and at leisure — Mr. Cardan went to visit the grocer's brother. Now that he had come so far it would be foolish to miss the opportunity of seeing the treasure. The grocer's brother was himself a grocer, and so like his relative that Mr. Cardan could almost fancy it was Miss Thriplow's virtuous and simple friend from the hill-top to whom he was now speaking in the plain. When Mr. Cardan explained his business the man bowed, wreathed himself in smiles, laughed and blew acetylene into his face just as his brother had done. He expatiated on the beauty and the antiquity of his treasure, and when Mr. Cardan begged him to make haste and show him the sculpture, he would not suffer himself to be interrupted, but went on lyrically with his description, repeating the same phrases again and again and gesticulating until he began to sweat. At last, when he considered Mr. Cardan worked up to a due state of preliminary enthusiasm, the grocer opened the door at the back of the shop and mysteriously beckoned to his visitor to follow him. They walked down a dark passage, through a kitchen full of tumbling children on whom one had to be careful not to tread, across a little yard and into a mouldering out-house. The grocer led the way, walking all the time on tip-toe and speaking only in a whisper — for what reason Mr. Cardan could not imagine, unless it was to impress him with the profound importance of the affair, and perhaps to suggest that the beauty and antiquity of the work of art were such that it was only barefoot and in silence that it should be approached.

'Wait there,' he whispered impressively, as they entered the out-house.

Mr. Cardan waited. The grocer tip-toed across to the further corner of the shed. Mysteriously draped in sacking, something that might have been an ambushed man stood motionless in the shadow. The grocer halted in front of it and, standing a little to one side so as to give Mr. Cardan an uninterrupted view of the marvel to be revealed, took hold of a corner of the sacking, and with a magnificently dramatic gesture whisked it off.

There emerged the marble effigy of what in the imagination of a monumental mason of 1830 figured as a Poet. A slenderer Byron with yet more hyacinthine hair and a profile borrowed from one of Canova's Greeks, he stood, leaning against a truncated column, his marble eyes turned upwards in pursuit of the flying Muse. A cloak hung lankly from his shoulders; a vine leaf was all the rest of his costume. On the top of the truncated column lay a half-opened marble scroll, which the Poet's left hand held down for fear it should be blown clean away by the wind of inspiration. His right, it was evident, had originally poised above the virgin page a stylus. But the hand, alas, and the whole forearm almost to the elbow were gone. At the base of the column was a little square tablet on which, if the figure had ever been put to its proper monumental use, should have been written the name and claims to fame of the poet upon whose tomb it was to stand. But the tablet was blank. At the time this statue was carved there had evidently been a dearth of lyrists in the principality of Massa Carrara.

'E bellissimo!' said the grocer's brother, standing back and looking at it with a connoisseur's enthusiasm.

'Davvero,' Mr. Cardan agreed. He thought sadly of his recumbent Etruscan, his sarcophagus by Jacopo della Quercia, his Romanesque demon. Still, he reflected, even a bas-relief by Giotto would hardly have brought him five-and-twenty thousand pounds.

## Chapter X

MR. CARDAN RETURNED to the palace of the Cybo Malaspina to find that the number of guests had been increased during his absence by the arrival of Mrs. Chelifer. Mrs. Aldwinkle had not been particularly anxious to have Chelifer's mother in the house, but finding that Chelifer was preparing to leave as soon as his mother should arrive, she peremptorily insisted on giving the lady hospitality.

'It's absurd,' she argued, 'to go down again to that horrible hotel at Marina di Vezza, stay there uncomfortably for a few days and then go to Rome by train. You must bring your mother here, and then, when it's time for Mr. Falx to go to his conference, we'll all go to Rome in the car. It'll be far pleasanter.'

Chelifer tried to object; but Mrs. Aldwinkle would not hear of objections. When Mrs. Chelifer arrived at the station of Vezza she found Francis waiting for her on the platform with Mrs. Aldwinkle, in yellow tussore and a floating white veil, at his side. The welcome she got from Mrs. Aldwinkle was far more effusively affectionate than that which she got from her son. A little bewildered, but preserving all her calm and gentle dignity, Mrs. Chelifer suffered herself to be led towards the Rolls-Royce.

'We all admire your son so enormously,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'He's so — how shall I say? — so post bellum, so essentially one of us.' Mrs. Aldwinkle made haste to establish her position among the youngest of the younger generation. 'All that one only dimly feels he expresses. Can you be surprised at our admiration?'

So far Mrs. Chelifer was rather surprised by everything. It took her some time to get used to Mrs. Aldwinkle. Nor was the aspect of the palace calculated to allay her astonishment.

'A superb specimen of early baroque,' Mrs. Aldwinkle assured her, pointing with her parasol. But even after she knew the dates, it all seemed to Mrs. Chelifer rather queer.

Mrs. Aldwinkle remained extremely cordial to her new guest; but in secret she disliked Mrs. Chelifer extremely. There would have been small reason, in any circumstances, for Mrs. Aldwinkle to have liked her. The two women had nothing in common; their views of life were different and irreconcilable, they had lived in separate worlds. At the best of times Mrs. Aldwinkle would have found her guest *bourgeoise* and *bornée*. As things actually were she loathed her. And no wonder; for in his mother Chelifer had a permanent and unexceptionable excuse for getting away from Mrs. Aldwinkle.

Mrs. Aldwinkle naturally resented the presence in her house of this cause and living justification of infidelity. At the same time it was necessary for her to keep on good terms with Mrs. Chelifer; for if she quarrelled with the mother, it was obvious that the son would take himself off. Inwardly chafing, Mrs. Aldwinkle continued to treat her with the same gushing affection as at first.

To Mrs. Aldwinkle's guests the arrival of Mrs. Chelifer was more welcome than to herself. Mr. Falx found in her a more sympathetic and comprehensible soul than he could discover in his hostess. To Lord Hovenden and Irene her arrival meant the complete cessation of Irene's duties as a spy; they liked her well enough, moreover, for her own sake.

'A nice old fmg,' was how Lord Hovenden summed her up.

Miss Thriplow affected almost to worship her.

'She's so wonderfully good and simple and integral, if you understand what I mean,' Miss Thriplow explained to Calamy. 'To be able to be so undividedly enthusiastic about folk-songs and animals' rights and all that sort of thing — it's really wonderful. She's a lesson to us,' Miss Thriplow concluded, 'a lesson.' Mrs. Chelifer became endowed, for her, with all the qualities that the village grocer had unfortunately not possessed. The symbol of his virtues — if only he had possessed them — had been the white apron; Mrs. Chelifer's integrity was figured forth by her dateless grey dresses.

'She's one of Nature's Quakeresses,' Miss Thriplow declared. 'If only one could be born like that!' There had been a time, not so long ago, when she had aspired to be one of Nature's Guardswomen. 'I never knew that anything so good and dove-coloured existed outside of Academy subject-pictures of 1880. You know: "A Pilgrim Mother on Board the Mayflower," or something of that sort. It's absurd in the Academy. But it's lovely in real life.'

Calamy agreed.

But the person who most genuinely liked Mrs. Chelifer was Grace Elver. From the moment she set eyes on Mrs. Chelifer, Grace was her dog-like attendant. And Mrs. Chelifer responded by practically adopting her for the time being. When he learned the nature of her tastes and occupations, Mr. Cardan explained her kindness to himself by the hypothesis that poor Grace was the nearest thing to a stray dog or cat that Mrs. Chelifer could find. Conversely, Grace's love at first sight must be due to the realization by that cat-like mind that here was a born protector and friend. In any case, he was exceedingly grateful to Mrs. Chelifer for having made her appearance when she did. Her presence in the house made easy what would otherwise have been a difficult situation.

That Mrs. Aldwinkle would be impressed by the romantic story of Grace's abduction Mr. Cardan had always been certain. And when he told the story, she was impressed, though less profoundly than Mr. Cardan had hoped; she was too much preoccupied with her own affairs to be able to respond with her customary enthusiasm to what, at other times, would have been an irresistible appeal. About her reception of the story, then, Mr. Cardan had never entertained a doubt; he knew that she would find it

romantic. But that was no guarantee that she would like the heroine of the story. From what he knew of her, which was a great deal, Mr. Cardan felt sure that she would very quickly find poor Grace exceedingly tiresome. He knew her lack of patience and her intolerance. Grace would get on her nerves; Lilian would be unkind, and goodness only knew what scenes might follow. Mr. Cardan had brought her to the palace meaning to stay only a day or two and then take his leave, before Mrs. Aldwinkle had had time to get poor Grace on her nerves. But the presence of Mrs. Chelifer made him change his mind. Her affectionate protection was a guarantee against Mrs. Aldwinkle's impatience; more important still, it had the best possible effect on Grace herself. In Mrs. Chelifer's presence she behaved quietly and sensibly, like a child doing its best to make a good impression. Mrs. Chelifer, moreover, kept a tenderly watchful eye on her appearance and her manners; kept her up to the mark about washing her hands and brushing her hair, dropped a gentle hint when she was not behaving as well as she ought to at table, and checked her propensity to eat too much of the things she liked and not enough of those she didn't like. Mrs. Chelifer, it was obvious, had the best possible influence over her. When they were married, Mr. Cardan decided, he would frequently invite Mrs. Chelifer to stay — preferably, though she was a very nice old thing, while he was away from home. Meanwhile, secure that his residence at the palace of the Cybo Malaspina would be marred by no disagreeable incidents, he wrote to his lawyer to make the necessary arrangements about his marriage.

For her part, Mrs. Chelifer was delighted to have found Grace. As Mr. Cardan had divined, she missed her cats and dogs, her poor children and traditional games. It was very reluctantly that she had at last given up the old Oxford house; very reluctantly, though the arguments that Francis had used to persuade her were unanswerable. It was too large for her, it was full of those mediaeval labour-creating devices of which Mr. Ruskin and his architectural followers were so fond, it cost more to keep up than she could afford; moreover, it was unhealthy, she was regularly ill there every winter; the doctors had been urging her for years past to get out of the Thames valley. Yes, the arguments were quite unanswerable; but it had been a long time before she had finally made up her mind to leave the place. Forty years of her life had been passed there; she was loth to part with all those memories. And then there were the dogs and the poor children, all her old friends and her charities. In the end, however, she had allowed herself to be persuaded. The house was sold; it was arranged that she should spend the winter in Rome.

'Now you're free,' her son had said.

But Mrs. Chelifer rather mournfully shook her head. 'I don't know that I very much like being free,' she answered. 'I shall be without occupation in Rome. I look forward to it almost with dread.'

Francis reassured her. 'You'll soon find something,' he said. 'Don't be afraid of that.'

'Shall I?' Mrs. Chelifer questioned doubtfully. They were walking together in the little garden at the back of the house; looking round her at the familiar grass plot and flower beds, she sighed.

But Francis was right; dogs, poor children or their equivalents are fortunately not rare. At the end of the first stage of her journey Mrs. Chelifer had found, in Grace Elver, a compensation for what she had abandoned at Oxford. Attending to poor Grace she was happy.

For the rest of the party Miss Elver's arrival had no special or personal significance. For them she was just Mr. Cardan's half-wit; that was all. Even Mary Thriplow, who might have been expected to take an interest in so genuine a specimen of the simple soul, paid little attention to her. The fact was that Grace was really too simple to be interesting. Simplicity is no virtue unless you are potentially complicated. Mrs. Chelifer, being with all her simplicity a woman of intelligence, threw light, Miss Thriplow felt, on her own case. Grace was simple only as a child or an imbecile is simple; her didactic value was therefore nil. Miss Thriplow remained faithful to Mrs. Chelifer.

## Chapter XI

IT WAS NIGHT. Half undressed, Irene was sitting on the edge of her bed stitching away at an unfinished garment of pale pink silk. Her head was bent over her work and her thick hair hung perpendicularly down on either side, making an angle with her tilted face. The light clung richly to her bare arms and shoulders, was reflected by the curved and glossy surfaces of her tight-drawn stockings. Her face was extremely grave; the tip of her tongue appeared between her teeth. It was a difficult job.

Round her, on the walls of the enormous room which had once been the bedchamber of the Cardinal Alderano Malaspina, fluttered an army of gesticulating shapes. Over the door sat God the Father, dressed in a blue *crêpe de Chine* tunic and enveloped in a mantle of red velvet, which fluttered in the divine *afflatus* as though it had been so much bunting. His right hand was extended; and in obedience to the gesture a squadron of angels went flying down one of the side walls towards the window. At a *prie-Dieu* in the far corner knelt Cardinal Malaspina, middle-aged, stout, with a *barbiche* and *moustache*, and looking altogether, Irene thought, like the current British idea of a French chef. The Archangel Michael, at the head of his troop of Principalities and Powers, was hovering in the air above him, and with an expression on his face of mingled condescension and respect — condescension, inasmuch as he was the plenipotentiary of the *Padre Eterno*, and respect, in view of the fact that His Eminence was a brother of the Prince of Massa Carrara — was poising above the prelate's head the red symbolic hat that was to make him a Prince of the Church. On the opposite wall the Cardinal was represented doing battle with the powers of darkness. Dressed in scarlet robes he stood undaunted on the brink of the bottomless pit. Behind him was a carefully painted view of the Malaspina palace, with a group of retainers and handsome coaches in the middle distance and, immediately behind their Uncle, whom they gallantly supported by their prayers, the Cardinal's nephews. From the pit came up legions of hideous

devils who filled the air with the flapping of their wings. But the Cardinal was more than a match for them. Raising a crucifix above his head, he conjured them to return to the flames. And the foiled devils, gnashing their teeth and trembling with terror, were hurled back towards the pit. Head foremost, tail foremost, in every possible position they came hurtling down towards the floor. When she lay in bed, Irene could see half a dozen devils diving down at her; and when she woke up in the morning, a pair of plunging legs waved frantically within a foot of her opening eyes. In the wall space over the windows the Cardinal's cultured leisures were allegorically celebrated. Nine Muses and three Graces, attended by a troop of Hours, reclined or stood, or danced in studied postures; while the Cardinal himself, enthroned in the midst, listened to their conversation and proffered his own opinions without appearing to notice the fact that all the ladies were stark naked. No one but the most polished and accomplished man of the world could have behaved in the circumstances with such perfect *savoir-vivre*.

In the midst of the Cardinal's apotheosis and entirely oblivious of it, Irene stitched away at her pink chemise. Undressing, just now, she had caught sight of it lying here in her work-basket; she hadn't been able to resist the temptation of adding a touch or two there and then. It was going to be one of her masterpieces when it was done. She held it out in her two hands, at arm's length, and looked at it, lovingly and critically. It was simply too lovely.

Ever since Chelifer's arrival she had been able to do a lot of work on her underclothes. Mrs. Aldwinkle, absorbed by her unhappy passion, had completely forgotten that she had a niece who ought to be writing lyrics and painting in water-colours. Irene was free to devote all her time to her sewing. She did not neglect the opportunity. But every now and then her conscience would suddenly prick her and she would ask herself whether, after all, it was quite fair to take advantage of poor Aunt Lilian's mournful preoccupation to do what she did not approve of. She would wonder if she oughtn't, out of loyalty to Aunt Lilian, to stop sewing and make a sketch or write a poem. Once or twice in the first days she even acted on the advice of her conscience. But when in the evening she brought Aunt Lilian her sketch of the temple, and the lyric beginning 'O Moon, how calmly in the midnight sky . . .' — brought them with a certain triumph, a consciousness of virtuous actions duly performed — that distracted lady showed so little interest in these artistic tokens of niecely duty and affection that Irene felt herself excused henceforward from making any further effort to practise the higher life. She went on with her stitching. Her conscience, it is true, still troubled her at times; but she did nothing about it.

This evening she felt no conscientious qualm. The garment was so lovely that even Aunt Lilian, she felt sure, would have approved of it. It was a work of art — a work of art that deserved that honourable title just as richly as 'O Moon, how calmly in the midnight sky'; perhaps even more richly.

Irene folded up the unfinished masterpiece in rose, put it away, and went on with her undressing. To-night, she decided, as she brushed her hair, she would tell Aunt Lilian how right she had been about Hovenden. That ought to please her. 'How grateful I

am,' she would say. And she'd tell her how much she liked him — almost, almost in that way. Not quite yet. But soon; she felt somehow that it might happen soon. And it would be the real thing. Real and solid. Not flimsy and fizzy and imaginary, like the episodes with Peter and Jacques and the rest of them.

She put on her dressing-gown and walked down the long corridor to Mrs. Aldwinkle's room. Cardinal Alderano was left alone with his devils and the obsequious angels, his nine naked Muses and the Eternal Father.

When Irene came in, Aunt Lilian was sitting in front of her looking-glass, rubbing skin food into her face.

'It appears,' she said, looking at herself in the glass, critically, as Irene had looked at her masterpiece of fine sewing, 'that there's such a wonderful electric massage machine. I forget who told me about it.'

'Was it Lady Belfry?' Irene suggested. The image of Lady Belfry's face floated up before her mind's eye — smooth, pink, round, youthful looking, but with that factitious and terribly precarious youthfulness of beauty scientifically preserved.

'Perhaps it was,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'I must certainly get one of them. Write to Harrods' about it to-morrow, will you, darling?'

Irene began the nightly brushing of her aunt's hair. There was a long silence. How should she begin about Hovenden? Irene was thinking. She must begin in some way that would show how really and genuinely serious it all was. She must begin in such a way that Aunt Lilian would have no possible justification for taking up a playful tone about it. At all costs, Aunt Lilian must not be allowed to talk to her in that well-known and dreaded vein of bludgeoning banter; on no account must she be given an opportunity for saying: 'Did she think then that her silly old auntie didn't notice?' or anything of that kind. But to find the completely fun-proof formula was not so easy. Irene searched for it long and thoughtfully. She was not destined to find it. For Aunt Lilian, who had also been thinking, suddenly broke the silence.

'I sometimes doubt,' she said, 'whether he takes any interest in women at all. Fundamentally, unconsciously, I believe he's a homosexualist.'

'Perhaps,' said Irene gravely. She knew her Havelock Ellis.

For the next half-hour Mrs. Aldwinkle and her niece discussed the interesting possibility.

## Chapter XII

MISS THRILOW WAS writing in her secret note-book. 'There are people,' she wrote, 'who seem to have no capacity for feeling deeply or passionately about anything. It is a kind of emotional impotence for which one can only pity them profoundly. Perhaps there are more of these people nowadays than there were. But that's only an impression; one has no facts to go on, no justifying documents. But if it's the case, it's

due, I suppose, to our intellectualizing education. One has to have a strong emotional constitution to be able to stand it. And then one lives so artificially that many of the profounder instincts rarely get an opportunity for displaying themselves. Fear, for example, and all the desperate passions evoked by the instinct of self-preservation in face of danger or hunger. Thousands of civilized people pass through life condemned to an almost complete ignorance of these emotions.'

Miss Thriplow drew a line under this paragraph and began again a little further down the page.

'To love primitively, with fury. To be no more civilized, but savage. No more critical, but whole-heartedly passionate. No more a troubled and dubious mind, but a young, healthy body certain and unwavering in its desires. The beast knows everything, says Uncle Yerochka in Tolstoy. Not everything; no. But he knows, at any rate, all the things the mind does not know. The strong complete spirit must know what the beast knows as well as what the mind knows.'

She drew another line.

'His hands are so strong and firm, and yet touch so softly. His lips are soft. Where his neck joins his body, in front, between the two strong tendons, where they converge towards the collar bone, is a boldly marked depression in the flesh that looks as though it had been made by the thumb of an artist god, so beautiful it is. So beautiful . . .'

It occurred to Miss Thriplow that there would be an excellent article to be written round the theme of masculine beauty. In the Song of Solomon it is described as lyrically as feminine beauty. It is rare to find modern poetesses expressing so frank an admiration. In the Paris Salons it is the female nude which prevails; the male is exceptional and, when complete, seems a little shocking. How different from the state of things in Pompeii! Miss Thriplow bit the end of her pen. Yes, decidedly, it would make a capital article.

'His skin is white and smooth,' she went on writing. 'How strong he is! His eyes are sleepy; but sometimes they seem to wake up and he looks at me so piercingly and commandingly that I am frightened. But I like being frightened — by him.'

Another line. Miss Thriplow would have written more on this subject; but she was always apprehensive that somebody might find her note-book and read it. She did not want that to happen till she was dead. Miss Thriplow made an asterisk by the side of the first of the evening's notes. In the margin of the blank page opposite she scratched a similar sign, to indicate that what she was going to write now was in the nature of an appendix or corollary to what she had written in the first note.

'Certain people,' she wrote, 'who have no natural capacity for profound feeling are yet convinced, intellectually, that they ought to feel profoundly. The best people, they think, have formidable instincts. They want to have them too. They are the emotional snobs. This type, I am sure, is new. In the eighteenth century people tried to make out that they were rational and polished. The cult of the emotions began in the nineteenth. It has had a new turn given to it by Bergsonism and Romain-Rollandism in the twentieth century. It is fashionable now to be exactly the opposite of what it



was fashionable to be in the eighteenth century. So that you get emotionally impotent people simulating passion with their minds. Hypocrites of instinct, they often more than half deceive themselves. And, if they are intelligent, they completely deceive all but the most observant of those around them. They act the emotional part better than those who actually feel the emotions. It is Diderot's paradox of the comedian, in real life; the less you feel, the better you represent feeling. But while the comedian on the stage plays only for the audience in the theatre, those in real life perform as much for an inward as an outward gallery; they ask for applause also from themselves and, what is more, they get it; though always, I suppose, with certain secret reservations. What a curious type it is! I have known many specimens of it.'

Miss Thriplow stopped writing and thought of the specimens she had known. There was a surprisingly large number of them. Every human being is inclined to see his own qualities and weaknesses in others. Inevitably: since his own mental and moral attributes are the only ones of which he has any personal experience. The man who visualizes his multiplication table in a fantastic and definite picture imagines that all other men must do the same; the musician cannot conceive of a mind that is irresponsive to music. Similarly the ambitious man presumes that all his fellows are actuated by his own desire to achieve distinction and power. The sensualist sees sensuality everywhere. The mean man takes it for granted that everybody else is mean. But it must not be thought that the possessor of a vice who sees his own weakness in all his fellows therefore condones that weakness. We rarely give our own weaknesses their specific name, and are aware of them only in a vague and empirical fashion. The conscious and educated part of us condemns the vice to which we are congenitally subject. At the same time, our personal knowledge of the vice — a knowledge not conscious or intellectual, but obscure, practical and instinctive — tends to direct the attention of the superficial, educated part of the mind to manifestations of this particular weakness, tends even to make it detect such manifestations when they do not exist; so that we are constantly struck by the ludicrous spectacle of the avaricious passionately condemning avarice in others much more generous than themselves, of the lascivious crying out on lasciviousness, the greedy criticizing greed. Their education has taught them that these vices are blameworthy, while their personal and empirical knowledge of them causes them to take a special interest in these weaknesses and to see signs of them everywhere.

If the number of Miss Thriplow's friends who belonged to the type of the emotionally impotent was surprisingly large, the fact was due to a tendency in Miss Thriplow herself towards precisely this spiritual weakness. Being by nature a good deal more acute and self-analytic than most of the men and women who indignantly castigate their own inveterate sins, Miss Thriplow was not unaware, while she criticized others, of the similar defect in herself. She could not help suspecting, when she read Dostoievsky and Tchekhov, that she was organized differently from these Russians. It seemed to her that she felt nothing so acutely, with such an intricate joy or misery as did they. And even before she had started reading the Russians, Miss Thriplow had come to

the painful conclusion that if the Brontë sisters were emotionally normal, then she must be decidedly sub-normal. And even if they weren't quite normal, even if they were feverish, she desired to be like them; they seemed to her entirely admirable. It was the knowledge of her sub-normality (which she had come, however, to attribute to a lack of opportunities — we lead such sheltered, artificial lives — for the display of her potential passions and emotions) that had made Miss Thriplow so passionate an admirer of fine spontaneous feelings. It caused her at the same time to be willing and anxious to embrace every opportunity that presented itself for the testing of her reactions. It is experience that makes us aware of what we are; if it were not for contacts with the world outside ourselves we should have no emotions at all. In order to get to know her latent emotional self, Miss Thriplow desired to have as much experience, to make as many contacts with external reality as possible. When the external reality was of an unusual character and offered to be particularly fruitful in emotional revelations, she sought it with a special eagerness. Thus, a love affair with Calamy had seemed to her fraught with the most interesting emotional possibilities. She would have liked him well enough even if his drowsiness had concealed no inward fires. But the conviction that there was something 'queer,' as Mrs. Aldwinkle would say, and dangerous about the man made her imagine at every stage of their intimacy that she liked him better than she actually did; made her anxious to advance to further stages in the hope that, as he revealed himself, ampler and more interesting revelations of her own hidden soul might there be awaiting her. She had had her reward; Calamy had already genuinely frightened her, had revealed himself as excitingly brutal.

'You exasperate me so much,' he had said, 'that I could wring your neck.'

And there were moments when she half believed that he really would kill her. It was a new kind of love. She abandoned herself to it with a fervour which she found, taking its temperature, very admirable. The flood of passion carried her along; Miss Thriplow took notes of her sensations on the way and hoped that there would be more and intenser sensations to record in the future.

## Chapter XIII

CALAMY LAY ON his back, quite still, looking up into the darkness. Up there, he was thinking, so near that it's only a question of reaching out a hand to draw back the curtaining darkness that conceals it, up there, just above me, floats the great secret, the beauty and the mystery. To look into the depths of that mystery, to fix the eyes of the spirit on that bright and enigmatic beauty, to pore over the secret until its symbols cease to be opaque and the light filters through from beyond — there is nothing else in life, for me at any rate, that matters; there is no rest or possibility of satisfaction in doing anything else.

All this was obvious to him now. And it was obvious, too, that he could not do two things at once; he couldn't at the same time lean out into the silence beyond the futile noise and bustle — into the mental silence that lies beyond the body — he couldn't at the same time do this and himself partake in the tumult; and if he wanted to look into the depths of mind, he must not interpose a preoccupation with his bodily appetites.

He had known all this so well and so long; and still he went on in the same way of life. He knew that he ought to change, to do something different, and he profoundly resented this knowledge. Deliberately he acted against it. Instead of making an effort to get out of the noise and bustle, to break away from his enslavement and do what he ought to do, what he knew that, really and profoundly, he wanted to do, he had more than once, when his bonds had seemed on the point of falling away of themselves, deliberately tightened them. He resented this necessity of changing, even though it was a necessity imposed on him, not from without, but by what he knew to be the most intelligent part of his own being. He was afraid, too, that if he changed he would be making himself ridiculous. It was not that he desired to live as he had until a year ago. That dreary and fatiguing routine of pleasure had become intolerable; he had broken definitely with that. No; he pictured a sort of graceful Latin compromise. An Epicurean cultivation of mind and body. Breakfast at nine. Serious reading from ten till one. Luncheon prepared by an excellent French cook. In the afternoon a walk and talk with intelligent friends. Tea with crumpets and the most graceful of female society. A frugal but exquisite supper. Three hours' meditation about the Absolute, and then bed, not unaccompanied. . . . It sounded charming. But somehow it wouldn't do. To the liver of this perfect Life of Reason the secret, the mystery and the beauty, though they might be handled and examined, refused to give up their significance. If one really wanted to know about them, one must do more than meditate upon them of an evening between the French chef's masterpiece of maigre cooking and the night's rest, not in solitude. In these delightful Latin circumstances the secret, the mystery and the beauty reduced themselves to nothing. One thought of them only because they were amusing and to pass the time; they were really no more important than the tea with crumpets, the vegetarian supper and the amorous repose. If one wanted them to be more than these, one must abandon oneself completely to the contemplation of them. There could be no compromise.

Calamy knew this. But all the same he had made love to Mary Thriplow, not because he had felt an overwhelming passionate necessity to do so; but because she amused him, because her prettiness, her air of unreal innocence exasperated his senses, more than all because he felt that a love affair with Mary Thriplow would keep him thoroughly occupied and prevent him from thinking about anything else. It had not. The beauty and the mystery still hung just above him when he lay alone in the darkness. They were still there; his affair with Mary Thriplow merely prevented him from approaching them.

Down in the valley a clock struck one. The sound reminded him that he had promised to go to her to-night. He found himself thinking of what would happen

when they met, of the kisses, the caresses given and received. Angrily he tried to turn his thoughts to other themes; he tried to think of the mystery and the beauty that floated there, above him, on the further side of the curtaining darkness. But however vehemently he strove to expel them, the charnel images kept returning again and again to his mind.

'I won't go,' he said to himself; but he knew while he was saying it that he would. With an extraordinary vividness he imagined her lying on the crook of his arm, emaciated, limp and shuddering, like one who has been tormented on the rack. Yes, he knew that he would go.

The notion of torture continued to haunt his mind. He thought of those poor wretches who, accused of sorcery, admitted after the third day's torment that they had indeed flown along the wind, passed through keyholes, taken the form of wolves and conjoined themselves with incubi; who would admit, not only these things, but also, after another hour on the rack, that they had accomplices, that this man, that woman, that young child were also sorcerers and servants of the devil. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Weak in pain, but weaker still, he thought, more excusably weak, in pleasure. For under the torments of pleasure, what cowardices, what betrayals of self and of others will it not commit! How lightly it will lie and perjure itself! How glibly, with a word, condemn others to suffer! How abjectly it will surrender happiness and almost life itself for a moment's prolongation of the delicious torture! The shame that follows is the spirit's resentment, its sad indignation at its bondage and humiliation.

Under the torment of pleasure, he thought, women are weaker than men. Their weakness flatters their lover's consciousness of strength, gratifies his desire for power. On one of his own sex a man will vent his love of power by making him suffer; but on a woman by making her enjoy. It is more the pleasurable torment he inflicts than what is inflicted upon him that delights the lover.

And since man is less weak, Calamy went on thinking, since pleasure with him is never so annihilating that he cannot take greater pleasure in the torment of his tormentor, is he not therefore the less excusable for breaking faith with himself or others under the delicious torture or the desire and anticipation of it? Man has less physical justification for his weakness and his enslavement. Woman is made by nature to be enslaved — by love, by children. But every now and then a man is born who ought to be free. For such a man it is disgraceful to succumb under the torture.

If I could free myself, he thought, I could surely do something; nothing useful, no doubt, in the ordinary sense, nothing that would particularly profit other people; but something that for me would be of the last importance. The mystery floats just above me. If I were free, if I had time, if I could think and think and slowly learn to plumb the silences of the spirit . . .

The image of Mary Thriplow presented itself again to his mind's eye. Limply she lay in the crook of his arm, trembling as though after torment. He shut his eyes; angrily

he shook his head. The image would not leave him. If I were free, he said to himself, if I were free . . .

In the end he got out of bed and opened the door. The corridor was brightly illuminated; an electric light was left burning all night. Calamy was just about to step out, when another door a little further down the passage was violently thrown open and Mr. Falx, his legs showing thin and hairy below the hem of a night-shirt, impetuously emerged. Calamy retired into the shadowed embrasure of his door. With the anxious, harrowed expression on his face of one who suffers from colic, Mr. Falx hurried past, looking neither to the left hand nor to the right. He turned down another passage which entered the main corridor a few yards away and disappeared; a door slammed. When he was out of sight, Calamy walked softly and rapidly down the corridor, opened the fourth door on the left and disappeared into the darkness. A little later Mr. Falx returned, at leisure, to his room.

# Part IV. The Journey

## Chapter I

LORD HOVENDEN DETACHED from his motor car was an entirely different being from the Lord Hovenden who lounged with such a deceptive air of languor behind the steering-wheel of a Vauxhall Velox. Half an hour spent in the roaring wind of his own speed transformed him from a shy and diffident boy into a cool-headed hero, daring not merely in the affairs of the road, but in the affairs of life as well. The fierce wind blew away his diffidence; the speed intoxicated him out of his self-consciousness. All his victories had been won while he was in the car. It was in the car — eighteen months ago, before he came of age — that he had ventured to ask his guardian to increase his allowance; and he had driven faster and faster until, in sheer terror, his guardian had agreed to do whatever he wished. It was on board the Velox that he had ventured to tell Mrs. Terebinth, who was seventeen years older than he, had four children and adored her husband, that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; he had bawled it at her while they were doing seventy-five on the Great North Road. At sixty, at sixty-five, at seventy, his courage had still been inadequate to the achievement; but at seventy-five it reached the sticking-point: he had told her. And when she laughed and told him that he was an impudent young shrimp, he felt not a whit abashed, but laughed back, pressed the accelerator down a little further, and when the needle of the speedometer touched eighty, shouted through the wind and the noise of the engine: 'But I love you.' Unfortunately, however, the drive came to an end soon after; all drives must come to an end, sooner or later. The affaire Terebinth went no further. If only, Lord Hovenden regretfully sighed, if only one could spend all one's life in the Velox! But the Velox had its disadvantages. There were occasions when the heroic, speed-intoxicated self had got the timorous pedestrian into awkward scrapes. There was that time, for example, when, rolling along at sixty, he had airily promised one of his advanced political friends to make a speech at a meeting. The prospect, while one was doing sixty, had seemed not merely unalarming, but positively attractive. But what agonies he suffered when he was standing on the solid earth again, at his journey's end! How impossibly formidable the undertaking seemed! How bitterly he cursed himself for his folly in having accepted the invitation! In the end he was reduced to telegraphing that his doctor had ordered him peremptorily to the south of France. He fled, ignominiously.

To-day the Velox had its usual effect on him. At Vezza, when they started, he was all shyness and submission. He assented meekly to all the arrangements that Mrs. Aldwinkle made and remade every five minutes, however contradictory and impossible. He did not venture to suggest that Irene should come in his car; it was through no good management of his own, but by the mere luck of Mrs. Aldwinkle's final caprice before the actual moment of starting, that he did in fact find her sitting next him when at last they moved off from before the palace doors. At the back sat Mr. Falx, in solitude, surrounded by suit-cases. To him Lord Hovenden had even dutifully promised that he would never go more than five-and-twenty miles an hour. Pedestrian slavishness could hardly go further.

Heavily loaded, Mrs. Aldwinkle's limousine started first. Miss Elver, who had begged to be granted this special favour, sat in front, next the chauffeur. An expression of perfect and absolute bliss irradiated her face. Whenever the car passed any one by the roadside, she made a shrill hooting noise and waved her handkerchief. Luckily she was unaware of the feelings of disgust and indignation which her conduct aroused in the chauffeur; he was English and enormously genteel, he had the reputation of his country and his impeccable car to keep up. And this person waved handkerchiefs and shouted as though she were on a char-à-banc. Miss Elver even waved at the cows and horses, she shouted even to the cats and the chickens.

In the body of the car sat Mrs. Aldwinkle, Mrs. Chelifer, Chelifer and Mr. Cardan. Calamy and Miss Thriplow had decided that they had no time to go to Rome and had been left — without a word of objection on Mrs. Aldwinkle's part — at the palace. The landscape slid placidly past the windows. Mr. Cardan and Mrs. Chelifer talked about traditional games.

Meanwhile, a couple of hundred yards behind, Lord Hovenden disgustfully sniffed the dusty air. 'How intolerably slowly old Ernest drives!' he said to his companion.

'Aunt Lilian doesn't allow him to do more than thirty miles an hour,' Irene explained.

Hovenden snorted derisively. 'Firty! But must we eat veir filthy dust all ve way?'

'Perhaps you might drop back a bit,' Irene suggested.

'Or perhaps we might pass vem?'

'Well . . .' said Irene doubtfully. 'I don't think we ought to make poor Aunt Lilian eat our dust.'

'She wouldn't eat it for long, if old Ernest is only allowed to do firty.'

'Well, in that case,' said Irene, feeling that her duty towards Aunt Lilian had been done, 'in that case . . .'

Lord Hovenden accelerated. The road was broad, flat and straight. There was no traffic. In two minutes Mrs. Aldwinkle had eaten her brief, unavoidable meal of dust; the air was clear again. Far off along the white road, a rapidly diminishing cloud was all that could be seen of Lord Hovenden's Velox.

'Well, fank God,' Lord Hovenden was saying in a cheerful voice, 'now we can get along at a reasonable rate.' He grinned, a young ecstatic giant.

Irene also found the speed exhilarating. Under her grey silk mask, with its goggling windows for the eyes, her short lip was lifted in a joyful smile from the white small teeth. 'It's lovely,' she said.

'I'm glad you like it,' said Hovenden. 'Vat's splendid.'

But a tap on his shoulder reminded him that there was somebody else in the car besides Irene and himself. Mr. Falx was far from finding the present state of affairs splendid. Blown by the wind, his white beard shook and fluttered like a living thing in a state of mortal agitation. Behind the goggles, his dark eyes had an anxious look in them. 'Aren't you going rather fast?' he shouted, leaning forward, so as to make himself heard.

'Not a bit,' Hovenden shouted back. 'Just ve usual speed. Perfectly safe.' His ordinary pedestrian self would never have dreamed of doing anything contrary to the wishes of the venerated master. But the young giant who sat at the wheel of the Velox cared for nobody. He went his own way.

They passed through the sordid outskirts of Viareggio, through the pinewoods beyond, solemn with dark green shadow, and aromatic. Islanded in their grassy meadow within the battlemented walls, the white church, the white arcaded tower miraculously poised on the verge of falling, the round white baptistery seemed to meditate in solitude of ancient glories — Pisan dominion, Pisan arts and thoughts — of the mysteries of religion, of inscrutable fate and unfathomed godhead, of the insignificance and the grandeur of man.

'Why ve deuce it shouldn't fall,' said Hovenden, as the Leaning Tower came in sight, 'I can't imagine.'

They drove past the house on the water, where Byron had bored himself through an eternity of months, out of the town. After Pontedera the road became more desolate. Through a wilderness of bare, unfertile hills, between whose yellowing grasses showed a white and ghastly soil, they mounted towards Volterra. The landscape took on something of an infernal aspect; a prospect of parched hills and waterless gulleys, like the undulations of a petrified ocean, expanded interminably round them. And on the crest of the highest wave, the capital of this strange hell, stood Volterra — three towers against the sky, a dome, a line of impregnable walls, and outside the walls, still outside but advancing ineluctably year by year towards them, the ravening gulf that eats its way into the flank of the hill, devouring the works of civilization after civilization, the tombs of the Etruscans, Roman villas, abbeys and mediaeval fortresses, renaissance churches and the houses of yesterday.

'Must be a bit slow, life in a town like vis,' said Hovenden, racing round the hairpin turns with an easy virtuosity that appalled Mr. Falx.

'Think if one had been born there,' said Irene.

'Well, if we'd both been born vere,' replied Lord Hovenden, flushed with insolence and speed, 'it wouldn't have been so bad.'

They left Volterra behind them. The hellish landscape was gradually tempered with mundane greenness and amenity. They descended the headlong street of Colle. The



landscape became once more completely earthly. The soil of the hills was red, like that from which God made Adam. In the steep fields grew rows of little pollard trees, from whose twisted black arms hung the festooned vines. Here and there between the trees shuffled a pair of white oxen, dragging a plough.

‘Excellent roads, for a change,’ said Lord Hovenden. On one straight stretch he managed to touch eighty-eight. Mr. Falx’s beard writhed and fluttered with the agonized motions of some captive animal. He was enormously thankful when they drew up in front of the hotel at Siena.

‘Wonderful machine, don’t you fink?’ Lord Hovenden asked him, when they had come to a standstill.

‘You go much too fast,’ said Mr. Falx severely.

Lord Hovenden’s face fell. ‘I’m awfully sorry,’ he apologized. The young giant in him was already giving place to the meek pedestrian. He looked at his watch. ‘The others won’t be here for another three-quarters of an hour, I should fink,’ he added, in the hope that Mr. Falx would be mollified by the information.

Mr. Falx was not mollified, and when the time came, after lunch, for setting out on the Perugia road, he expressed a decided preference for a seat in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s limousine. It was decided that he should change places with Miss Elver.

Miss Elver had no objection to speed; indeed, it excited her. The faster they went, the more piercing became her cries of greeting and farewell, the more wildly she waved her handkerchief at the passing dogs and children. The only trouble about going so fast was that the mighty wind was always tearing the handkerchiefs from between her fingers and whirling them irretrievably into receding space. When all the four handkerchiefs in her reticule had been blown away, Miss Elver burst into tears. Lord Hovenden had to stop and lend her his coloured silk bandana. Miss Elver was enchanted by its gaudy beauty; to secure it against the assaults of the thievish wind, she made Irene tie one corner of it round her wrist.

‘Now it’ll be all right,’ she said triumphantly; lifting her goggles, she wiped away the last traces of her recent grief.

Lord Hovenden set off again. On the sky-line, lifted high above the rolling table-land over which they were travelling, the solitary blue shape of Monte Amiata beckoned from far away. With every mile to southward the horns of the white oxen that dragged the carts became longer and longer. A sneeze — one ran the risk of a puncture; a sideways toss of the head — one might have been impaled on the hard and polished points. They passed through San Quirico; from that secret and melancholy garden within the walls of the ruined citadel came a whiff of sun-warmed box. In Pienza they found the Platonic idea of a city, the town with a capital T; walls with a gate in them, a short street, a piazza with a cathedral and palaces round the other three sides, another short street, another gate and then the fields, rich with corn, wine and oil; and the tall blue peak of Monte Amiata looking down across the fertile land. At Montepulciano there were more palaces and more churches; but the intellectual beauty of symmetry was replaced by a picturesque and precipitous confusion.

‘Gosh!’ said Lord Hovenden expressively, as they slid with locked wheels down a high street that had been planned for pack-asses and mules. From pedimented windows between the pilasters of the palaces, curious faces peered out at them. They tobogganed down, through the high renaissance, out of an arch of the Middle Ages, into the dateless and eternal fields. From Montepulciano they descended on to Lake Trasimene.

‘Wasn’t there a battle here, or something?’ asked Irene, when she saw the name on the map.

Lord Hovenden seemed to remember that there had indeed been something of the kind in this neighbourhood. ‘But it doesn’t make much difference, does it?’

Irene nodded; it certainly didn’t seem to make much difference.

‘Nofing makes any difference,’ said Lord Hovenden, making himself heard with difficulty in the teeth of a wind which his speedometer registered as blowing at forty-five miles an hour. ‘Except’ — the wind made him bold — ‘except you.’ And he added hastily, in case Irene might try to be severe. ‘Such a bore going down-hill on a twiddly road like vis. One can’t risk ve slightest speed.’

But when they turned into the flat highway along the western shore of the lake, his face brightened. ‘Vis is more like it,’ he said. The wind in their faces increased from a capful to half a gale, from half a gale to a full gale, from a full gale very nearly to a hurricane. Lord Hovenden’s spirits rose with the mounting speed. His lips curved themselves into a smile of fixed and permanent rapture. Behind the glass of his goggles his eyes were very bright. ‘Pretty good going,’ he said.

‘Pretty good,’ echoed Irene. Under her mask, she too was smiling. Between her ears and the flaps of her leather cap the wind made a glorious roaring. She was happy.

The road swung round to the left following the southern shore of the lake.

‘We shall soon be at Perugia,’ said Hovenden regretfully. ‘What a bore!’

And Irene, though she said nothing, inwardly agreed with him.

They rushed on, the gale blew steadily in their faces. The road forked; Lord Hovenden turned the nose of his machine along the leftward branch. They lost sight of the blue water.

‘Good-bye, Trasimene,’ said Irene regretfully. It was a lovely lake; she wished she could remember what had happened there.

The road began to climb and twist; the wind abated to a mere half-gale. From the top of the hill, Irene was surprised to see the blue waters, which she had just taken leave of for ever, sparkling two or three hundred feet below on the left. At the joyous sight Miss Elver clapped her hands and shouted.

‘Hullo,’ Irene said, surprised. ‘That’s odd, isn’t it?’

‘Taken ve wrong road,’ Hovenden explained. ‘We’re going norf again up ve east side of ve lake. We’ll go right round. It’s too much bore to stop and turn.’

They rushed on. For a long time neither of them spoke. Behind them Miss Elver hooted her greetings to every living creature on the road.

They were filled with happiness and joy; they would have liked to go on like this for ever. They rushed on. On the north shore of the lake the road straightened itself out

and became flat again. The wind freshened. Far off on their respective hills Cortona and Montepulciano moved slowly, as they rushed along, like fixed stars. And now they were on the west shore once more. Perched on its jutting peninsula Castiglione del Lago reflected itself complacently in the water. 'Pretty good,' shouted Lord Hovenden in the teeth of the hurricane. 'By the way,' he added, 'wasn't it Hannibal or somebody who had a battle here? Wiv elephants, or somefing.'

'Perhaps it was,' said Irene.

'Not vat it matters in ve least.'

'Not in the least.' She laughed under her mask.

Hovenden laughed too. He was happy, he was joyful, he was daring.

'Would you marry me if I asked you?' he said. The question followed naturally and by a kind of logic from what they had been saying about Hannibal and his elephants. He did not look at her as he asked the question; when one is doing sixty-seven one must keep one's eyes on the road.

'Don't talk nonsense,' said Irene.

'I'm not talking nonsense,' Lord Hovenden protested. 'I'm asking a straightforward question. Would you marry me?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know,' said Irene.

They had passed Castiglione. The fixed stars of Montepulciano and Cortona had set behind them.

'Don't you like me?' shouted Lord Hovenden. The wind had swelled into a hurricane.

'You know I do.'

'Ven why not?'

'Because, because . . . Oh, I don't know. I wish you'd stop talking about it.'

The machine rushed on. Once more they were running along the southern shore. A hundred yards before the forking of the roads, Lord Hovenden broke silence. 'Will you marry me?' he asked.

'No,' said Irene.

Lord Hovenden turned the nose of his machine to the left. The road climbed and twisted, the wind of their speed abated.

'Stop,' said Irene. 'You've taken the wrong turn again.'

But Hovenden did not stop. Instead, he pressed down the accelerator. If the car got round the corners it was more by a miracle than in obedience to the laws of Newton or of nature.

'Stop!' cried Irene again. But the car went on.

From the hill-top they looked down once more upon the lake.

'Will you marry me?' Lord Hovenden asked again. His eyes were fixed on the road in front of him. Rapturously, triumphantly he smiled. He had never felt happier, never more daring, more overflowing with strength and power. 'Will you marry me?'

'No,' said Irene. She felt annoyed; how stupidly he was behaving!

They were silent for several minutes. At Castiglione del Lago he asked again. Irene repeated her answer.

'You're not going to do this clown's trick again, are you?' she asked as they approached the bifurcation of the roads.

'It depends if you're going to marry me,' he answered. This time he laughed aloud; so infectiously that Irene, whose irritation was something laid on superficially over her happiness, could not help laughing too. 'Are you going to?' he asked.

'No.'

Lord Hovenden turned to the left. 'It'll be late before we get to Perugia,' he said.

'Oo-ooh!' cried Miss Elver, as they topped the long hill. 'How lovely!' She clapped her hands. Then, leaning forward, she touched Irene's shoulder. 'What a lot of lakes there are here!' she said.

On the north shore Lord Hovenden asked again. Cortona and Montepulciano presided at the asking.

'I don't see why I should be bullied,' said Irene. Lord Hovenden found the answer more promising than those which had gone before.

'But you're not being bullied.'

'I am,' she insisted. 'You're trying to force me to answer all at once, without thinking.'

'Now really,' said Hovenden, 'I call vat a bit fick. Forcing you to answer all at once! But vat's exactly what I'm not doing. I'm giving you time. We'll go round ve lake all night, if you like.'

A quarter of a mile from the forking of the road, he put the question yet once more.

'You're a beast,' said Irene.

'Vat's not an answer.'

'I don't want to answer.'

'You needn't answer definitely if you don't want to,' he conceded. 'I only want you to say vat you'll fink of it. Just say perhaps.'

'I don't want to,' Irene insisted. They were very close, now, to the dividing of ways.

'Just perhaps. Just say you'll fink of it.'

'Well, I'll think,' said Irene. 'But mind, it doesn't commit . . .'

She did not finish her sentence; for the car, which had been heading towards the left, swerved suddenly to the right with such violence that Irene had to clutch at the arm of her seat to prevent herself from being thrown sideways bodily out of the machine. 'Goodness!'

'It's all right,' said Lord Hovenden. They were running smoothly now along the right-hand road. Ten minutes later, from the crest of a little pass, they saw Perugia on its mountain, glittering in the sunlight. They found, when they reached the hotel, that the rest of the party had long since arrived.

'We took ve wrong turning,' Lord Hovenden explained. 'By ve way,' he added, turning to Mr. Cardan, 'about vat lake we passed — wasn't it Hannibal or some one . . .'

‘Such a lot of lakes,’ Miss Elver was telling Mrs. Chelifer. ‘Such a lot!’

‘Only one, surely, my dear,’ Mrs. Chelifer mildly insisted.

But Miss Elver wouldn’t hear of it. ‘Lots and lots.’

Mrs. Chelifer sighed compassionately.

Before dinner Irene and Lord Hovenden went for a stroll in the town. The huge stone palaces lowered down at them as they passed. The sun was so low that only their highest windows, their roofs and cornices took the light. The world’s grey shadow was creeping up their flanks; but their crests were tipped with coral and ruddy gold.

‘I like vis place,’ said Lord Hovenden. In the circumstances he would have liked Wigan or Pittsburg.

‘So do I,’ said Irene. Through the window in her thick hair her face looked smiling out, merry in its childishness.

Leaving the stately part of the town, they plunged into the labyrinth of steep alleys, of winding passage-ways and staircases behind the cathedral. Built confusedly on the hill-side, the tall houses seemed to grow into one another, as though they were the component parts of one immense and fantastical building, in which the alleys served as corridors. The road would burrow through the houses in a long dark tunnel, to widen out into a little well-like courtyard, open to the sky. Through open doors, at the head of an outside staircase, one saw in the bright electric light a family sitting round the soup tureen. The road turned into a flight of stairs, dipped into another tunnel, made cheerful by the lights of a subterranean wine shop opening into it. From the mouth of the bright cavern came up the smell of liquor, the sound of loud voices and reverberated laughter.

And then, suddenly emerging from under the high houses, they found themselves standing on the edge of an escarped slope, looking out on to a huge expanse of pale evening sky, scalloped at its fringes by the blue shapes of mountains, with the round moon, already bright, hanging serene and solemn in the midst. Leaning over the parapet, they looked down at the roofs of another quarter of the city, a hundred feet below. The colours of the world still struggled against the encroaching darkness; but a lavish municipality had already beaded the streets with yellow lights. A faint smell of wood-smoke and frying came up through the thin pure air. The silence of the sky was so capacious, so high and wide, that the noises of the town — like so many small, distinctly seen objects in the midst of an immense blank prairie — served but to intensify the quiet, to make the listener more conscious of its immensity in comparison with the trivial clatter at its heart.

‘I like vis place,’ Lord Hovenden repeated.

They stood for a long time, leaning their elbows on the parapet, saying nothing.

‘I say,’ said Hovenden suddenly, turning towards his companion a face on which all the shyness, the pedestrian’s self-deprecation had reappeared, ‘I’m most awfully sorry about vat silly business of going round vat beastly lake.’ The young giant who sat at the wheel of the Vauxhall Velox had retired with the machine into the garage, leaving a much less formidable Hovenden to prosecute the campaign which he had

so masterfully begun. The moon, the enchanting beauty of the face that looked out so pensively through its tress-framed window, the enormous silence with the little irrelevant noises at its heart, the smell of wood-smoke and fried veal cutlets — all these influences had conspired to mollify Lord Hovenden's joyous elation into a soft and sugary melancholy. His actions of this afternoon seemed to him now, in his changed mood, reprehensibly violent. He was afraid that his brutality might have ruined his cause. Could she ever forgive him for such behaviour? He was overwhelmed by self-reproach. To beg forgiveness seemed to be his only hope. 'I'm awfully sorry.'

'Are you?' Irene turned and smiled at him. Her small white teeth showed beneath the lifted lip; in the wide-set, childish eyes there was a shining happiness. 'I'm not. I didn't mind a bit.'

Lord Hovenden took her hand. 'You didn't mind? Not at all?'

She shook her head. 'You remember that day under the olive trees?'

'I was a beast,' he whispered remorsefully.

'I was a goose,' said Irene. 'But I feel different now.'

'You don't mean . . .'

She nodded. They walked back to their hotel hand in hand. Hovenden never stopped talking and laughing all the way. Irene was silent. The kiss had made her happy too, but in a different way.

## Chapter II

TIME AND SPACE, matter and mind, subject, object — how inextricably they got mixed, next day, on the road to Rome! The simple-minded traveller who imagines himself to be driving quietly through Umbria and Latium finds himself at the same time dizzily switchbacking up and down the periods of history, rolling on top gear through systems of political economy, scaling heights of philosophy and religion, whizzing from aesthetic to aesthetic. Dimensions are bewilderingly multiplied, and the machine which seems to be rolling so smoothly over the roads is travelling, in reality, as fast as forty horses and the human minds on board can take it, down a score of other roads, simultaneously, in all directions.

The morning was bright when they left Perugia. In the blue sky above Subasio floated a few large white clouds. Silently they rolled away down the winding hill. At the foot of the mountain, secure from the sunlight in the delicious cool of their family vault, the obese Volumni reclined along the lids of their marble ashbins, as though on couches round the dinner-table. In an eternal anticipation of the next succulent course they smiled and for ever went on smiling. We enjoyed life, they seemed to say, and considered death without horror. The thought of death was the seasoning which made our five and twenty thousand dinners upon this earth yet more appetizing.

A few miles further on, at Assisi, the mummy of a she-saint lies in a glass case, brilliantly illumined by concealed electric lights. Think of death, says the she-saint, ponder incessantly on the decay of all things, the transience of this sublunary life. Think, think; and in the end life itself will lose all its savour; death will corrupt it; the flesh will seem a shame and a disgustfulness. Think of death hard enough and you will come to deny the beauty and the holiness of life; and, in point of fact, the mummy was once a nun.

‘When Goethe came to Assisi,’ said Mr. Cardan, as they emerged from the vaults of St. Clare, ‘the only thing he looked at was the portico of a second-rate Roman temple. Perhaps he wasn’t such a fool as we think him.’

‘An admirable place for playing halma,’ said Chelifer, as they entered the Teatro Metastasio.

Upon that rococo stage art was intended to worship itself. Everywhere now, for the last two hundred years and more, it has been worshipping itself.

But in the upper and the lower churches of St. Francis, Giotto and Cimabue showed that art had once worshipped something other than itself. Art there is the handmaid of religion — or, as the psycho-analysts would say, more scientifically, anal-erotism is a frequent concomitant of incestuous homosexuality.

‘I wonder,’ said Mr. Cardan pensively, ‘if St. Francis really managed to make poverty seem so dignified, charming and attractive as they make out. I know very few poor people nowadays who cut a particularly graceful figure.’ He looked at Miss Elver, who was waddling along the road like a water-bird on land, a few yards ahead. The end of one of Lord Hovenden’s bright bandanas trailed behind her in the dust; it was tied by one corner to her wrist and she had forgotten its existence. Twenty-five thousand pounds, thought Mr. Cardan, and sighed. St. Francis, Gotama Buddha — they managed their affairs rather differently. But it was difficult nowadays to beg with any degree of dignity.

They got into the cars once more; waving the red bandana, Miss Elver said good-bye to the saints who thought so much of death that they were forced to mortify their lives. In their cool summer-house the obese Volumni smiled contemptuously. We thought not of death, we begat children, multiplied our flocks, added acre to acre, glorified life. . . . Lord Hovenden accelerated; the two wisdoms, the new and the ancient law, receded into the distance.

Spello came tumbling down the hill to look at them. In Foligno it was market day. There were so many people that Miss Elver exhausted herself in continuous wavings and greetings. Trevi on its conical mountain was like the picture of a city in an illuminated book. By the side of the road, in the rich plain, stood factories; their tall chimneys were the slenderer repetitions of the castle towers perched high on the slopes of the hills above. In these secure and civilized times the robbers come down from their mountain fastnesses and build their watch-towers in the valleys. They were driving through progress; through progress at a mile a minute. And suddenly the cool and sparkling miracle of Clitumnus was at their right hand. The sacred spring came rushing out of

the flank of the hill into a brimming pool. The banks were green with an almost English grass. There were green islands in the midst; and the weeping willow trees drooping over the water, the little bridges, transformed the Roman site into the original landscape from which a Chinese artist first drew a willow pattern.

‘More lakes,’ cried Miss Elver.

At Spoleto they stopped for lunch and the frescoes of Filippo Lippi, a painter Mrs. Aldwinkle particularly admired for having had the strength of mind, though a friar, to run off with a young girl at a Convent School. The shadowy apse was melodious with pious and elegant shapes and clear, pure colours. Anal-erotism was still the handmaid of incestuous homosexuality, but not exclusively. There was more than a hint in these bright forms of anal-erotism for anal-erotism’s sake. But the designer of that more than Roman cinquecento narthex at the west end of the church, he surely was a pure and unmixed coprophilite. How charming is divine philosophy! Astrology, alchemy, phrenology and animal magnetism, the N-rays, ectoplasm and the calculating horses of Elberfield — these have had their turn and passed. We need not regret them; for we can boast of a science as richly popular, as easy and as all-explanatory as ever were phrenology or magic. Gall and Mesmer have given place to Freud. Filippo Lippi once had a bump of art. He is now an incestuous homosexualist with a bent towards anal-erotism. Can we doubt any longer that human intelligence progresses and grows greater? Fifty years hence, what will be the current explanation of Filippo Lippi? Something profounder, something more fundamental even than faeces and infantile incestuousness; of that we may be certain. But what, precisely what, God alone knows. How charming is divine philosophy!

‘I like these paintings,’ Lord Hovenden whispered to Irene.

They set out again. Over the pass of the Somma, down the long winding gorge to Terni.

On across the plain (the mountains bristling jaggedly all round) and up the hill to Narni; Narni that hangs precariously on the brink of its deep precipitous valley; on into the Sabine hills.

Sabine, Sabine — how wildly the mere word deviated the machine from its course! Eheu, fugaces, how the days draw in — was not that first said, first elegantly and compellingly said, in a Sabine farm? And the Sabine women! Only Rubens knew what they looked like and how they ought to be raped. How large and blonde they were! What glossy satin dresses they had on, what pearls! And their Roman ravishers were tanned as brown as Indians. Their muscles bulged; their eyes, their polished armour flashed. From the backs of their prancing horses they fairly dived into the foaming sea of female flesh that splashed and wildly undulated around them. The very architecture became tumultuous and orgiastic. Those were the high old times. Climbing from Narni, they drove into the heart of them.

But other artists than Peter Paul had passed this way. He painted only the Sabine name; they, the scene. An ancient shepherd, strayed from one of Piranesi’s ruins, watched them from a rock above the road, leaning on his staff. A flock of goats, kneeling



ruminatively in the shade of an oak tree, their black bearded faces, their twisted horns sharply outlined against the bright blue sky, grouped themselves professionally — good beasts! they had studied the art of pictorial composition under the best masters — in momentary expectation of Rosa da Tivoli's arrival. And the same Italianizing Dutchman was surely responsible for that flock of dusty sheep, those dogs, those lads with staves and that burly master shepherd, dressed like a capripede in goatskin breeches and mounted on the back of a little donkey, whose smallness contributed by contrast to the portly dignity of its rider. Nor were Dutchmen and Flemings the only foreign painters in this Italian scene. There were trees, there were glades in the woods, there were rocks that belonged by right of conquest to Nicolas Poussin. Half close the eyes, and that grey stone becomes a ruined sepulchre: *Et ego in Arcadia . . .*; the village there, on the hill-top, across the valley, flowers into a little city of colonnades and cupolas and triumphal arches, and the peasants working in the fields are the people of a transcendental Arcadia gravely and soberly engaged in pursuing the True, the rationally Good and Beautiful. So much for the foreground and the middle distance. But suddenly, from the crest of a long descent, the remote wide background of Poussin's ideal world revealed itself: the vale of the Tiber, the broken plain of the Campagna, and in the midst — fantastic, improbable — the solitary cone of Mount Soracte, dim and blue against the blue of the sky.

## Chapter III

FROM THE HEIGHTS of the Pincio Mr. Falx denounced the city that lay spread out below him.

'Marvellous, isn't it?' Mrs. Aldwinkle had said. Rome was one of her private properties.

'But every stone of it,' said Mr. Falx, 'raised by slave labour. Every stone! Millions of wretches have sweated and toiled and died' — Mr. Falx's voice rose, his language became richer and richer, he gesticulated as though he were addressing a public meeting — 'in order that these palaces, these stately churches, these forums, amphitheatres, cloaca maximas and what-nots might be here to-day to gratify your idle eyes. Is it worth it, I ask you? Is the momentary gratification of a few idlers a sufficient reason for the secular oppression of millions of human beings, their brothers, their equals in the eyes of God? Is it, I ask again? No, a thousand times no.' With his right fist Mr. Falx thumped the open palm of his left hand. 'No!'

'But you forget,' said Mr. Cardan, 'there's such a thing as a natural hierarchy.' The words seemed to remind him of something. He looked round. At one of the little tea-tables grouped round the band-stand at the other side of the road, Miss Elver, dressed in her sack of flowered upholstery, was eating chocolate éclairs and meringues, messily, with an expression of rapture on her cream-smeared face. Mr. Cardan turned back and

continued: 'There are a few choice Britons who never never will be slaves, and a great many who not only will be slaves, but would be utterly lost if they were made free. Isn't it so?'

'Specious,' said Mr. Falx severely. 'But does the argument justify you in grinding the life out of a million human beings for the sake of a few works of art? How many thousand workmen and their wives and children lived degraded lives in order that St. Peter's might be what it is?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, St. Peter's isn't much of a work of art,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle scornfully, feeling that she had scored a decided point in the argument.

'If it's a question of degraded lives,' put in Chelifer, 'let me make a claim for the middle classes rather than the workers. Materially, perhaps, they may live a little better; but morally and spiritually, I assure you, they stand at the very heart of reality. Intellectually, of course, they are indistinguishable from the workers. All but a negligible, freakish minority in both classes belong to the three lowest Galtonian categories. But morally and spiritually they are worse off; they suffer from a greater reverence for public opinion, they are tortured by snobbery, they live perpetually in the midst of fear and hate. For if the workers are afraid of losing their jobs, so too are the burgesses, and with almost better reason — for they have more to lose, have further to fall. They fall from a precarious heaven of gentility into the abysses of unrelieved poverty, into the workhouse and the glutted labour exchanges; can you wonder that they live in fear? And as for hate — you can talk about the hate of the proletariat for the bourgeoisie, but it's nothing, I assure you, to the hate that the bourgeoisie feel for the proletariat. Your burgess loathes the worker because he is afraid of him; he is terrified of the revolution that may pull him down from his genteel heaven into hell. How enviously, with what a bitter resentment, your burgess regards the slightest amelioration of the worker's existence! To him it always seems an amelioration made at his expense. Do you remember, during the war and in the prosperous time immediately following, when the workers for the first time in history were paid a wage that enabled them to live in something like comfort, do you remember how furiously, with what a black atrabilious overflow of hatred, the middle classes denounced the riotous excesses of the idle poor? Why, the monsters even bought pianos — pianos! The pianos have all been sold again, long since. The spare furniture has gone the way of all superfluities. Even the winter overcoat is pawned. The burgess, for all that the times are hard for him too, feels happier; he is revenged. He can live in a comparative tranquillity. And what a life! He lives according to his lusts, but timorously and in a conventional way; his diversions are provided for him by joint stock companies. He has no religion, but a great respect for genteel conventions which have not even the justification of a divine origin. He has heard of art and thought, and respects them because the best people respect them; but his mental capacities and his lack of education do not allow him to get any real satisfaction out of them. He is thus poorer than the savage, who, if he has never heard of art or science, is yet rich in religion and traditional lore. The life of a wild animal has a certain dignity and beauty; it is only the life of a domesticated

animal that can be called degraded. The burgess is the perfectly domesticated human animal. That is why,' added Chelifer, 'that is why any one who wants to live really at the heart of human reality must live in the midst of burgessdom. In a little while, however, it won't be necessary to make any invidious distinctions between the classes. Every one will soon be bourgeois. The charm of the lower classes in the past consisted in the fact that they were composed of human animals in a state of relative wildness. They had a traditional wisdom and a traditional superstition; they had ancient and symbolical diversions of their own. My mother can tell you all about those,' he put in parenthetically. 'That Tolstoy should have preferred the Russian peasants to his rich and literary friends is very comprehensible. The peasants were wild; the others, just as brutish at bottom, were disgustingly tame. Moreover, they were lap-dogs of a perfectly useless breed; the peasants at any rate did something to justify their existence. But in the other countries of Europe and the New World the wild breed is rapidly dying out. Million-sale newspapers and radios are domesticating them at a prodigious rate. You can go a long way in England nowadays before you find a genuine wild human animal. Still, they do exist in the country and even in the more fetid and savage parts of towns. That's why, I repeat, one must live among the suburban bourgeoisie. The degraded and domesticated are the typical human animals of the present time; it's they who will inherit the earth in the next generation; they're the characteristic modern reality. The wild ones are no longer typical; it would be ludicrous to be a Tolstoyan now, in western Europe. And as for the genuine men and women, as opposed to the human animals, whether wild or tame — they're so fabulously exceptional that one has no right to think of them at all. That cupola,' he pointed to the silhouette of St. Peter's, rising high above the houses on the other side of the city, 'was designed by Michelangelo. And very nice too. But what has it or he to do with us?'

'Blasphemy!' cried Mrs. Aldwinkle, flying to the defence of Buonarroti.

Mr. Falx harked back to an earlier grievance. 'You malign human nature,' he said.

'All very true and indeed obvious,' was Mr. Cardan's comment. 'But I can't see why you shouldn't allow us to amuse ourselves with Michelangelo if we want to. God knows, it's hard enough for a man to adapt himself to circumstances; why should you deprive him of his little assistants in the difficult task? Wine, for example, learning, cigars and conversation, art, cooking, religion for those that like it, sport, love, humanitarianism, hashish and all the rest. Every man has his own recipe for facilitating the process of adaptation. Why shouldn't he be allowed to indulge in his dope in peace? You young men are all so damned intolerant. How often have I had occasion to say it? You're nothing but a set of prohibitionists, the whole lot of you.'

'Still,' said Mrs. Chelifer in her gentle and musical voice, 'you can't deny that prohibition has done a great deal of good in America.'

They strolled back to the tea-table, which they had left a few minutes before to look at the view. Miss Elver was just finishing an éclair. Two empty dishes stood in front of her.

'Had a good tea?' asked Mr. Cardan.

Miss Elver nodded; her mouth was too full to speak.

‘Perhaps you’d like some more cakes?’ he suggested.

Miss Elver looked at the two empty dishes, then at Mr. Cardan. She seemed on the point of saying yes. But Mrs. Chelifer, who had taken the chair next hers, laid a hand on her arm.

‘I don’t think Grace really wants any more,’ she said.

Grace turned towards her; a look of disappointment and melancholy came into her eyes, but it gave place after a moment to a happier expression. She smiled, she took Mrs. Chelifer’s hand and kissed it.

‘I like you,’ she said.

On the back of Mrs. Chelifer’s hand her lips had left a brown print of melted chocolate. ‘I think you’d better just give your face a little wipe with your napkin,’ Mrs. Chelifer suggested.

‘Perhaps if you dipped the corner of it first into the hot water . . .’

There was a silence. From the open-air dancing-floor, a hundred yards away beneath the trees, came the sound, a little dimmed by the intervening distance and the pervading Roman noise, of the jazz band. Monotonously, unceasingly, the banjos throbbed out the dance rhythms. An occasional squeak indicated the presence of a violin. The trumpet could be heard tooting away with a dreary persistence at the tonic and dominant; and clear above all the rest the saxophone voluptuously caterwauled. At this distance every tune sounded exactly the same. Suddenly, from the band-stand of the tea-garden a pianist, two fiddlers and a ‘cellist began to play the Pilgrims’ Chorus out of Tannhäuser.

Irene and Lord Hovenden, locked in one another’s arms, were stepping lightly, meanwhile, lightly and accurately over the concrete dance-floor. Obedient to the music of the jazz band, forty other couples stepped lightly round them. Percolating insidiously through the palisade that separated the dance-floor from the rest of the world, thin wafts of the Pilgrims’ Chorus intruded faintly upon the jazz.

‘Listen,’ said Hovenden. Dancing, they listened. ‘Funny it sounds when you hear bof at ve same time!’

But the music from beyond the palisade was not strong enough to spoil their rhythm. They listened for a little, smiling at the absurdity of this other music from outside; but they danced on uninterruptedly. After a time they did not even take the trouble to listen.

## Chapter IV

MR. FALX HAD expected to find no difficulty, once they were arrived in Rome, in recalling his pupil to what he considered a better and more serious frame of mind. In the bracing atmosphere of an International Labour Conference Lord Hovenden, he

hoped, would recover his moral and intellectual tone. Listening to speeches, meeting foreign comrades, he would forget the corrupting charms of life under Mrs. Aldwinkle's roof and turn to nobler and more important things. Moreover, on a young and generous spirit like his the prospect of possible persecution at the hands of the Fascists might be expected to act as a stimulant; the fact of being in opposition ought to make him feel the more ardently for the unpopular cause. So Mr. Falx calculated.

But it turned out in the event that he had calculated badly. Arrived in Rome, Lord Hovenden seemed to take even less interest in advanced politics than he had during the last two or three weeks at Vezza. He suffered himself, but with a reluctance that was only too obvious to Mr. Falx, to be taken to a few of the meetings of the conference. Their bracing intellectual atmosphere had no tonic effect upon him whatsoever, and he spent his time at the meetings yawning and looking with an extraordinary frequency at his watch. In the evenings, when Mr. Falx wanted to take him to see some distinguished comrade, Lord Hovenden either made some vague excuse or, more frequently, was simply undiscoverable. The next day Mr. Falx learned with distress that he had passed half the night at a Dancing Club with Irene Aldwinkle. He could only look forward hopefully to the date of Mrs. Aldwinkle's return journey. Lord Hovenden — it had been arranged before they left England — would stay on with him in Rome till the end of the conference. With the removal of all temptations to frivolity he might be relied upon to re-become his better self.

Lord Hovenden's conscience, meanwhile, occasionally troubled him.

'I sometimes feel I've raver left old Mr. Falx in ve lurch,' he confided uneasily to Irene on the evening of their second day in Rome. 'But still, he can't really expect me to spend all ve day wiv him, can he?'

Irene agreed that he really couldn't.

'Besides,' Lord Hovenden went on, reassuring himself, 'I'd really be raver out of it wiv his friends. And it's not as if he were lonely. Vere's such a lot of people he wants to talk to. And, you know, I fink I'd really be in ve way more van anyfing.'

Irene nodded. The band struck up again. Simultaneously the two young people got up and, united, stepped off on to the floor. It was a sordid and flashy cabaret, frequented by the worst sort of international and Italian public. The women were mostly prostitutes; a party of loud and tipsy young Englishmen and Americans were sitting in one corner with a pair of swarthy young natives who looked altogether too sober; the couples who took the floor danced with an excessive intimacy. Irene and Lord Hovenden were discussing the date of their wedding; they thought the cabaret delightful.

In the day-time, when Hovenden could get off going to the conferences, they wandered about the town buying what they imagined to be antiques for their future home. The process was a little superfluous. For, absorbed in the delights of shopping, they forgot that their future home was also a highly ancestral home.

'Vat looks an awfully nice dinner-service,' Lord Hovenden would say; and darting into the shop they would buy it out of hand. 'A bit chipped' — he shook his head.

‘But never mind.’ Among the twenty-three valuable dinner-services with which their future home was already supplied was one of solid gold and one of silver gilt for less important occasions. Still, it was such fun buying, such fun to poke about in the shops! Under the pale blue sky of autumn the city was golden and black — golden where the sunlight fell on walls of stucco or travertine, black in the shadows, deeply black under archways, within the doors of churches, glossily black where the sculptured stone of fountains shone wet with the unceasing gush of water. In the open places the sun was hot; but a little wind from the sea blew freshly, and from the mouth of narrow alleys, sun-proof these thousand years, there breathed forth wafts of a delicious vault-like coolness. They walked for hours without feeling tired.

Mrs. Aldwinkle meanwhile went the round of the sights with Chelifer. She had hopes that the Sistine Chapel, the Appian Way at sunset, the Coliseum by moonlight, the gardens of the Villa d’Este might arouse in Chelifer’s mind emotions which should in their turn predispose him to feel romantically towards herself. The various emotions, she knew by experience, are not boxed off from one another in separate pigeon-holes; and when one is stimulated it is likely that its neighbours will also be aroused. More proposals are made in the taxi, on the way home from a Wagner opera, in the face of an impressive view, within the labyrinth of a ruined palace, than in drab parlours or the streets of West Kensington. But the Appian Way, even when the solitary pine trees were black against the sunset and the ghosts were playing oboes, not for the sensual ear, in the ruined sepulchres; the Coliseum, even under the moon; the cypresses, the cascades and the jade-green pools of Tivoli — all were ineffective. Chelifer never committed himself; his behaviour remained perfectly courteous.

Seated on a fallen column in the ruins of Hadrian’s Villa, Mrs. Aldwinkle even went so far as to tell him about certain amorous passages in her past life. She told him, with various little modifications of the facts, modifications in which she herself had long ago come implicitly to believe, the story of the affair with Elzevir, the pianist — such an artist! to his finger-tips; with Lord Trunion — such a grand seigneur of the old school! But concerning Mr. Cardan she was silent. It was not that Mrs. Aldwinkle’s mythopoeic faculties were not equal to making something very extraordinary and romantic out of Mr. Cardan. No, no; she had often described the man to those who did not know him; he was a sort of village Hampden, a mute inglorious What’s-his-name, who might have done anything — but anything — if he had chosen to give himself the trouble. He was a great Don Juan, actual in this case, not merely potential. He was a mocking devil’s advocate, he was even a devil. But that was because he was misunderstood — misunderstood by everybody but Mrs. Aldwinkle herself. Secretly he was so sensitive and kind-hearted. But one had to be gifted with intuition to find it out. And so on; she had made a capital mythical figure out of him. But an instinct of caution restrained her from showing off her myths too freely before people who were well acquainted with the originals. Chelifer had never met Lord Trunion or the immortal Elzevir. He had met Mr. Cardan.

But the effect of the confidences was as small as that of the romantic scenery and the stupendous works of art. Chelifer was not encouraged by them either to confide in return or to follow the example of Elzevir and Lord Trunion. He listened attentively, gave vent, when she had finished, to a few well-chosen expressions of sympathy, such as one writes to acquaintances on the deaths of their aged grandmothers, and after a considerable silence, looking at his watch, said he thought it was time to be getting back: he had promised to meet his mother for tea, and after tea, he added, he was going to take her to look at pensions. Seeing that she was going to stay in Rome the whole winter, it was worth taking some trouble about finding a nice room. Wasn't it? Mrs. Aldwinkle was forced to agree. They set off through the parched Campagna towards the city. Mrs. Aldwinkle preserved a melancholy silence all the way.

On their way from the hotel to the tea-shop in the Piazza Venezia Mrs. Chelifer, Miss Elver and Mr. Cardan passed through the forum of Trajan. The two little churches lifted their twin domes of gold against the sky. From the floor of the forum, deep-sunk beneath the level of the road — a foot for every hundred years — rose the huge column, with tumbled pillars and blocks of masonry lying confusedly round its base. They paused to look round.

'I've always been a Protestant,' said Mrs. Chelifer after a moment's silence; 'but all the same I've always felt, whenever I came here, that Rome was somehow a special place; that God had marked it out in some peculiar way from among other cities as a place where the greatest things should happen. It's a significant place, a portentous place — though I couldn't tell you exactly why. One just feels that it is portentous; that's all. Look at this piazza, for example. Two florid little counter-Reformation churches, all trumpery pretentiousness and no piety; a mixed lot of ordinary houses all round, and in the hole in the middle a huge heathen memorial of slaughter. And yet for some reason it all seems to me to have a significance, a spiritual meaning; it's important. And the same applies to everything in this extraordinary place. You can't regard it with indifference as you can an ordinary town.'

'And yet,' said Mr. Cardan, 'a great many tourists and all the inhabitants contrive to do so with complete success.'

'That's only because they've never looked at the place,' said Mrs. Chelifer. 'Once you've really looked . . .'

She was interrupted by a loud whoop from Miss Elver, who had wandered away from her companions and was looking over the railing into the sunken forum.

'What is it?' called Mr. Cardan. They hurried across the street towards her.

'Look,' cried Miss Elver, pointing down, 'look. All the cats!'

And there they were. On the sun-warmed marble of a fallen column basked a large tabby. A family of ginger kittens were playing on the ground below. Small tigers stalked between the blocks of masonry. A miniature black panther was standing up on its hind legs to sharpen its claws on the bark of a little tree. At the foot of the column lay an emaciated corpse.

'Puss, puss,' Miss Elver shrilly yelled.

‘No good,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘They only understand Italian.’

Miss Elver looked at him. ‘Perhaps I’d better learn a little, then,’ she said. ‘Cat’s Italian.’

Mrs. Chelifer meanwhile was looking down very earnestly into the forum. ‘Why, there are at least twenty,’ she said. ‘How do they get there?’

‘People who want to get rid of their cats just come and drop them over the railing into the forum,’ Mr. Cardan explained.

‘And they can’t get out?’

‘So it seems.’

An expression of distress appeared on Mrs. Chelifer’s gentle face. She made a little clicking with her tongue against her teeth and sadly shook her head. ‘Dear, dear,’ she said, ‘dear, dear. And how do they get fed?’

‘I’ve no idea,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘Perhaps they feed on one another. People throw things down from time to time, no doubt.’

‘There’s a dead one there, in the middle,’ said Mrs. Chelifer; and a note of something like reproach came into her voice, as though she found that Mr. Cardan was to blame for the deadness of the little corpse at the foot of the triumphal column.

‘Very dead,’ said Mr. Cardan.

They walked on. Mrs. Chelifer did not speak; she seemed preoccupied.

## Chapter V

‘AN PRIS CARUNS flucuthukh’; Mr. Cardan beckoned to the guide. ‘Bring the lamp a little nearer,’ he said in Italian, and when the light had been approached, he went on slowly spelling out the primitive Greek writing on the wall of the tomb: ‘flucuthukh nun tithuial khues khathc anulis mulu vizile ziz riin puian acasri flucuper pris an ti ar vus ta aius muntheri flucuthukh.’ He straightened himself up. ‘Charming language,’ he said, ‘charming! Ever since I learned that the Etruscans used to call the god of wine Fufluns, I’ve taken the keenest interest in their language. Fufluns — how incomparably more appropriate that is than Bacchus, or Liber, or Dionysos! Fufluns, Fufluns,’ he repeated with delighted emphasis. ‘It couldn’t be better. They had a real linguistic genius, those creatures. What poets they must have produced! “When Fufluns flucuthukhs the ziz” — one can imagine the odes in praise of wine which began like that. You couldn’t bring together eight such juicy, boozy syllables as that in English, could you?’

‘What about “Ale in a Saxon rumkin” then?’ suggested Chelifer.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘It doesn’t compare with the Etruscan,’ he said. ‘There aren’t enough consonants. It’s too light, too fizzy and trivial. Why, you might be talking about soda water.’



‘But for all you know,’ said Chelifer, ‘flucuthukh in Etruscan may mean soda water. Fufluns, I grant you, is apposite. But perhaps it was just a fluke. You have no evidence to show that they fitted sound to sense so aptly in other words. “When Fufluns flucuthukhs the ziz” may be the translation of “When Bacchus drowns the hock with soda.” You don’t know.’

‘You’re quite right,’ Mr. Cardan agreed. ‘I don’t. Nor does any one else. My enthusiasm for Fufluns carried me away. Flucuthukh may not have the fruity connotation that a word with a sound like that ought to have; it may even, as you say, mean soda water. Still, I continue to hope for the best; I believe in my Etruscans. One day, when they find the key to this fossilized language, I believe I shall be justified; flucuthukh will turn out to be just as appropriate as Fufluns — you mark my words! It’s a great language, I insist; a great language. Who knows? A couple of generations hence some new Busby or Keat may be drumming Etruscan syntax and Etruscan prosody into the backsides of British boyhood. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction. Latin and Greek have a certain infinitesimal practical value. But Etruscan is totally and absolutely useless. What better basis for a gentleman’s education could possibly be discovered? It’s the great dead language of the future. If Etruscan didn’t exist, it would be necessary to invent it.’

‘Which is precisely what the pedagogues will have to do,’ said Chelifer, ‘there being no Etruscan literature beyond the inscriptions and the rigmarole on the mummy-wrappings at Agram.’

‘So much the better,’ replied Mr. Cardan. ‘If we wrote it ourselves, we might find Etruscan literature interesting. Etruscan literature composed by Etruscans would be as boring as any other ancient literature. But if the epics were written by you, the Socratic dialogues by me, the history by some master of fiction like Miss Thriplow — then we’d possess a corpus in which the rare schoolboys who can derive some profit from their education could take a real interest. And when, a generation hence, we have become as much out of date in our ideas as Tully or Horace, the literature of Etruria will be rewritten by our descendants. Each generation will use the dead language to express its own ideas. And expressed in so rich an idiom as I take Etruscan to be, the ideas will seem the more significant and memorable. For I have often noticed that an idea which, expressed in one’s native language, would seem dull, commonplace and opaque, becomes transparent to the mind’s eye, takes on a new significance when given a foreign and unfamiliar embodiment. A cracker-motto in Latin sounds much weightier and truer than the same motto in English. Indeed, if the study of dead languages has any use at all, which I should be sorry to admit, it consists in teaching us the importance of the verbal medium in which thoughts are expressed. To know the same thing in several languages is to know it (if you have any sense at all) more profoundly, more richly, than if it were known only in one. The youth who learns that the god of wine is called, in Etruscan, Fufluns has a profounder knowledge of the attributes of that divine personality than the youth who only knows him under the name of Bacchus. If I desire that archaeologists should discover the key to the Etruscan language, it is

merely in order that I may have a deeper insight into the thing or idea connoted by such sumptuous words as flucuthukh or khathc. For the rest I care nothing. That they should discover the meaning of these inscriptions is a matter to me of the most complete indifference. For after all, what would they discover? Nothing that we don't already know. They would discover that before the Romans conquered Italy men ate and drank, made love, piled up wealth, oppressed their weaker neighbours, diverted themselves with sports, made laws and so on. One could have divined as much by walking down Piccadilly any day of the week. And besides, we have their pictures.' He threw out his hand. The guide, who had been listening patiently to the incomprehensible discourse, responded to the gesture by raising his acetylene lamp. Called magically into existence by the bright white light, a crowd of gaily coloured forms appeared on the walls of the vault in which they were standing. Set in a frame of conventionalized trees, a pair of red-brown wrestlers with Egyptian eyes and the profiles of the Greeks who disport themselves round the flanks of the earliest vases were feeling for a hold. On either side of them, beyond the trees, stood two couples of long-legged black horses. Above them, in the segment of a circle between the upper line of this band of paintings and the vaulted roof, a great leopard lay couchant, white-skinned, with a pattern of black spots arranged like those on the china dogs and cats of a later age. On the wall to the left they were feasting: red-brown Etruscans reclined on couches; porcelain-white women, contrasting as voluptuously with their tanned companions as the pale, plump nymphs of Boucher with their brown pastoral lovers, sat by their sides. With hieratic gestures of mutual love they pledged one another in bowls of wine. On the opposite wall the fowlers were busy — here with slings, there with nets. The sky was alive with birds. In the blue sea below they were spearing fish. A long inscription ran from right to left across the wall. The vaulted roof was painted with chequers, red, black and white. Over the low, narrow door that led from the tomb into the ante-chamber there knelt a benevolent white bull. Two thousand five hundred years ago they had wept here over the newly dead.

'You see them,' continued Mr. Cardan, 'hunting, drinking, playing, making love. What else could you expect them to do? This writing will tell us no more than we know already. True, I want to know what it means, but only because I hope that the brown man may be saying to the white lady: "Flucuthukh to me only with thine eyes," or words to that effect, "and I will flucuthukh with mine." If that was what they really were saying, it would throw an entirely new light on the notion of drinking. An entirely new light.'

'It would throw no new light on love, if lovers they are,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle mournfully.

'Wouldn't it?' Mr. Cardan queried. 'But imagine if flucuthukh turned out to mean, not drink, but love. I assure you that the feelings denoted by such a word would be quite different from those we sum up by "love." You can make a good guess from the sound of the word in any language what the people who speak it mean when they talk of love. Amour, for example — that long ou sound with the rolled r at the

end of it, how significant it is! Ou — you have to push your lips into a snout-like formation, as though you were going to kiss. Then, briskly, rrr — you growl like a dog. Could anything be more perfectly expressive of the matter-of-fact lasciviousness which passes for love in nine-tenths of French fiction and drama? And Liebe — what a languishing, moonlit, sentimental sound the long ie has! And how apt, too, is the bleating labial by which it is followed! — be, — be. It is a sheep whose voice is choked by emotion. All German romanticism is implied in the sound of the word. And German romanticism, a little *détraqué*, turns quite logically into expressionism and the wild erotic extravagance of contemporary German fiction. As for our love — that's characteristically non-committal and diffident. That dim little monosyllable illustrates our English reluctance to call a spade a spade. It is the symbol of our national repressions. All our hypocrisy and all the beautiful platonism of our poetry is there. Love . . .' Mr. Cardan whispered the word, and holding up his finger for silence cocked his ear to catch the faint echoes of his voice reverberating from wall to wall under the sepulchral vault. 'Love. . . . How utterly different is our English emotion from that connoted by *amore*! *Amore* — you fairly sing the second syllable, in a baritone voice, from the chest, with a little throaty tremolo on the surface to make it sound more palpitating. *Amore* — it's the name of the quality that Stendhal so much admired in the Italians and the absence of which in his own countrymen, and more especially countrywomen, made him rank Paris below Milan or Rome — it's the apt and perfectly expressive name of passion.'

'How true!' said Mrs. Aldwinkle, brightening for a moment through her gloom. This compliment to her Italian language and Italian character touched and pleased her. 'The very sound of *amore* is passionate. If the English knew what passion meant, they'd have found a more expressive word than love. That's certain. But they don't know.' She sighed.

'Quite so,' said Mr. Cardan. '*Amore*, we see, can mean nothing else than Southern passion. But now, suppose that *flucuthukh* should turn out to be the Etruscan for love — what then? *Amour* connotes lasciviousness, *Liebe* sentiment, *amore* passion. To what aspect of the complex phenomenon of love can *flucuthukh* refer? The microbe *Staphylococcus pyogenes* produces in some patients boils, in others sties in the eye; in certain cases it is even responsible for *keratitis punctata*. It is the same with love. The symptoms vary in different individuals. But owing to the boundless suggestibility and imitativeness of man, the commonest symptoms at any given period tend to become universal in any one society. Whole peoples take the disease in the same way; one suffers from *amour*, another from *Liebe* and so on. But now imagine a people to whom love was *flucuthukh*. What can have been the particular symptoms of the general amorous disease to which such a name was given? One cannot guess. But at least it is fascinating to speculate.'

One after the other the party filed out through the narrow door into the ante-room of the sepulchre and up the steep flight of steps leading to the surface of the ground.

Blinking in the bright afternoon light, they stepped out on to the bare and windy down.

It was a solitary place. The arches of a ruined aqueduct went striding along the ridge, and following their long recession the eye came at last to rest on the walls and tall towers of Corneto. To the left the hog-backed down sloped seawards; on the further side of the narrow plain at its foot stretched the Mediterranean. On the right lay a deep valley, shut in on the further side by a great round hill. Its grassy flanks were furrowed and pitted with what had once been the works of man. Once, on that hill, had stood the sacred city, Tarquinii of the Etruscans. The long bare down on which they were standing had been, through how many centuries? its necropolis. In little houses hollowed out of the chalky stone slept the innumerable dead. Here and there the top of a vault was broken through; from the hollow darkness within came up even at high summer an immemorial coolness. Here and there the surface of the down swelled up into round grass-grown barrows. It was from the heart of one of these tumuli that they had now emerged. The guide put out his lamp and shut the door upon the Etruscan ghosts. They walked for a few hundred yards through geological time — between the sea and the hills, under the floating clouds; on the sky-line the Middle Ages pricked up their towers; the smudged and flattened relics of Etruria undulated almost imperceptibly under the grass; from the Roman road in the plain below came up the distant hooting of a motor car.

The sound of the motor horn aroused Irene from the thoughtful trance in which, sad-faced and childish, this time, pathetically, she was walking. She had been silent and melancholy ever since, yesterday morning, they had left Rome; Lord Hovenden had stayed behind with Mr. Falx. The long-drawn hooting of the electric horn seemed to remind her of something. She looked down towards the sea-board plain. A cloud of white dust was advancing along the Maremman road from the direction of Civita Vecchia. It hung, opaque, over half a mile of road, fading slowly to transparency towards the tail. At the head, where the dust was thickest, a small black object moved like a rapidly crawling insect across the map-like expanse of plain, drawing the cloud after it. From the opposite direction came another black-headed comet of dust. Like two white serpents they approached one another, as though rushing to battle. Nearer, nearer they came. Irene stopped still to look at them. She was filled with a horrible apprehension. It seemed impossible that they should not crash together. Nearer, nearer. The heads of the two serpents seemed almost to be touching one another. Suppose, just suppose that one of the cars was his. . . . Inevitably they must collide. Crash and smash — oh, the horror of it! Irene shut her eyes. A few seconds later she opened them. The two white snakes had merged together into one very thick opaque snake. It was impossible to see the little black heads at all. For one horrible moment she thought that they must have destroyed one another. But they reappeared after a little, receding now one from the other, no more approaching. The two serpents were still one serpent, but two-headed, a long amphisbaena. Then, gradually, the middle of the amphisbaena began to grow thin, to fade; a little clump of trees showed through it, dimly at first, mistily, then

clearly. The amphisbaena had fallen in half and the two white snakes crawled on, one northwards, the other towards the south, and between their fading tails was a wide and ever wider gap. Irene heaved a deep sigh of relief and ran on after the others. It seemed to her that she had been the witness of a catastrophe miraculously averted. She felt much happier than she had felt all day. On a wide road two automobiles had passed one another. That was all.

The guide was unlocking the door that gave entrance to another excavated barrow. He relit his lamp and led the way down the steep steps into the tomb. On one wall they were horse-racing and wrestling, hieratically, all in profile. A goddess — or perhaps it was merely the Lady Mayoress of the city — wearing that high bonnet-shaped coiffure which the Roman matrons were afterwards to borrow from their neighbours, was distributing the prizes. On the other walls they were feasting. The red-brown men, the white-skinned ladies reclined along their couches. A musician stood by, playing on his double flute, and a female dancer, dressed in what looked rather like a Persian costume, was dancing a shawl dance for the diversion of the diners.

‘They seem to have had simple tastes,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘There’s nothing very sophisticated or *fin de siècle* here — no bull-baiting by naked female acrobats, as at Cnossos; no gladiatorial fights, no wholesale butchering of animals, no boring matches with brass knuckle-dusters, as in the Roman arenas. A nice school-boyish sort of people, it looks to me. Not quite civilized enough to be exigent about their pleasures.’

‘And not yet quite civilized enough,’ added Chelifier, ‘to be really vulgar. In that respect they fall a long way behind the later Romans. Do you know that huge mosaic in the Lateran museum? It comes from one of the Imperial baths, I forget which, and consists of portraits of the principal sporting heroes of the epoch — boxers and wrestlers — with their trainers and backers. These last are treated very respectfully by the mosaic-maker, who represents them wearing togas and standing in the noblest attitudes. One sees at a glance that they are the *gens bien*, the sportsmen, the amateurs — in a word, the monied interest. The athletes are portrayed in a state of nature, and are indeed so excessively natural that one could easily mistake the heavy-weight boxers for gorillas peeled of their superfluous hair. Under each portrait is a caption with the name of the hero represented. The whole thing reminds one very much of the sporting page in a picture paper — only it is a page that is forty feet long by thirty wide, and made, not of wood-pulp, but of the most durable materials ever devised by the ingenuity of man for the embodiment and visible eternization of his thoughts. And it is, I think, precisely the size and everlastingness of the frightful thing that makes it so much worse than the similar page from our picture papers. To make ephemeral heroes of professional sportsmen and prize-fighters is bad enough; but that a people should desire to immortalize their fame is surely indicative of a profounder vulgarity and abjection. Like the Roman mob, the mobs of our modern capitals delight in sports and exercises which they themselves do not practise; but at any rate, the fame of our professionals lasts only a day after their triumph. We do not print their effigies on marble pavements made to live down a hundred generations of men. We print them on wood-pulp, which

is much the same as printing them on water. It is comforting to think that by the year two thousand one hundred the whole of contemporary journalism, literature and thought will have crumbled to dust. The mosaic, however, will still be in its present state of perfect preservation. Nothing short of dynamite or an earthquake will ever totally destroy the effigies of those Imperial boxers. And a very good thing, too, for the future historians of Rome. For no man can claim that he has really understood the Roman empire till he has studied that mosaic. That pavement is a vessel filled with the quintessence of Roman reality. A drop of that reality is enough to shrivel up all the retrospective Utopias that historians have ever made or ever can make out of the chronicles of ancient Rome. After looking at that mosaic a man can have no more generous illusions about the people who admired it or the age in which it was made. He will realize that Roman civilization was not merely just as sordid as ours, but if anything more sordid. But in these Etruscan vaults,' Chelifer added, looking round at the frescoed walls, 'one gets no such impression of organized and efficient beastliness as one gets from the Roman mosaic. There's a freshness, as you say, Mr. Cardan, a certain jolly schoolboyishness about all the fun they represent. But I have no doubt, of course, that the impression is entirely fallacious. Their art has a certain archaic charm; but the artists were probably quite as sophisticated and quite as repulsive as their Roman successors.'

'Come, come,' said Mr. Cardan, 'you forget that they called Bacchus Fufuns. Give them at least the credit that is due to them.'

'But the Romans too had a fine language,' Chelifer objected. 'And yet they laid down immense enlargements of the sporting page of the Daily Sketch in marble tesserae on a foundation of cement.'

They climbed again towards the light. The steps were so high and her legs so short that Miss Elver had to be helped up. The tomb resounded with her laughter and shrill whooping. They emerged at last out of the ground.

On the top of a high barrow some two or three hundred yards away stood the figure of a man, distinct against the sky. He was shading his eyes with his hand and seemed to be looking for something. Irene suddenly became very red.

'Why, I believe it's Hovenden,' she said in a voice that was as casual as she could make it.

Almost simultaneously the man turned his face in their direction. The shading hand went up in a gesture of greeting. A glad 'Hullo!' sounded across the tombs; the man skipped down from his barrow and came running across the down towards them. And Hovenden it was; Irene had seen aright.

'Been looking for you all over ve place,' he explained breathlessly as he came up. With the greatest heartiness he shook the hands of all present except — diplomatically — Irene's. 'Vey told me in ve town vat a party of foreigners was out here looking at ve cemetery or somefing. So I buzzed after you till I saw old Ernest wiv ve car at ve side of ve road. Been underground, have you?' He looked into the dark entrance of the tomb. 'No wonder I couldn't . . .'

Mrs. Aldwinkle cut him short. 'But why aren't you in Rome with Mr. Falx?' she asked.

Lord Hovenden's boyish, freckled face became all at once exceedingly red. 'Ve fact is,' he said, looking at the ground, 'vat I didn't feel very well. Ve doctor said I ought to get away from Rome at once. Country air, you know. So I just left a note for Mr. Falx and . . . and here I am.' He looked up again, smiling.

## Chapter VI

'BUT AT MONTEFIASCONI,' said Mr. Cardan, concluding the history of the German bishop who gave the famous wine of Montefiascone its curious name, 'at Montefiascone Bishop Defuk's servant found good wine at every shop and tavern; so that when his master arrived he found the prearranged symbol chalked up on a hundred doors. Est, Est, Est — the town was full of them. And the Bishop was so much enraptured with the drink that he decided to settle in Montefiascone for life. For life — but he drank so much that in a very short time it turned out that he had settled here for death. They buried him in the lower church, down there. On his tombstone his servant engraved the Bishop's portrait with this brief epitaph: "Est Est Jo Defuk. Propter nimium hic est. Dominus meus mortuus est." Since when the wine has always been called Est Est Est. We'll have a flask of it dry for serious drinking. And for the frivolous and the feminine, and to sip with the dessert, we'll have a bottle of the sweet moscato. And now let's see what there is to eat.' He picked up the menu and holding it out at arm's length — for he had the long sight of old age — read out slowly, with comments, the various items. It was always Mr. Cardan who ordered the dinner (although it was generally Lord Hovenden or Mrs. Aldwinkle who paid), always Mr. Cardan; for it was tacitly admitted by every one that Mr. Cardan was the expert on food and wine, the professional eater, the learned and scholarly drinker.

Seeing Mr. Cardan busy with the bill of fare, the landlord approached, rubbing his hands and cordially smiling — as well he might on a Rolls-Royce-full of foreigners — to take orders and give advice.

'The fish,' he confided to Mr. Cardan, 'the fish is something special.' He put his fingers to his lips and kissed them. 'It comes from Bolsena, from the lake, down there.' He pointed out of the window at the black night. Somewhere, far down through the darkness, lay the Lake of Bolsena.

Mr. Cardan held up his hand. 'No, no,' he objected with decision and shook his head. 'Don't talk to me of fish. Never safe in these little places,' he explained to his companions. 'Particularly in such hot weather. And then, imagine eating fish from Bolsena — a place where they have miracles, where holy wafers bleed for the edification of the pious and as a proof of the fact of transubstantiation. No, no,' Mr. Cardan

repeated, 'fishes from Bolsena are altogether too fishy. Let's stick to fried eggs, with fillet of veal to follow. Or a little roast capon . . .'

'I want fish,' said Miss Elver. The passionate earnestness of her tone contrasted strikingly with the airiness of Mr. Cardan's banter.

'I really wouldn't, you know,' said Mr. Cardan.

'But I like fish.'

'But it may be unwholesome. You never can tell.'

'But I want it,' Miss Elver insisted. 'I love fish.' Her large lower lip began to tremble, her eyes filled with tears. 'I want it.'

'Well, then, of course you shall have it,' said Mr. Cardan, making haste to console her. 'Of course, if you really like it. I was only afraid that it mightn't perhaps be good. But it probably will be.'

Miss Elver took comfort, blew her long nose and smiled. 'Thank you, Tommy,' she said, and blushed as she pronounced the name.

After dinner they went out into the piazza for coffee and liqueurs. The square was crowded and bright with lights. In the middle the band of the local Philharmonic Society was giving its Sunday evening concert. Planted on the rising ground above the piazza Sammicheli's great church solemnly impended. The lights struck up, illuminating its pilastered walls. The cupola stood out blackly against the sky.

'The choice,' said Mr. Cardan, looking round the piazza, 'seems to lie between the Café Moderno and the Bar Ideale. Personally, I should be all for the ideal rather than the real if it wasn't for the disagreeable fact that in a bar one has to stand. Whereas in a café, however crassly materialistic, one can sit down. I'm afraid the Moderno forces itself upon us.'

He led the way in the direction of the café.

'Talking of Bars,' said Chelifer, as they sat down at a little table in front of the café, 'has it ever occurred to you to enumerate the English words that have come to have an international currency? It's a somewhat curious selection, and one which seems to me to throw a certain light on the nature and significance of our Anglo-Saxon civilization. The three words from Shakespeare's language that have a completely universal currency are Bar, Sport and W.C. They're all just as good Finnish now as they are good English. Each of these words possesses what I may call a family. Round the idea "Bar" group themselves various other international words, such as Bitter, Cocktail, Whiskey and the like. "Sport" boasts a large family — Match, for example, Touring Club, the verb to Box, Cycle-Car, Performance (in the sporting sense) and various others. The idea of hydraulic sanitation has only one child that I can think of, namely Tub. Tub — it has a strangely old-world sound in English nowadays; but in Yugo-Slavia, on the other hand, it is exceedingly up-to-date. Which leads us on to that very odd class of international English words that have never been good English at all. A Smoking for example, a Dancing, a Five-o'clock — these have never existed except on the continent of Europe. As for High-Life, so popular a word in Athens, where it is spelt *iota, gamma*,



lambda, iota, phi — that dates from a remote, mid-Victorian epoch in the history of our national culture.'

'And Spleen,' said Mr. Cardan, 'you forget Spleen. That comes from much further back. A fine aristocratic word, that; we were fools to allow it to become extinct. One has to go to France to hear it uttered now.'

'The word may be dead,' said Chelifer, 'I but the emotion, I fancy, has never flourished more luxuriantly than now. The more material progress, the more wealth and leisure, the more standardized amusements — the more boredom. It's inevitable, it's the law of Nature. The people who have always suffered from spleen and who are still the principal victims, are the prosperous, leisured and educated. At present they form a relatively small minority; but in the Utopian state where everybody is well off, educated and leisured, everybody will be bored; unless for some obscure reason the same causes fail to produce the same effects. Only two or three hundred people out of every million could survive a lifetime in a really efficient Utopian state. The rest would simply die of spleen. In this way, it may be, natural selection will work towards the evolution of the super-man. Only the intelligent will be able to bear the almost intolerable burden of leisure and prosperity. The rest will simply wither away, or cut their throats — or, perhaps more probably, return in desperation to the delights of barbarism and cut one another's throats, not to mention the throats of the intelligent.'

'That certainly sounds the most likely and natural ending,' said Mr. Cardan. 'If of two possible alternatives one is in harmony with our highest aspirations and the other is, humanly speaking, absolutely pointless and completely wasteful, then, you may be sure, Nature will choose the second.'

At half-past ten Miss Elver complained that she did not feel very well. Mr. Cardan sighed and shook his head. 'These miraculous fishes,' he said. 'They went back to the hotel.'

'Luckily,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle that evening while Irene was brushing her hair, 'luckily I never had any babies. They spoil the figure so frightfully.'

'Still,' Irene ventured to object, 'still . . . they must be rather fun, all the same.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle pretexted a headache and sent her to bed almost at once. At half-past two in the morning Irene was startled out of her sleep by a most melancholy groaning and crying from the room next to hers. 'Oo, Oo! Ow!' It was Grace Elver's voice. Irene jumped out of bed and ran to see what was the matter. She found Miss Elver lying in a tumbled bed, writhing with pain.

'What is it?' she asked.

Miss Elver made no articulate answer. 'Oo, Oo,' she kept repeating, turning her head from side to side as though in the hope of escaping from the obsessing pain.

Irene ran to her aunt's bedroom, knocked at the door and, getting no answer, walked in. 'Aunt Lilian,' she called in the darkness, and louder, 'Aunt Lilian!' There was still no sound. Irene felt for the switch and turned on the light. Mrs. Aldwinkle's bed was empty. Irene stood there for a moment looking dubiously at the bed, wondering, speculating. From down the corridor came the repeated 'Oo, Oo!' of Grace Elver's

inarticulate pain. Roused by the sound from her momentary inaction, Irene turned, stepped across the passage and began knocking at Mr. Cardan's door.

## Chapter VII

### SELECTIONS FROM FRANCIS Chelifer

In the sporting calendar the most interesting events are booked for the autumnal months. There is no hunting in the spring. And even in Italy there is a brief close season for song-birds that lasts from the coming of the nightingales to the departure of the last swallow. The fun, the real fun, starts only in the autumn. Grouse-shooting, partridge-shooting — these are the gay preliminaries. But the great day is the First of October, when the massacre of the gaudy pheasant begins. Crack! crack! — the double barrels make music in the fading woods. And a little later the harmonious dogs join in and the hoof, as the Latin poet so aptly puts it, the hoof shakes the putrid field with quadrupedantical sound. Winter is made gay with the noise of hunting.

It is the same in the greater year of certain feminine lives. . . . Pop! pop! — on the First of October they go out to shoot the pheasant. A few weeks later, tally-ho, they hunt the fox. And on Guy Fawkes's day the man-eating season begins. My hostess, when she picked me up on the beach of Marina di Vezza, had reached a point in her year somewhere between pheasant-shooting and man-eating. They say that foxes enjoy being hunted; but I venture to doubt the truth of this comforting hypothesis. *Experientia* does it, as Mrs. Micawber's papa (ha ha! from Mr. Toft) . . . Etcetera.

If loving without being loved in return may be ranked as one of the most painful of experiences, being loved without loving is certainly one of the most boring. Perhaps no experience is better calculated to make one realize the senselessness of the passion. The spectacle of some one making a fool of himself arouses only laughter. When one is playing the fool oneself, one weeps. But when one is neither the active imbecile nor the disinterested spectator, but the unwilling cause of somebody else's folly — then it is that one comes to feel that weariness and that disgust which are the proper, the human reaction to any display of the deep animal stupidity that is the root of all evil.

Twice in my life have I experienced these salutary horrors of boredom — once by my own fault, because I asked to be loved without loving; and once because I had the misfortune to be picked up on the beach, limp as sea-weed, between the First of October and Guy Fawkes's day. The experiences were disagreeable while they lasted; but on the other hand, they were highly didactic. The first of them rounded off, so to speak, the lesson I had learned from Barbara. The second episode was staged by Providence, some few years later, to remind me of the first and to print what the Americans would call its 'message' still more indelibly upon my mind. Providence has been remarkably persistent in its efforts to sober me. To what end I cannot imagine.

Poor Miss Masson! She was a very good secretary. By the end of 1917 she knew all that it was possible to know about rubber tubing and castor oil. It was unfortunate for every one concerned that Providence should have destined her to instruct me yet more deeply in the fearful mysteries of love. True, I brought it on myself. Providence, on that occasion, elected to act indirectly and threw the blame on me. I accept it all — all the more willingly since my act shows in the most illuminating manner what are the consequences, the frightful consequences, of stupidity. There is a certain satisfaction to be derived from having personally proved the truth of one's own wisdom by acting in defiance of its precepts.

Yes, I brought it on myself. For it was I who made the first advances. It was I who, out of pure wantonness, provoked the sleeping, or at least well-disciplined tiger that lay hidden in Dorothy Masson's heart — put my walking-stick between the bars and, against all the rules, poked it rudely in the ribs. I got what I asked for.

I was like that wanton Blackamoor in one of old Busch's misanthropically comic picture-books.

Ein Mohr aus Bosheit und Pläsier  
Schießt auf das Elefantentier.

With his little arrow he punctures the placid pachyderm; and the pachyderm takes his revenge, elaborately, through fourteen subsequent woodcuts.

My only excuse — the recentness of that ludicrous catastrophe with which the tragedy of Barbara had concluded — was an excuse that might equally have served as an additional reason against doing what I did; I ought, after having once been bitten, to have shown myself twice shy. But in the state of misery in which I found myself I hoped that a second bite might distract my attention from the anguish of the first. And even this is not precisely accurate; for I never anticipated that the second would really be a bite at all. I looked forward merely to a kind of playful diversion, not to anything painful. True, when I found how serious the affair threatened to become for Dorothy Masson, I might have guessed that it would soon be serious also for myself, and have drawn back. But, inspired by that high-spirited irresponsibility which I have come since then so highly to admire in the natural, brutish human specimen, I refused to consider possible consequences and went on in the course I had begun. I was not in the least in love with the woman; nor did her person inspire me with any specific desire. My motive forces were misery, mingled with a kind of exasperation, and the vague itch of recurrent appetite. More than half of the world's 'affairs' have no more definite reasons for occurring. Ennui and itch are their first causes. Subsequently imagination may come into play and love will be born. Or experience may beget specific desires and in so doing may render one party necessary to the happiness of the other, or each to each. Or perhaps there will be no development at all and the affair will end placidly as it began, in itch and ennui.

But there are cases, of which mine was one, where one party may be inspired by the mere indefinite wantonness I have been describing, while the other is already imagination-ridden and in love. Poor Dorothy! There came into her eyes when I kissed

her a look such as I had never seen in any other human eyes before or since. It was the look one sees in the eyes of a dog when its master is angry and raises his whip — a look of absolute self-abasement mingled with terror. There was something positively appalling in seeing those eyes staring at one out of a woman's face. To see a human being reduced in one's arms to the condition of a frightened and adoring dog is a shocking thing. And the more so in this case since it was completely indifferent to me whether she was in my arms or not. But when she raised her face and looked at me for a moment with those abject and terrified eyes of hers, it was not merely indifferent to me; it was even positively distasteful. The sight of those large-pupilled eyes, in which there was no glimmer of a human rational soul, but only an animal's terror and abasement, made me feel at once guilty and, complementarily, angry, resentful and hostile.

'Why do you look at me like that?' I asked her once. 'As though you were frightened of me.'

She did not answer; but only hid her face against my shoulder, and pressed me more closely in her arms. Her body shook with involuntary startings and tremblings. Casually, from force of habit, I caressed her. The trembling became more violent. 'Don't,' she implored me in a faint hoarse whisper, 'don't.' But she pressed me still closer.

She was frightened, it seemed, not of me but of herself, of that which lay sleeping in the depths of her being and whose awakening threatened to overwhelm, to blot for a moment out of existence that well-ordered, reasonable soul which was the ruler at ordinary times of her life. She was afraid of the power within her that could make her become something other than her familiar self. She was fearful of losing her self-mastery. And at the same time there was nothing else that she desired. The sleeping power within her had begun to stir and there was no resisting it. Vainly, hopelessly, she continued to attempt the impossible. She went on trying to resist, and her resistance quickened her desire to yield. She was afraid and yet invited my awakening kisses. And while she whispered to me imploringly, like one who begs for mercy, she pressed me in her arms. I, meanwhile, had begun to realize all the potentialities for boredom implicit in the situation. And how boring it did in fact turn out to be! To be pursued by restless warmth when all that one desires is cool peace; to be perpetually and quite justly accused of remissness in love and to have to deny the accusation, feebly, for the sake of politeness; to be compelled to pass hours in tedious company — what an affliction, what a martyrdom it is! I came to feel extremely sorry for those pretty women who are perpetually being courted by a swarm of men. But the pretty women, I reflected, had this advantage over me: that they were by nature a good deal more interested in love than I. Love is their natural business, the reason of their existence; however distasteful their suitors may personally be to them, they cannot find them as completely boring and insufferable as would, placed in similar circumstances, a person to whom love as such is fundamentally rather uninteresting. The most tedious lover atones a little, in the eyes of the courted lady, for his personal insupportableness by

the generic fact of being a lover. Lacking a native enthusiasm for love, I found it more difficult to support the martyrdom of being loved by Miss Masson.

But such an affair, you will object, is a typical piece of reality. True; but at that time I was not quite such a believer in the real and earnest side of life as I am now. And even now I should regard it as something of a work of supererogation to associate with realities of so exceptionally penetrative a nature. A sober man, if he is logical and courageous, is bound to pass his life between Gog's Court and Miss Carruthers's. But he is not bound to make love to Miss Carruthers or to provoke the clinging affections of Fluffy. That would be too much — so it seems to me, at any rate at present; though perhaps the time may come when I shall feel strong enough to take my reality in these stiff doses. There is an electric machine used by masseurs for driving iodine into stiffened joints. Love acts like this machine; it serves to drive the lover's personality into the mind of the beloved. I am strong enough at present to be able to bathe in the personalities of ordinary human animals; but I should be suffocated, I should faint away, if the muddy swill were to be pumped into my spiritual system by the penetrating electricity of love.

Miss Masson stood one Galtonian class higher than Miss Carruthers or Fluffy. One out of every four people is a Fluffy; only one out of every six is a Dorothy Masson. It makes a slight but perceptible difference. None the less, how much I suffered! When I brought her a few orchids as a present, remarking as I gave them to her that they looked so delightfully like artificial flowers, she would thank me and say she adored orchids, adding after a moment's pause for thought that she liked them because they looked so like artificial flowers. And she laughed softly to herself, she looked up at me for confirmatory applause. For that little habit alone I sometimes felt that I could have murdered her. But her solicitude, her reproaches, expressed or more often mute (for she rarely made scenes, but only looked at me with those sad brown eyes), her incessant desire to be close to me, to touch me, to kiss and be kissed — these were almost enough to drive me to suicide. It lasted for more than a year, an eternity. And technically it still lasts; for I never broke with her, never dramatically quitted her, but only quietly and gradually faded out of her life like the Cheshire Cat. Sometimes, even, we still meet. And still, as though nothing had happened, I take her in my arms and kiss her, till that strange expression of abject terror comes again into her eyes, till she implores me, in a voice made faint with excessive desire, to spare her well-disciplined everyday soul and not deliver it into the power of the fearful thing that is waking darkly within her. And still as she speaks she presses me closer, she offers her stretched throat to my kisses. And before and after, we talk about politics and common friends. And still as of old she echoes the last phrase I have spoken, still softly laughs and still expects me to admire her original thoughts. Finally I take my leave.

'You'll come again soon?' she asks, looking up into my face with eyes that are full of sadness and apprehension, of questions unuttered, of unexpressed reproaches. I kiss her hand. 'Of course,' I say. And I go away, taking pains as I walk down the street not to speculate on the subject of her thoughts.

But Providence seems to have thought my connection with Dorothy inadequately instructive. Dorothy, after all, was only twenty-six when the episode began. Hers was that vernal and flowery season during which, even in Italy, warblers are not shot. It would be another twenty years before she reached her First of October; thirty, perhaps, before the man-eating season should begin. And it was I who had made the first advances. But for my exhibition of *Bosheit und Pläsier* the boring history would never have unrolled itself. But Providence, anxious, for some inscrutable reason, to teach me a yet more memorable lesson, went so far as almost to drown me, so determined was it that I should fall into the hands of the suitable schoolmistress. I was to learn how ludicrously dreadful, as well as how boring, love can be.

I made no advances on this occasion. From the first I did nothing but retreat. Mrs. Aldwinkle's blue danger signals bore down on me; like an agile pedestrian in the London traffic, I stepped aside. When she asked what women had inspired me, I answered that nothing inspired me but the London slums and the vulgarity of Lady Giblet. When she said that one could see by my face that I had been unhappy, I said that that was odd; I had always been perfectly happy. When she talked about experience, meaning, as women generally do when they use that word, merely love, I replied with a discussion of experience in relation to the Theory of Knowledge. When she accused me of wearing a mask, I protested that I paraded my naked soul for every one to see. When she asked if I had ever been in love, I shrugged my shoulders and smiled: not to speak of. And when she asked, at very close range, if I had ever been loved, I answered quite truthfully that I had, but that it bored me.

But still, indomitably, she renewed the attack. There might have been something grand about her unwavering determination — something grand, if it had not been grotesque. Providence was teaching me yet once more that the unsapient life is a dreary and hopeless business, and that it is, for all practical purposes, the only life — lived everywhere by all but a negligibly few exceptions. At least I presume that that is what Providence was trying to impress on me. But in the process it was using Mrs. Aldwinkle, I thought, rather hardly. I felt sorry for the poor lady. Some hidden irrational force within herself was compelling her to cut these capers, throw herself into these ludicrous postures, say these stupid words and contort her face into these grimaces; she was helpless. She just obeyed orders and did her best; but her best was ludicrous. And not merely ludicrous but appalling. She was like a buffoon carrying a skull.

Unflaggingly she played the deplorable part assigned to her. Every day she brought me flowers. 'I want them to blossom in your verses,' she said. I assured her that the only scent which provoked me to write was that of the butchers' shops on a winter's evening along the Harrow Road. She smiled at me. 'Don't think I can't understand you,' she said. 'I do. I do.' She leaned forward; her eyes shone, her perfume enveloped me, she breathed heliotrope in my face. I could see with extraordinary distinctness the little wrinkles round her eyes, the careless smear of rouge at the corners of the mouth. 'I do understand you,' she repeated.

She did understand me. . . . One night (it was at Montefiascone, on our way back from Rome), when I was reading in bed, I heard a sound; I looked up, and saw Mrs. Aldwinkle carefully closing the door behind her. She was wearing a dressing-gown of sea-green silk. Her hair hung in two thick plaits over her shoulders. When she turned round, I saw that her face had been coloured and powdered with more than ordinary care. In silence she advanced across the room, she sat down on the edge of my bed. An aura of ambergris and heliotrope surrounded her.

I smiled politely, closed my book (keeping a finger, however, between the pages to mark my place) and slightly raised my eyebrows in interrogation. To what, I made my face inquire, do I owe the honour? . . .

I owed it, it seemed, to my hostess's urgently felt need to tell me yet once more that she understood me.

'I couldn't bear,' she said breathlessly, 'couldn't bear to think of you here alone. With your secret misery.' And when I made as though to protest, she held up her hand. 'Oh, don't think I haven't seen through your mask. Alone with your secret misery . . .'

'No, really . . .' I managed to put in. But Mrs. Aldwinkle would not suffer herself to be interrupted.

'I couldn't bear to think of your terrible loneliness,' she went on. 'I wanted you to know there was at least one person who understood.' She leaned towards me, smiling, but with lips that trembled. All at once her eyes filled with tears, her face contorted itself into the terrible grimace of misery. She made a little moaning noise and, letting herself fall forward, she hid her face against my knees. 'I love you, I love you,' she repeated in a muffled voice. Her body was shaken by recurrent spasms of sobbing. I was left wondering what to do. This was not in the programme. When one goes out man-eating or pheasant-shooting, one has no business to weep over the victim. But the trouble is, of course, that the man-eater sees herself as the victim. *Hinc illae lacrimae*. It is impossible for two human beings to agree completely about anything. *Quot homines, for now that the Dictionary of Familiar Quotations has been opened I may as well continue to make use of it, quot homines, tot disputandum est*. There is no agreement even about the truths of science. One man is a geometrician; the other can only understand analysis. One is incapable of believing in anything of which he cannot make a working model; the other wants his truth as abstract as it is possible to make it. But when it comes to deciding which of two people is the victim and which the man-eater, there is nothing to be done but abandon the attempt. Let each party stick to his own opinion. The most successful men are those who never admit the validity of other people's opinions, who even deny their existence.

'My dear Lilian,' I said (she had insisted on my calling her Lilian within a day or two of my arrival), 'my dear Lilian . . .' I could find nothing more to say. A successful man, I suppose, would have said something frankly brutal, something that would have made it clear to Mrs. Aldwinkle which of the two, in his opinion, was the victim and which the carnivore. I lacked the force. Mrs. Aldwinkle went on sobbing.

‘I love you. Couldn’t you love me a little? A little only? I would be your slave. Your slave; I’d be your slave,’ she kept repeating.

What things she said! I listened to her, feeling pity — yes, pity no doubt — but still more, a profound embarrassment, and with it anger against the person who had thrust me into this untenable position.

‘It’s no good,’ I protested. ‘It’s impossible.’

She only began again, desperately.

How much further the scene might have prolonged itself and what might have happened if it had been protracted, I do not know. Luckily, however, an extraordinary commotion suddenly broke loose in the hotel. Doors slammed, voices were raised, there was the noise of feet along the corridors and on the stairs. Startled and alarmed, Mrs. Aldwinkle got up, went to the door, opened it a crack and looked into the passage. Some one hurried past; hastily she closed it again. When the coast was clear, she slipped out into the passage and tip-toed away, leaving me alone.

The commotion was caused by the beginning of Miss Elver’s death-agony. Providence, having decided that my education had gone far enough, had broken off the lesson. The means it employed were, I must say, rather violent. A vain man might have been gratified by the reflection that one woman had been made miserable in order that he might be taught a lesson, while another had died — like King John, of a surfeit of lampreys — in order that the lesson might be interrupted before it was carried too disagreeably far. But as it happens, I am not particularly vain.

## Chapter VIII

FROM THE FIRST nobody put very much faith in the local doctor; the mere look of him was enough to inspire mistrust. But when across the patient’s prostrate and comatose body he chattily confided that he had taken his degree at the University of Siena, Mr. Cardan decided that it was time to send for somebody else.

‘Siena’s notorious,’ he whispered. ‘It’s the place where the imbeciles who can’t get their degrees at Bologna, or Rome, or Pisa go and have themselves made doctors.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle, who in the middle of the tumult had suddenly reappeared (Irene did not know from where), expressed her horror. Doctors were one of her specialities; she was very particular about doctors. Mrs. Aldwinkle had had a number of interesting maladies in the course of her life — three nervous break-downs, an appendicitis, gout and various influenzas, pneumonias and the like, but all of them aristocratic and avowable diseases; for Mrs. Aldwinkle distinguished sharply between complaints that are vulgar and complaints of a gentlemanly sort. Chronic constipation, hernia, varicose veins (‘bad legs’ as the poor so gruesomely call them) — these, obviously, were vulgar diseases which no decent person could suffer from, or at any rate, suffering, talk about. Her illnesses had all been extremely refined and correspondingly expensive.



What she did not know about doctors, English, French, Swiss, German, Swedish and even Japanese, was not worth knowing. Mr. Cardan's remarks about the University of Siena impressed her profoundly.

'The only thing to do,' she said decisively, 'is for Hovenden to drive straight back to Rome and bring back a specialist. At once.' She spoke peremptorily. It was a comfort for her, in her present distress of mind, to be able to do something, to make arrangements, to order people about, even herself to carry and fetch. 'The Principessa gave me the name of a wonderful man. I've got it written down somewhere. Come.' And she darted off to her room.

Obediently Lord Hovenden followed her, wrote down the talismanic name and took himself off. Chelifer was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs.

'I may as well come with you, if you don't mind,' he said. 'I think I should only be in the way here.'

It was nearly half-past five when they started. The sun had not yet risen, but it was already light. The sky was pale grey with dark clouds low down on the horizon. There were mists in the valleys and the Lake of Bolsena was hidden from view under what seemed the waters of a milky sea. The air was cold. Driving out of the town, they met a train of pack mules climbing slowly, in the midst of a jingle of bells, up the steep street towards the market-place.

Viterbo was still asleep when they drove through. From the crest of the Ciminian mountains they first saw the sun. By seven o'clock they were in Rome. The sun-tipped obelisks, the gilded roofs and cupolas reached up out of shadow into the pale blue sky. They drove up the Corso. In the Piazza di Venezia they stopped at a café, ordered some coffee, and while it was being brought looked up in a directory the address of Mrs. Aldwinkle's doctor. He lived, they found, in the new quarter near the station.

'I leave all ve talking to you,' said Hovenden, as they sipped their coffee. 'I'm no good at ve language.'

'How did you manage the other day when you had to see the doctor yourself?' Chelifer inquired.

Lord Hovenden blushed. 'Well,' he said, 'as a matter of fact, ve doctor I saw was English. But he's gone away now,' he added hastily, for fear that Chelifer might suggest their bringing the English doctor along too; 'gone to Naples,' he further specified, hoping by the accumulation of circumstantial details to give greater verisimilitude to his story, 'for an operation.'

'He was a surgeon, then?' Chelifer raised his eyebrows.

Hovenden nodded. 'A surgeon,' he echoed, and buried his face in his coffee-cup.

They drove on. As they turned out of the Piazza into Trajan's Forum, Chelifer noticed a little crowd, mostly of street boys, pressing against the railings on the further side of the forum. At its centre stood a pale thin woman in dove-grey clothes whom even at this distance one could not fail to recognize as English, or at any rate definitely not Italian. The lady in grey was leaning over the railings, lowering very carefully at the end of a string, to which it was ingeniously attached by four subsidiary strings passed

through holes bored in the rim, a large aluminium pannikin filled with milk. Slowly revolving as it went down, the pannikin was lowered to the floor of the sunken forum. Hardly had it touched the ground when, with simultaneous mewings and purrings, half a dozen thirsty cats came running up to it and began to lap at the white milk. Others followed; every cranny gave up its cat. Lean toms jumped down from their marble pedestals and trotted across the open with the undulating, bounding gait of a running leopard. Month-old kittens staggered up on tottering legs. In a few seconds the pannikin was besieged by a horde of cats. The street boys whooped with delight.

‘Well, I’m blowed,’ said Lord Hovenden, who had slowed up to watch the curious scene. ‘I believe it’s your mover.’

‘I think it is,’ said Chelifer, who had recognized her long ago.

‘Would you like me to stop?’ asked Hovenden.

Chelifer shook his head. ‘I think we’d better get to the doctor as quickly as possible,’ he said.

Looking back as they drove out of the forum, Chelifer saw that his mother, faithful to her vegetarian principles, was throwing down into the den of cats bread and cold potatoes. In the evening he imagined she would come again. She had not taken long to find her Roman occupation.

## Chapter IX

THE FUNERAL WAS not due to take place before sunset. The bearers, the choristers, the sexton, the priest himself, most likely, were all in the fields, picking the grapes. They had something more important to do, while the light lasted, than to bury people. Let the dead bury their dead. The living were there to make wine.

Mr. Cardan sat alone in the empty church. Alone; what had once been Grace Elver lay, confined, on a bier in the middle of the aisle. That did not count as company; it was just so much stuff in a box. His red knobbly face was as though frozen into stillness, all its gaiety, its twinkling mobility were gone. It might have been the face of a dead man, of one of the dead whose business it is to bury the dead. He sat there grim and stony, leaning forward, his chin in his hand, his elbow on his knee.

Three thousand six hundred and fifty days more, he was thinking; that is, if I live another ten years. Three thousand six hundred and fifty, and then the end of everything, the tunnelling worms.

There are such horrible ways of dying, he thought. Once, years ago, he had a beautiful grey Angora cat. She ate too many black-beetles in the kitchen and died vomiting shreds of her shard-torn stomach. He often thought of that cat. One might die like that oneself, coughing up one’s vitals.

Not that one eats many black-beetles, of course. But there is always putrid fish. The effects are not so very different. Wretched moron! he thought, looking at the coffin. It

had been a disgusting sort of death. Pains, vomiting, collapse, coma, then the coffin — and now the busy ferments of putrefaction and the worms. Not a very dignified or inspiring conclusion. No speeches, no consoling serenities, no Little Nells or Paul Dombey. The nearest approach to the Dickensian had been when, in a brief spell of lucidity, she asked him about the bears he was going to give her after they were married.

‘Will they be grown up?’ she asked. ‘Or puppies?’

‘Puppies,’ he answered, and she had smiled with pleasure.

Those had been almost the only articulate words she had uttered. Through that long death-agony they were the only witnesses to the existence of her soul. For the rest of the time she had been no more than a sick body, mindlessly crying and muttering. The tragedy of bodily suffering and extinction has no catharsis. Punctually it runs its dull, degrading course, act by act to the conclusion. It ennobles neither the sufferer nor the contemplator. Only the tragedy of the spirit can liberate and uplift. But the greatest tragedy of the spirit is that sooner or later it succumbs to the flesh. Sooner or later every soul is stifled by the sick body; sooner or later there are no more thoughts, but only pain and vomiting and stupor. The tragedies of the spirit are mere struttings and posturings on the margin of life, and the spirit itself is only an accidental exuberance, the products of spare vital energy, like the feathers on the head of a hoopoo or the innumerable populations of useless and foredoomed spermatozoa. The spirit has no significance; there is only the body. When it is young, the body is beautiful and strong. It grows old, its joints creak, it becomes dry and smelly; it breaks down, the life goes out of it and it rots away. However lovely the feathers on a bird’s head, they perish with it; and the spirit, which is a lovelier ornament than any, perishes too. The farce is hideous, thought Mr. Cardan, and in the worst of bad taste.

Fools do not perceive that the farce is a farce. They are the more blessed. Wise men perceive it and take pains not to think about it. Therein lies their wisdom. They indulge themselves in all the pleasures, of the spirit as of the body — and especially in those of the spirit, since they are by far the more varied, charming and delightful — and when the time comes they resign themselves with the best grace they can muster to the decay of the body and the extinction of its spiritual part. Meanwhile, however, they do not think too much of death — it is an unexhilarating theme; they do not insist too much upon the farcical nature of the drama in which they are playing, for fear that they should become too much disgusted with their parts to get any amusement out of the piece at all.

The most ludicrous comedies are the comedies about people who preach one thing and practise another, who make imposing claims and lamentably fail to fulfil them. We preach immortality and we practise death. *Tartuffe* and *Volpone* are not in it.

The wise man does not think of death lest it should spoil his pleasures. But there are times when the worms intrude too insistently to be ignored. Death forces itself sometimes upon the mind, and then it is hard to take much pleasure in anything.

This coffin, for instance — how can a man take pleasure in the beauty of the church in which this boxful of decaying stuff is lying? What can be more delightful than to look up the aisle of a great church and see at the end of a long dark vista of round-headed arches a brightly illumined segment of the drum of the cupola — the horizontal circle contrasting harmoniously with the perpendicular half-circles of the arches? There is nothing lovelier among all the works of man. But the coffin lies here under the arches, reminding the connoisseur of beauty that there is nothing but the body and that the body suffers degradingly, dies and is eaten by maggots.

Mr. Cardan wondered how he would die. Slowly or suddenly? After long pain? Intelligent, still human? Or an idiot, a moaning animal? He would die poor, now, in any case. Friends would club together and send him a few pounds every now and then. Poor old Cardan, can't let him die in the workhouse. Must send him five pounds. What a bore! Extraordinary how he manages to last so long! But he was always a tough old devil. Poor old Cardan!

A door banged; in the hollow echoing church there was a sound of footsteps. It was the sacristan. He came to tell Mr. Cardan that they would soon be ready to begin. They had hurried back from the fields on purpose. The grapes were not so plentiful nor of quite such good quality as they had been last year. But still, one thanked God for His mercies, such as they were.

Blessed are the fools, thought Mr. Cardan, for they shall see nothing. Or perhaps they do see and, seeing, nevertheless comfortingly believe in future compensations and the justice of eternity. In either case — not seeing, or seeing but believing — they are fools. Still, believing is probably the best solution of all, Mr. Cardan went on to reflect. For it allows one to see and not to ignore. It permits one to accept the facts and yet justify them. For a believer the presence of a coffin or two would not interfere with the appreciation of Sammicheli's architecture.

The bearers filed in, bringing with them from the fields a healthy smell of sweat. They were dressed for the occasion in garments that ought, no doubt, to have been surplices, but which were, in point of fact, rather dirty and crumpled white dust-coats. They looked like a cricket eleven entirely composed of umpires. After the bearers came the priest, followed by a miniature umpire in a dust-coat so short that it did not hide his bare knees. The service began. The priest reeled off his Latin formulas as though for a wager; the bearers, in ragged and tuneless unison, bawled back at him the incomprehensible responses. During the longer prayers they talked to one another about the vintage. The boy scratched first his head, then his posterior, finally picked his nose. The priest prayed so fast that all the words fused together and became one word. Mr. Cardan wondered why the Catholic Church did not authorize prayer wheels. A simple little electric motor doing six or eight hundred revolutions a minute would get through a quite astonishing amount of pious work in a day and cost much less than a priest.

'Baa baba, baa baa, Boo-oo-baa,' bleated the priest.

'Boooo-baa,' came back from the bawling flock.

Not ceasing for a moment to pick his nose, the diminutive umpire, who seemed to know his part as perfectly as a trained dog in a music hall, handed the priest a censer. Waving it as he went, and rattling off his pious Latin, he walked round and round the bier. Symbolic and religious perfume! It had smoked in the stable of Bethlehem, in the midst of the ammoniac smell of the beasts, the sign and symbol of the spirit. The blue smoke floated up and was lost along the wind. On the surface of the earth the beasts unremittingly propagate their kind; the whole earth is a morass of living flesh. The smell of it hangs warm and heavy over all. Here and there the incense burns; its smoke soon vanishes. The smell of the beasts remains.

‘Baa baba,’ went the priest.

‘Baa,’ the choristers retorted, a fifth lower down the scale.

The boy produced water and a kind of whisk. Once more the priest walked round the bier, sprinkling the water from the end of the wetted whisk; the little umpire followed in his train, holding up the tail of his outer garment. The bearers, meanwhile, talked to one another in serious whispers about the grapes.

Sometimes, Mr. Cardan thought, the spirit plays its part so solemnly and well that one cannot help believing in its reality and ultimate significance. A ritual gravely performed is overwhelmingly convincing, for the moment at any rate. But let it be performed casually and carelessly by people who are not thinking of what the rite is meant to symbolize; one perceives that there is nothing behind the symbols, that it is only the acting that matters — the judicious acting of the body — and that the body, the doomed, decaying body, is the one, appalling fact.

The service was over; the bearers picked up the coffin and carried it to the hearse that stood at the church door. The priest beckoned to Mr. Cardan to follow him into the sacristy. There, while the little umpire put away his censer and the whisk, he presented his bill. Mr. Cardan paid.

# Part V. Conclusions

## Chapter I

‘WHAT ARE YOU thinking of?’

‘Nothing,’ said Calamy.

‘Yes, you were. You must have been thinking about something.’

‘Nothing in particular,’ he repeated.

‘Tell me,’ Mary insisted. ‘I want to know.’

‘Well, if you really want to know,’ Calamy began slowly . . .

But she interrupted him. ‘And why did you hold up your hand like that? And spread out the fingers? I could see it, you know; against the window.’ Pitch dark it was in the room, but beyond the unshuttered windows was a starlit night.

Calamy laughed — a rather embarrassed laugh. ‘Oh, you saw it, did you — the hand? Well, as a matter of fact, it was precisely about my hand that I was thinking.’

‘About your hand?’ said Mary incredulously. ‘That seems a queer thing to think about.’

‘But interesting if you think about it hard enough.’

‘Your hands,’ she said softly, in another voice, ‘your hands. When they touch me . . .’ With a feminine movement of gratitude, of thanks for a benefit received, she pressed herself more closely against him; in the darkness she kissed him. ‘I love you too much,’ she whispered, ‘too much.’ And at the moment it was almost true. The strong complete spirit, she had written in her note-book, must be able to love with fury, savagely, mindlessly. Not without pride, she had found herself complete and strong. Once, at a dinner party, she had been taken down by a large black and lemon coloured Argentine; unfolding his napkin, he had opened the evening’s conversation, in that fantastic trans-Pyreanean French which was his only substitute for the Castilian, by saying, with a roll of his black eyes and a flashing ivory smile: ‘Jé vois qué vous avez du temmperramenk.’ ‘Oh, à revendre,’ she had answered gaily, throwing herself into the light Parisian part. How marvellously amusing! But that was Life — Life all over. She had brought the incident into a short story, long ago. But the Argentine had looked with an expert’s eye; he was right. ‘I love you too much,’ she whispered in the darkness. Yes, it was true, it was nearly true, at the moment, in the circumstances. She took his hand and kissed it. ‘That’s all I think about your hand,’ she said.

Calamy allowed his hand to be kissed, and as soon as it was decently possible gently withdrew it. Invisibly, in the darkness, he made a little grimace of impatience. He was

no longer interested in kisses, at the moment. 'Yes,' he said meditatively, 'that's one way of thinking of my hand, that's one way in which it exists and is real. Certainly. And that was what I was thinking about — all the different ways in which these five fingers' — he held them up again, splayed out, against the window's oblong of paler darkness— 'have reality and exist. All the different ways,' he repeated slowly. 'If you think of that, even for five minutes, you find yourself plunged up to the eyes in the most portentous mysteries.' He was silent for a moment; then added in a very serious voice. 'And I believe that if one could stand the strain of thinking really hard about one thing — this hand, for example — really hard for several days, or weeks, or months, one might be able to burrow one's way right through the mystery and really get at something — some kind of truth, some explanation.' He paused, frowning. Down and down, through the obscurity, he was thinking. Slowly, painfully, like Milton's Devil, pushing his way through chaos; in the end, one might emerge into the light, to see the universe, sphere within sphere, hanging from the floor of heaven. But it would be a slow, laborious process; one would need time, one would need freedom. Above everything, freedom.

'Why don't you think about me?' Mary Thriplow asked. She propped herself up on one elbow and leaned over him; with her other hand she ruffled his hair. 'Don't I bear thinking about?' she asked. She had a fistful of his thick hair in her hand; softly she tugged at it, testingly, as though she were preparing for something worse, were assuring her grip for a more violent pull. She felt a desire to hurt him. Even in her arms, she was thinking, he escaped her, he simply wasn't there. 'Don't I bear thinking about?' she repeated, tugging a little harder at his hair.

Calamy said nothing. The truth was, he was reflecting, that she didn't bear thinking about. Like a good many other things. All one's daily life was a skating over thin ice, was a scampering of water-beetles across the invisible skin of depths. Stamp a little too hard, lean a shade too heavily and you were through, you were floundering in a dangerous and unfamiliar element. This love business, for example — it simply couldn't be thought of; it could only support one on condition that one never stopped to think. But it was necessary to think, necessary to break through and sink into the depths. And yet, insanely and desperately, one still went skating on.

'Do you love me?' asked Mary.

'Of course,' he said; but the tone of his voice did not carry much conviction.

Menacingly she tugged at the tuft of hair she held twined round her fingers. It angered her that he should escape her, that he should not give himself up completely to her. And this resentful feeling that he did not love her enough produced in her a complementary conviction that she loved him too much. Her anger combined with her physical gratitude to make her feel, for the moment, peculiarly passionate. She found herself all at once playing the part of the grande amoureuse, the impassioned *de Lespinasse*, playing it spontaneously and without the least difficulty. 'I could hate you,' she said resentfully, 'for making me love you so much.'

‘And what about me?’ said Calamy, thinking of his freedom. ‘Haven’t I a right to hate too?’

‘No. Because you don’t love so much.’

‘But that’s not the question,’ said Calamy, neglecting to record his protest against this damning impeachment. ‘One doesn’t resent love for its own sake, but for the sake of what it interferes with.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Mary bitterly. She was too deeply wounded even to desire to pull his hair. She turned her back on him. ‘I’m sorry I should have got in the way of your important occupations,’ she said in her most sarcastic voice. ‘Such as thinking about your hand.’ She laughed derisively. There was a long silence. Calamy made no attempt to break it; he was piqued by this derisive treatment of a subject which, for him, was serious, was in some sort sacred. It was Mary who first spoke.

‘Will you tell me, then, what you were thinking?’ she asked submissively, turning back towards him. When one loves, one swallows one’s pride and surrenders. ‘Will you tell me?’ she repeated, leaning over him. She took one of his hands and began to kiss it, then suddenly bit one of his fingers so hard that Calamy cried out in pain.

‘Why do you make me so unhappy?’ she asked between clenched teeth. She saw herself, as she spoke the words, lying face downward on her bed, desperately sobbing. It needs a great spirit to be greatly unhappy.

‘Make you unhappy?’ echoed Calamy in a voice of irritation; he was still smarting with the pain of that bite. ‘But I don’t. I make you uncommonly happy.’

‘You make me miserable,’ she answered.

‘Well, in that case,’ said Calamy, ‘I’d better go away and leave you in peace.’ He slipped his arm from under her shoulders, as though he were really preparing to go.

But Mary enfolded him in her arms. ‘No, no,’ she implored. ‘Don’t go. You mustn’t be cross with me. I’m sorry. I behaved abominably. Tell me, please, what you were thinking about your hand. I really am interested. Really, really.’ She spoke eagerly, childishly, like the little girl at the Royal Institution lecture.

Calamy couldn’t help laughing. ‘You’ve succeeded in rather damping my enthusiasm for that subject,’ he said. ‘I’d find it difficult to begin now, in cold blood.’

‘Please, please,’ Mary insisted. Wronged, it was she who asked pardon, she who cajoled. When one loves . . .

‘You’ve made it almost impossible to talk anything but nonsense,’ Calamy objected. But in the end he allowed himself to be persuaded. Embarrassed, rather awkwardly — for the spiritual atmosphere in which these ideas had been ruminated was dissipated, and it was in the void, so to speak, in the empty cold that his thoughts now gasped for breath — he began his exposition. But gradually, as he spoke, the mood returned; he became at home once more with what he was saying. Mary listened with a fixed attention of which, even in the darkness, he was somehow conscious.

‘Well, you see,’ he started hesitatingly, ‘it’s like this. I was thinking of all the different ways a thing can exist — my hand, for example.’



'I see,' said Mary Thriplow sympathetically and intelligently. She was almost too anxious to prove that she was listening, that she was understanding everything; she saw before there was anything to see.

'It's extraordinary,' Calamy went on, 'what a lot of different modes of existence a thing has, when you come to think about it. And the more you think, the more obscure and mysterious everything becomes. What seemed solid vanishes; what was obvious and comprehensible becomes utterly mysterious. Gulfs begin opening all around you — more and more abysses, as though the ground were splitting in an earthquake. It gives one a strange sense of insecurity, of being in the dark. But I still believe that, if one went on thinking long enough and hard enough, one might somehow come through, get out on the other side of the obscurity. But into what, precisely into what? That's the question.' He was silent for a moment. If one were free, he thought, one could go exploring into that darkness. But the flesh was weak; under the threat of that delicious torture it turned coward and traitor.

'Well?' said Mary at last. She moved closer to him, lightly, her lips brushed across his cheek. She ran her hand softly over his shoulder and along his arm. 'Go on.'

'Very well,' he said in a business-like voice, moving a little away from her as he spoke. He held up his hand once more against the window. 'Look,' he said. 'It's just a shape that interrupts the light. To a child who has not yet learned to interpret what he sees, that's all it would be, just a shaped blotch of colour, no more significant than one of those coloured targets representing a man's head and shoulders that one learns shooting on. But now, suppose I try to consider the thing as a physicist.'

'Quite,' said Mary Thriplow; and from the movement of a floating tress of her hair which brushed against his shoulder he knew that she was nodding her head.

'Well then,' Calamy went on, 'I have to imagine an almost inconceivable number of atoms, each consisting of a greater or lesser number of units of negative electricity whirling several million times a minute round a nucleus of positive electricity. The vibrations of the atoms lying near the surface sift out, so to speak, the electro-magnetic radiations which fall upon them, permitting only those waves to reach our eyes which give us the sensation of a brownish-pink colour. In passing it may be remarked that the behaviour of light is satisfactorily explained according to one theory of electrodynamics, while the behaviour of the electrons in the atom can only be explained on a theory that is entirely inconsistent with it. Inside the atom, they tell us now, electrons move from one orbit to another without taking any time to accomplish their journey and without covering any space. Indeed, within the atom there is neither space nor time. And so on and so on. I have to take most of this on trust, I'm afraid, for I understand next to nothing about these things. Only enough to make me feel rather dizzy when I begin to think about them.'

'Yes, dizzy,' said Mary, 'that's the word. Dizzy.' She made a prolonged buzzing over the z's.

'Well then, here are two ways already in which my hand exists,' Calamy went on. 'Then there's the chemical way. These atoms consisting of more or fewer electrons

whizzing round a nucleus of greater or lesser charge are atoms of different elements that build themselves up in certain architectural patterns into complicated molecules.'

Sympathetic and intelligent, Mary echoed: 'Molecules.'

'Now if, like Cranmer, I were to put my right hand into the fire, to punish it for having done something evil or unworthy (words, by the way, which haven't much in common with chemistry), if I were to put my hand in the fire, these molecules would uncombine themselves into their constituent atoms, which would then proceed to build themselves up again into other molecules. But this leads me on at once to a set of entirely different realities. For if I were to put my hand in the fire, I should feel pain; and unless, like Cranmer, I made an enormous effort of will to keep it there, I should withdraw it; or rather it would withdraw itself almost without my knowledge and before I was aware. For I am alive, and this hand is part of a living being, the first law of whose existence is to preserve its life. Being alive, this hand of mine, if it were burnt, would set about trying to repair itself. Seen by a biologist, it reveals itself as a collection of cells, having each its appointed function, and existing harmoniously together, never trespassing upon one another, never proliferating into wild adventures of growth, but living, dying and growing to one end — that the whole which they compose may fulfil its purpose — and as though in accordance with a preordained plan. Say that the hand is burnt. From all round the burn the healthy cells would breed out of themselves new cells to fill in and cover the damaged places.'

'How wonderful life is!' said Mary Thriplow. 'Life . . .'

'Cranmer's hand,' Calamy went on, 'had done an ignoble thing. The hand is part, not merely of a living being, but of a being that knows good and evil. This hand of mine can do good things and bad things. It has killed a man, for example; it has written all manner of words; it has helped a man who was hurt; it has touched your body.' He laid his hand on her breast; she started, she trembled involuntarily under his caress. He ought to think that rather flattering, oughtn't he? It was a symbol of his power over her — of her power, alas, over him. 'And when it touches your body,' he went on, 'it touches also your mind. My hand moves like this, and it moves through your consciousness as well as here, across your skin. And it's my mind that orders it to move; it brings your body into my mind. It exists in mind; it has reality as a part of my soul and a part of yours.'

Miss Thriplow couldn't help reflecting that there was, in all this, the stuff for a very deep digression in one of her novels. "This thoughtful young writer . . ." would be quoted from the reviewers on the dust-cover of her next book.

'Go on,' she said.

Calamy went on. 'And so these,' he said, 'are some of the ways — and there are plenty more, of course, besides — these are some of the ways in which my hand exists and is real. This shape which interrupts the light — it is enough to think of it for five minutes to perceive that it exists simultaneously in a dozen parallel worlds. It exists as electrical charges; as chemical molecules; as living cells; as part of a moral being, the instrument of good and evil; in the physical world and in mind. And from this one

goes on to ask, inevitably, what relationship exists between these different modes of being. What is there in common between life and chemistry; between good and evil and electrical charges; between a collection of cells and the consciousness of a caress? It's here that the gulfs begin to open. For there isn't any connection — that one can see, at any rate. Universe lies on the top of universe, layer after layer, distinct and separate . . .'

'Like a Neapolitan ice,' Mary's mind flew at once to the fantastic and unexpected comparison. "This witty young writer . . ." That was already on her dust-covers.

Calamy laughed. 'All right,' he agreed. 'Like a Neapolitan ice, if you like. What's true in the chocolate layer, at the bottom of the ice, doesn't hold in the vanilla at the top. And a lemon truth is different from a strawberry truth. And each one has just as much right to exist and to call itself real as every other. And you can't explain one in terms of the others. Certainly you can't explain the vanilla in terms of any of the lower layers — you can't explain mind as mere life, as chemistry, as physics. That at least is one thing that's perfectly obvious and self-evident.'

'Obvious,' Mary agreed. 'And what's the result of it all? I really don't see.'

'Neither do I,' said Calamy, speaking through an explosion of melancholy laughter. 'The only hope,' he went on slowly, 'is that perhaps, if you went on thinking long enough and hard enough, you might arrive at an explanation of the chocolate and the lemon by the vanilla. Perhaps it's really all vanilla, all mind, all spirit. The rest is only apparent, an illusion. But one has no right to say so until one has thought a long time, in freedom.'

'In freedom?'

'The mind must be open, unperturbed, empty of irrelevant things, quiet. There's no room for thoughts in a half-shut, cluttered mind. And thoughts won't enter a noisy mind; they're shy, they remain in their obscure hiding-places below the surface, where they can't be got at, so long as the mind is full and noisy. Most of us pass through life without knowing that they're there at all. If one wants to lure them out, one must clear a space for them, one must open the mind wide and wait. And there must be no irrelevant preoccupations prowling around the doors. One must free oneself of those.'

'I suppose I'm one of the irrelevant preoccupations,' said Mary Thriplow, after a little pause.

Calamy laughed, but did not deny it.

'If that's so,' said Mary, 'why did you make love to me?'

Calamy did not reply. Why indeed? He had often asked that question himself.

'I think it would be best,' she said, after a silence, 'if we were to make an end.' She would go away, she would grieve in solitude.

'Make an end?' Calamy repeated. He desired it, of course, above everything — to make an end, to be free. But he found himself adding, with a kind of submarine laughter below the surface of his voice: 'Do you think you can make an end?'

'Why not?'

‘Suppose I don’t allow you to?’ Did she imagine, then, that she wasn’t in his power, that he couldn’t make her obey his will whenever he desired? ‘I don’t allow you,’ he said, and his voice quivered with the rising mirth. He bent over her and began to kiss her on the mouth; with his hands he held and caressed her. What an insanity, he said to himself.

‘No, no.’ Mary struggled a little; but in the end she allowed herself to be overcome. She lay still, trembling, like one who has been tortured on the rack.

## Chapter II

ON THEIR RETURN, somewhat low-spirited, from Montefiascone, Mrs. Aldwinkle and her party found Mary Thriplow alone in the palace.

‘And Calamy?’ Mrs. Aldwinkle inquired.

‘He’s gone into the mountains,’ said Miss Thriplow in a serious, matter-of-fact voice. ‘Why?’

‘He felt like that,’ Mary answered. ‘He wanted to be alone to think. I understand it so well. The prospect of your return filled him almost with terror. He went off two or three days ago.’

‘Into the mountains?’ echoed Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘Is he sleeping in the woods, or in a cave, or something of that kind?’

‘He’s taken a room in a peasant’s cottage on the road up to the marble quarries. It’s a lovely place.’

‘This sounds most interesting,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I must really climb up and have a look at him.’

‘I’m sure he’d rather you didn’t,’ said Miss Thriplow. ‘He wants to be left alone. I understand it so well,’ she repeated.

Mr. Cardan looked at her curiously; her face expressed a bright and serious serenity. ‘I’m surprised that you too don’t retire from the world,’ he said, twinkling. He had not felt as cheerful as this since before the dismal day of poor Grace’s funeral.

Miss Thriplow smiled a Christian smile. ‘You think it’s a joke,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘But it isn’t really, you know.’

‘I’m sure it isn’t,’ Mr. Cardan made haste to protest. ‘And believe me, I never meant to imply that it was. Never, on my word. I merely said — quite seriously, I assure you — that I was surprised that you too . . .’

‘Well, you see, it doesn’t seem to me necessary to go away bodily,’ Miss Thriplow explained. ‘It’s always seemed to me that one can live the hermit’s life, if one wants to, in the heart of London, anywhere.’

‘Quite,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘You’re perfectly right.’

‘I think he might have waited till I came back,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle rather resentfully. ‘The least he could have done was to leave a note.’ She looked at Miss Thriplow angrily,

as though it were she who were to blame for Calamy's impoliteness. 'Well, I must go and get out of my dusty clothes,' she added crossly, and walked away to her room. Her irritation was the disguise and public manifestation of a profound depression. They're all going, she was thinking, they're all slipping away. First Chelifer, now Calamy. Like all the rest. Mournfully she looked back over her life. Everybody, everything had always slipped away from her. She had always missed all the really important, exciting things; they had invariably happened, somehow, just round the corner, out of her sight. The days were so short, so few now. Death approached, approached. Why had Cardan brought that horrible imbecile creature to die in front of her like that? She didn't want to be reminded of death. Mrs. Aldwinkle shuddered. I'm getting old, she thought; and the little clock on the mantel-piece, ticking away in the silence of her huge room, took up the refrain: Getting old, getting old, getting old, it repeated again and again, endlessly. Getting old — Mrs. Aldwinkle looked at herself in the glass — and that electric massage machine hadn't arrived. True, it was on its way; but it would be weeks before it got here. The posts were so slow. Everything conspired against her. If she had had it before, if she'd looked younger . . . who knew? Getting old, getting old, repeated the little clock. In a couple of days from now Chelifer would be going back to England; he'd go away, he'd live apart from her, live such a wonderful, beautiful life. She'd miss it all. And Calamy had already gone; what was he doing, sitting there in the mountains? He was thinking wonderful thoughts, thoughts that might hold the secret she had always been seeking and had never found, thoughts that might bring the consolation and tranquillity of which she always so sorely stood in need. She was missing them, she'd never know them. Getting old, getting old. She took off her hat and tossed it on to the bed. It seemed to her that she was the unhappiest woman in the world.

That evening, while she was brushing Mrs. Aldwinkle's hair, Irene, braving the dangers of Aunt Lilian's terrifying fun, screwed up her courage to say: 'I can never be grateful enough to you, Auntie, for having talked to me about Hovenden.'

'What about him?' asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, from whose mind the painful events of the last few weeks had quite obliterated such trivial memories.

Irene blushed with embarrassment. This was a question she had not anticipated. Was it really possible that Aunt Lilian could have forgotten those momentous and epoch-making words of hers? 'Why,' she began stammering, 'what you said about . . . I mean . . . when you said that he looked as though . . . well, as though he liked me.'

'Oh yes,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle without interest.

'Don't you remember?'

'Yes, yes,' Mrs. Aldwinkle nodded. 'What about it?'

'Well,' Irene went on, still painfully embarrassed, 'you see . . . that made me . . . that made me pay attention, if you understand.'

'Hm,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle. There was a silence. Getting old, getting old, repeated the little clock remorselessly.

Irene leaned forward and suddenly boiled over with confidences. 'I love him so much, Aunt Lilian,' she said, speaking very rapidly, 'so much, so much. It's the real thing this time. And he loves me too. And we're going to get married at the New Year, quite quietly; no fuss, no crowds shoving in on what isn't their business; quietly and sensibly in a registry office. And after that we're going in the Velox to . . .'

'What are you talking about?' said Mrs. Aldwinkle in a furious voice, and she turned round on her niece a face expressive of such passionate anger that Irene drew back, not merely astonished, but positively afraid. 'You don't mean to tell me,' Mrs. Aldwinkle began; but she could not find the words to continue. 'What have you two young fools been thinking about?' she got out at last.

. . . old, getting old; the remorseless ticking made itself heard in every silence.

From being merry and excited in its childishness Irene's face had become astonished and miserable. She was pale, her lips trembled a little as she spoke. 'But I thought you'd be glad, Aunt Lilian,' she said. 'I thought you'd be glad.'

'Glad because you're making fools of yourselves?' asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, savagely snorting.

'But it was you who first suggested,' Irene began.

Mrs. Aldwinkle cut her short, before she could say any more, with a brusqueness that might have revealed to a more practised psychologist than Irene her consciousness of being in the wrong. 'Absurd,' she said. 'I suppose you're going to tell me,' she went on sarcastically, 'that it was I who told you to marry him.'

'I know you didn't,' said Irene.

'There!' Mrs. Aldwinkle's tone was triumphant.

'But you did say you wondered why I wasn't in love . . .'

'Bah,' said Aunt Lilian, 'I was just making fun. Calf loves . . .'

'But why shouldn't I marry him?' asked Irene. 'If I love him and he loves me. Why shouldn't I?'

Why shouldn't she? Yes, that was an awkward question. Getting old, getting old, muttered the clock in the brief ensuing silence. Perhaps that was half the answer. Getting old! they were all going; first Chelifer, then Calamy, now Irene. Getting old, getting old; soon she'd be quite alone. And it wasn't only that. It was also her pride that was hurt, her love of dominion that suffered. Irene had been her slave; had worshipped her, taken her word as law, her opinions as gospel truth. Now she was transferring her allegiance. Mrs. Aldwinkle was losing a subject — losing her to a more powerful rival. It was intolerable. 'Why shouldn't you marry him?' Mrs. Aldwinkle repeated the phrase ironically two or three times, while she hunted for the answer. 'Why shouldn't you marry him?'

'Why shouldn't I?' Irene asked again. There were tears in her eyes; but however unhappy she might look, there was something determined and indomitable in her attitude, something obstinate in her expression and her tone of voice. Mrs. Aldwinkle had reason to fear her rival.

‘Because you’re too young,’ she said at last. It was a very feeble answer; but she had been unable to think of a better one.

‘But, Aunt Lilian, don’t you remember? You always said that people ought to marry young. I remember so well, one time, when we talked about Juliet being only fourteen when she first saw Romeo, that you said . . .’

‘That has nothing to do with it,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, cutting short her niece’s mnemonic display. Irene’s memory, Mrs. Aldwinkle had often had reason to complain, was really too good.

‘But if you said . . .’ Irene began again.

‘Romeo and Juliet have nothing to do with you and Hovenden,’ retorted Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘I repeat: you’re too young.’

‘I’m nineteen.’

‘Eighteen.’

‘Practically nineteen,’ Irene insisted. ‘My birthday’s in December.’

‘Marry in haste and repent at leisure,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, making use of any missile, even a proverb, that came ready to hand. ‘At the end of six months you’ll come back howling and complaining and asking me to get you out of the mess.’

‘But why should I?’ asked Irene. ‘We love one another.’

‘They all say that. You don’t know your own minds.’

‘But we do.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle suddenly changed her tactics. ‘And what makes you so anxious all at once to run away from me?’ she asked. ‘Can’t you bear to stay with me a moment longer? Am I so intolerable and odious and . . . and . . . brutal and . . . She clawed at the air. ‘Do you hate me so much that . . .’

‘Aunt Lilian!’ protested Irene, who had begun to cry in earnest.

Mrs. Aldwinkle, with that tactlessness, that lack of measure that were characteristic of her, went on piling question upon rhetorical question, until in the end she completely spoiled the effect she had meant to achieve, exaggerating into ludicrousness what might otherwise have been touching. ‘Can’t you bear me? Have I ill-treated you? Tell me. Have I bullied you, or scolded you, or . . . or not given you enough to eat? Tell me.’

‘How can you talk like that, Aunt Lilian?’ Irene dabbed her eyes with a corner of her dressing-gown. ‘How can you say that I don’t love you? And you were always telling me that I ought to get married,’ she added, breaking out into fresh tears.

‘How can I say that you don’t love me?’ echoed Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘But is it true that you’re longing to leave me as soon as possible? Is that true or not? I merely ask what the reason is, that’s all.’

‘But the reason is that we want to get married; we love each other.’

‘Or that you hate me,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle persisted.

‘But I don’t hate you, Aunt Lilian. How can you say such a thing? You know I love you.’

‘And yet you’re anxious to run away from me as fast as you possibly can,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘And I shall be left all alone, all alone.’ Her voice trembled; she shut her

eyes, she contorted her face in an effort to keep it closed and rigid. Between her eyelids the tears came welling out. 'All alone,' she repeated brokenly. Getting old, said the little clock on the mantel-piece, getting old, getting old.

Irene knelt down beside her, took her hands between her own and kissed them, pressed them against her tear-wet face. 'Aunt Lilian,' she begged, 'Aunt Lilian.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle went on sobbing.

'Don't cry,' said Irene, crying herself. She imagined that she alone was the cause of Aunt Lilian's unhappiness. In reality, she was only the pretext; Mrs. Aldwinkle was weeping over her whole life, weeping at the approach of death. In that first moment of agonized sympathy and self-reproach, Irene was on the point of declaring that she would give up Hovenden, that she would spend all her life with her Aunt Lilian. But something held her back. Obscurely she was certain that it wouldn't do, that it was impossible, that it would even be wrong. She loved Aunt Lilian and she loved Hovenden. In a way she loved Aunt Lilian more than Hovenden, now. But something in her that looked prophetically forward, something that had come through innumerable lives, out of the obscure depths of time, to dwell within her, held her back. The conscious and individual part of her spirit inclined towards Aunt Lilian. But consciousness and individuality — how precariously, how irrelevantly almost, they flowered out of that ancient root of life planted in the darkness of her being! The flower was for Aunt Lilian, the root for Hovenden.

'But you won't be all alone,' she protested. 'We shall constantly be with you. You'll come and stay with us.'

The assurance did not seem to bring much consolation to Mrs. Aldwinkle. She went on crying. The clock ticked away as busily as ever.

## Chapter III

IN THE COURSE of the last few days the entries in Miss Thriplow's note-book had changed their character. From being amorous they had turned mystical. Savage and mindless passion was replaced by quiet contemplation. De Lespinasse had yielded to de Guyon.

'Do you remember, darling Jim,' she wrote, 'how, when we were ten, we used to discuss what was the sin against the Holy Ghost? I remember we agreed that using the altar as a W.C. was probably the unforgivable sin. It's a great pity that it isn't, for then it would be so extremely easy to avoid committing it. No, I'm afraid it's not quite so straightforward as that, the sin against the Holy Ghost. And it's most perilously easy to fall into it. Stifling the voices inside you, filling the mind with so much earthy rubbish that God has no room to enter it, not giving the spirit its fair chance — that's the sin against the Holy Ghost. And it's unforgivable because it's irremediable. Last-minute repentances are no good. The sin and the corresponding virtue are affairs of a



lifetime. And almost everybody commits the sin; they die unforgiven, and at once they begin again another life. Only when they've lived in the virtue of the Holy Ghost are they forgiven, let off the pains of life and allowed to sink into unity with All. Isn't that the meaning of the text? It's terribly difficult not to commit the sin. Whenever I stop to think, I am appalled by the badness of my own life. Oh, Jim, Jim, how easily one forgets, how unthinkingly one allows oneself to be buried under a mountain of little earthy interests! The voices are muffled, the mind is blocked up, there's no place for the spirit of God. When I'm working, I feel it's all right; I'm living in the virtue of the Holy Ghost. For then I'm doing the best I can. But the rest of the time, that's when I go wrong. One can't be doing all the time, one can't always give out. One must also be passive, must receive. That's what I fail to do. I flutter about, I fill my mind with lumber, I make it impossible for myself to receive. One can't go on like this; one can't go on sinning against the Holy Ghost — not if one once realizes it.'

There was a line. The next note began: 'To think steadily and intensely of one thing is a wonderful mental exercise; it serves to open up the mysteries that lie below the commonplace surface of existence; and perhaps, if one went on thinking long enough and hard enough, one might get through the mystery to its explanation. When I think, for example, of my hand . . . ' The note was a long one; it covered, in Miss Thriplow's clear, cultured writing, more than two pages of the book.

'Recently,' she had written after that, 'I have been saying my prayers again, as I used to when I was a child. Our Father which art in heaven — the words help to clear out one's mind, to rid it of the lumber and leave it free for the coming of the spirit.'

The next three notes had got there by mistake. Their place was not in the secret, personal book, but in the other volume, wherein she recorded little snippets that might come in useful for her novels. Not, of course, that the entries in the secret book didn't also come in useful for her fiction sometimes; but they were not recorded expressly for that purpose.

'A man in riding breeches,' the first note ran: 'he makes a little creaking noise as he walks along, whipcord rubbing against whipcord, that is like the creaking noise that swans make, flying, when they move their big white wings.'

Then followed two lines of comic dialogue.

'Me. I find the Fall of the House of Usher a most blood-curdling story.

'Frenchman. Yes, yes, she bloods my curdle also.'

The third note recorded that 'moss after a shower on a sultry day is like a sponge still damp from the hot bath.'

There followed a corollary to the note on prayer. 'There is no doubt,' she had written, 'that the actual technique of prayer — the kneeling, the hiding the face in the hands, the uttering of words in an audible voice, the words being addressed into empty space — helps by its mere dissimilarity from the ordinary actions of everyday life to put one into a devout frame of mind. . . . '

To-night she sat for some time in front of the open book, pen in hand, without writing anything. She frowned pensively and bit the end of her pen. In the end she

put it on record that 'St. Augustine, St. Francis and St. Ignatius Loyola lived dissolute lives before their conversions.' Then, opening her other, her un-secret note-book, she wrote: 'X and Y are old friends from childhood. X dashing, Y timid; Y admires X. Y marries, while X is at the war, a passionate creature who takes Y more out of pity (he is wounded) than from love. There is a child. X returns, falls in love with Y's wife, A. Great passion amid growing anguish of mind — on her part because she is deceiving Y, whom she likes and respects, and daren't undeceive him for fear of losing the child; on his part because he feels that he ought to give up all this sort of thing and devote himself to God, etc.; in fact, he feels the premonitions of conversion. One night they decide that the time has come to part; it can't go on — she because of the deception, he because of mysticism, etc. It is a most touching scene, lasting all a last chaste night. Unfortunately Y finds out for some reason — baby ill, or something of the kind — that A is not staying at her mother's as she said, but is elsewhere. Early in the morning Y comes to X's flat to ask him to help in the search for A. Sees A's coat and hat lying on the drawing-room sofa; understands all. In a fury flies at X, who, defending himself, kills him. The end. Question, however; doesn't it end with too much of a click? too epigrammatically, so to speak? I wonder whether in this twentieth century one can permit oneself the luxury of such effective dramatic devices. Oughtn't one to do it more flatly, somehow? More terre-à-terreishly, more real-lifeishly? I feel that a conclusion like that is almost an unfair advantage taken at the reader's expense. One ought to arrange it differently. But the question is, how? Can one let them separate and show them living, she en bonne mère de famille, he as a coenobite? It would drag it out terribly, wouldn't it? Must think of this carefully.'

She shut the book and put the cap on her fountain pen, feeling that she had done a good evening's work. Calamy was now safely laid down in pickle, waiting to be consumed whenever she should be short of fictional provisions.

After having undressed, washed, brushed her hair, polished her nails, greased her face and cleaned her teeth, Miss Thriplow turned out the light, and kneeling down by the side of her bed said several prayers, aloud. She then got into bed, and lying on her back, with all her muscles relaxed, she began to think about God.

God is a spirit, she said to herself, a spirit, a spirit. She tried to picture something huge and empty, but alive. A huge flat expanse of sand, for example, and over it a huge blank dome of sky; and above the sand everything should be tremulous and shimmering with heat — an emptiness that was yet alive. A spirit, an all-pervading spirit. God is a spirit. Three camels appeared on the horizon of the sandy plain and went lolloping along in an absurd ungainly fashion from left to right. Miss Thriplow made an effort and dismissed them. God is a spirit, she said aloud. But of all animals camels are really almost the queerest; when one thinks of their frightfully supercilious faces, with their protruding under lips like the last Hapsburg kings of Spain . . . No, no; God is a spirit, all-pervading, everywhere. All the universes are made one in him. Layer upon layer . . . A Neapolitan ice floated up out of the darkness. She had never liked Neapolitan ices since that time, at the Franco-British exhibition, when she had eaten one and then

taken a ride on Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machines. Round and round and round. Lord, how she had been sick, afterwards, in the Blue Grotto of Capri! 'Sixpence each, ladies and gentlemen, only sixpence each for a trip to the celebrated Blue Grotto of Capri, the celebrated Blue Grotto, ladies and gentlemen. . . .' How sick! It must have been most awkward for the grown-ups. . . . But God is a spirit. All the universes are one in the spirit. Mind and matter in all their manifestations — all one in the spirit. All one — she and the stars and the mountains and the trees and the animals and the blank spaces between the stars and . . . and the fish, the fish in the Aquarium at Monaco. . . . And what fish! What extravagant fantasies! But no more extravagant or fantastic, really, than the painted and jewelled old women outside. It might make a very good episode in a book — a couple of those old women looking through the glass at the fishes. Very beautifully and discreetly described; and the fundamental similarity between the creatures on either side of the glass would just be delicately implied — not stated, oh, not stated; that would be too coarse, that would spoil everything, but just implied, by the description, so that the intelligent reader could take the hint. And then in the Casino . . . Miss Thriplow brusquely interrupted herself. God is a spirit. Yes. Where was she? All things are one, ah yes, yes. All, all, all, she repeated. But to arrive at the realization of their oneness one must climb up into the spirit. The body separates, the spirit unites. One must give up the body, the self; one must lose one's life to gain it. Lose one's life, empty oneself of the separating Me. She clasped her hands tightly together, tighter, tighter, as though she were squeezing out her individual life between them. If she could squeeze it all out, make herself quite empty, then the other life would come rushing in to take its place.

Miss Thriplow lay quite still, hardly breathing. Empty, she said to herself every now and then, quite empty. She felt wonderfully tranquil. God was surely very near. The silence grew more profound, her spirit became calmer and emptier. Yes, God was very near.

Perhaps it was the distant roaring of a train in the valley far below that reminded her of the noise of the whirling drill; or perhaps the thin bright line of light that came in, through a chink in the top of the rickety old door, from the illuminated corridor, to reach half across the ceiling above her — perhaps it was this long sharp probe of brightness that reminded her of a surgical instrument. Whatever may have been the cause, Miss Thriplow suddenly found herself thinking of her dentist. Such a charming man; he had a china bull-dog on the mantel-piece of his consulting-room and a photograph of his wife and twins. His hair wouldn't lie down. He had such kind grey eyes. And he was an enthusiast. 'This is an instrument of which I'm particularly fond, Miss Thriplow,' he used to say, picking out a little curved harpoon from his armoury. 'A little wider, please, if you don't mind. . . .' What about a story of a dentist who falls in love with one of his patients? He shows her all the instruments, enthusiastically, wants her to like his favourites as much as he does. He pretends that there's more wrong with her teeth than there really is, in order to see her more often.

The dentist grew dim, he began the same gesture again and again, very slowly, but could never finish it, having forgotten, half-way through the act, what he meant to do. At last he disappeared altogether. Miss Thriplow had fallen into a profound and tranquil sleep.

## Chapter IV

IT HAD BEEN raining, stormily; but now the wind had fallen and between the heavy clouds the sun was brightly shining. The yellowing chestnut trees stood motionless in the still bright air, glittering with moisture. A noise of rapidly running water filled the ear. The grass of the steep meadows shone in the sunlight. Calamy stepped out from the dark and frowsty living-room of the cottage and walked up the steep path on to the road. He halted here and looked about him. The road at this point was terraced out of one of the sides of a deep valley. The ground rose steeply, in places almost precipitously, above it. Below it the green mountain meadows, brilliant in the sunshine and dotted here and there with clumps of chestnut trees, fell away into the depths of the valley, which the afternoon sun had left already in a vaporous smoky shadow. Profoundly shadowed, too, were the hills on the further side of the narrow cleft. Huge black masses, smoky with the same vapour as that which floated at the bottom of the valley, they rose up almost in silhouette against the bright light beyond. The sun looked down, over their clouded summits, across the intervening gulf, touching the green hillside, on the slope of which Calamy was standing, with a radiance that, in contrast to the dark hills opposite, seemed almost unearthly. To the right, at the head of the valley, a great pinnacle of naked rock, pale brown and streaked here and there with snow-white veins of marble, reached up into the clouds and above them, so that the summit shone like a precious stone in the sunlight, against the blue of the sky. A band of white vapour hung round the shoulders of the mountain. Beneath it appeared the lower buttresses of rock and the long slopes of hanging wood and meadowland falling away into the valley, all shadowy under the clouds, shadowy and dead, save where, here and there, a great golden beam broke through, touching some chosen tract of grass or woodland or rock with an intense and precarious life.

Calamy stood for a long time looking out at the scene. How beautiful it was, how beautiful! Glittering in the light, the withering trees seemed to have prepared themselves as though for a feast. For a feast — and yet it was winter and death that awaited them. Beautiful the mountains were, but menacing and terrible; terrible the deep gulf below him with its smoky vaporous shadows, far down, below the shining green. And the shadows mounted second after second as the sun declined. Beautiful, terrible and mysterious, pregnant with what enormous secret, symbolic of what formidable reality?

From the direction of the cottage below the road came a tinkle of bells and the shrill shouting of a child's voice. Half a dozen tall black and white goats, with long black

beards, long twisted horns and yellow eyes, slitted with narrow pupils, came trotting up the slope, shaking their flat bells. A little boy scrambled after them, brandishing a stick and shouting words of command. To Calamy he touched his cap; they exchanged a few words in Italian, about the rain, the goats, the best pasture; then, waving his stick and peremptorily shouting at his little flock, the child moved on up the road. The goats trotted on in front, their hoofs clicking on the stones; every now and then they paused to pull a mouthful of grass from the bank at the side of the road; but the little boy would not let them pause. 'Vial' he shouted, and banged them with his stick. They bounded forward. Soon herdsman and flock were out of sight.

If he had been born that little boy, Calamy wondered, would he still be working, unquestioningly, among these hills: tending the beasts, cutting wood; every now and then carting his faggots and his cheeses down the long road to Vezza? Would he, still, unquestioningly? Would he see that the mountains were beautiful, beautiful and terrible? Or would he find them merely ungrateful land, demanding great labour, giving little in return? Would he believe in heaven and hell? And fitfully, when anything went wrong, would he still earnestly invoke the aid of the infant Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, that patriarchal family trinity — father, mother and baby — of the Italian peasant? Would he have married? By this time, very likely, his eldest children would be ten or twelve years old — driving the goats afield with shrill yellings and brandished sticks. Would he be living quietly and cheerfully the life of a young patriarch, happy in his children, his wife, his flocks and herds? Would he be happy to live thus, close to the earth, earthily, an ancient, instinctive, animally sagacious life? It seemed hardly imaginable. And yet, after all, it was likely enough. It needs a very strong, a passionately ardent spirit to disengage itself from childish tradition, from the life which circumstances impose upon it. Was his such a spirit?

He was startled out of his speculations by the sound of his own name, loudly called from a little distance. He turned round and saw Mr. Cardan and Chelifer striding up the road towards him. Calamy waved his hand and went to meet them. Was he pleased to see them or not? He hardly knew.

'Well,' said Mr. Cardan, twinkling jovially, as he approached, 'how goes life in the Thebaïd? Do you object to receiving a couple of impious visitors from Alexandria?'

Calamy laughed and shook their hands without answering.

'Did you get wet?' he asked, to change the conversation.

'We hid in a cave,' said Mr. Cardan. He looked round at the view. 'Pretty good,' he said encouragingly, as though it were Calamy who had made the landscape, 'pretty good, I must say.'

'Agreeably Wordsworthian,' said Chelifer in his precise voice.

'And where do you live?' asked Mr. Cardan.

Calamy pointed to the cottage. Mr. Cardan nodded comprehendingly.

'Hearts of gold, but a little nifty, eh?' he asked, lifting his raised white eyebrow still higher.

'Not to speak of,' said Calamy.

‘Charming girls?’ Mr. Cardan went on. ‘Or goitres?’

‘Neither,’ said Calamy.

‘And how long do you propose to stay?’

‘I haven’t the faintest idea.’

‘Till you’ve got to the bottom of the cosmos, eh?’

Calamy smiled. ‘That’s about it.’

‘Splendid,’ said Mr. Cardan, patting him on the arm, ‘splendid. I envy you. God, what wouldn’t I give to be your age? What wouldn’t I give?’ He shook his head sadly. ‘And, alas,’ he added, ‘what could I give, in point of actual fact? I put it at about twelve hundred quid at the present time. My total fortune. Shouldn’t we sit down?’ he added on another note.

Calamy led the way down the little path. Along the front of the cottage, under the windows, ran a long bench. The three men sat down. The sun shone full upon them; it was pleasantly warm. Beneath them was the narrow valley with its smoky shadows; opposite, the black hills, cloud-capped and silhouetted against the brightness of the sky about the sun.

‘And the trip to Rome,’ Calamy inquired, ‘was that agreeable?’

‘Tolerably,’ said Chelifer, with precision.

‘And Miss Elver?’ he addressed himself politely to Mr. Cardan.

Mr. Cardan looked up at him. ‘Hadn’t you heard?’ he asked.

‘Heard what?’

‘She’s dead.’ Mr. Cardan’s face became all at once very hard and still.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Calamy. ‘I didn’t know.’ He thought it more tactful to proffer no further condolences. There was a silence.

‘That’s something,’ said Mr. Cardan at last, ‘that you’ll find it rather difficult to contemplate away, however long and mystically you stare at your navel.’

‘What?’ asked Calamy.

‘Death,’ Mr. Cardan answered. ‘You can’t get over the fact that, at the end of everything, the flesh gets hold of the spirit, and squeezes the life out of it, so that a man turns into something that’s no better than a whining sick animal. And as the flesh sickens the spirit sickens, manifestly. Finally the flesh dies and putrefies; and the spirit presumably putrefies too. And there’s an end of your omphaloskepsis, with all its by-products, God and justice and salvation and all the rest of them.’

‘Perhaps it is,’ said Calamy. ‘Let’s admit it as certain, even. I don’t see that it makes the slightest difference. . . .’

‘No difference?’

Calamy shook his head. ‘Salvation’s not in the next world; it’s in this. One doesn’t behave well here for the sake of a harp and wings after one is dead — or even for the sake of contemplating throughout eternity the good, the true and the beautiful. If one desires salvation, it’s salvation here and now. The kingdom of God is within you — if you’ll excuse the quotation,’ he added, turning with a smile to Mr. Cardan. ‘The conquest of that kingdom, now, in this life — that’s your salvationist’s ambition.’

There may be a life to come, or there may not; it's really quite irrelevant to the main issue. To be upset because the soul may decay with the body is really mediaeval. Your mediaeval theologian made up for his really frightful cynicism about this world by a childish optimism about the next. Future justice was to compensate for the disgusting horrors of the present. Take away the life to come and the horrors remain, untempered and unpalliated.'

'Quite so,' said Chelifer.

'Seen from the mediaeval point of view,' Calamy went on, 'the prospect is most disquieting. The Indians — and for that matter the founder of Christianity — supply the corrective with the doctrine of salvation in this life, irrespective of the life to come. Each man can achieve salvation in his own way.'

'I'm glad you admit that,' said Mr. Cardan. 'I was afraid you'd begin telling us that we all had to live on lettuces and look at our navels.'

'I have it from no less an authority than yourself,' Calamy answered, laughing, 'that there are — how many? — eighty-four thousand — isn't it? — different ways of achieving salvation.'

'Fully,' said Mr. Cardan, 'and a great many more for going to the devil. But all this, my young friend,' he pursued, shaking his head, 'doesn't in any way mitigate the disagreeableness of slowly becoming gaga, dying and being eaten by worms. One may have achieved salvation in this life, certainly; but that makes it none the less insufferable that, at the end of the account, one's soul should inevitably succumb to one's body. I, for example, am saved — I put the case quite hypothetically, mind you — I have been living in a state of moral integrity and this-worldly salvation for the last half-century, ever since I reached the age of puberty. Let this be granted. Have I, for this reason, any the less cause to be distressed by the prospect, in a few years' time, of becoming a senile imbecile, blind, deaf, toothless, witless, without interest in anything, partially paralysed, revolting to my fellows — and all the rest of the Burtonian catalogue? When my soul is at the mercy of my slowly rotting body, what will be the use of salvation then?'

'It will have profited during the fifty years of healthy life,' said Calamy.

'But I'm talking about the unhealthy years,' Mr. Cardan insisted, 'when the soul's at the mercy of the body.'

Calamy was silent for a moment. 'It's difficult,' he said pensively, 'it's horribly difficult. The fundamental question is this: Can you talk of the soul being at the mercy of the body, can you give any kind of an explanation of mind in terms of matter? When you reflect that it's the human mind that has invented space, time and matter, picking them out of reality in a quite arbitrary fashion — can you attempt to explain a thing in terms of something it has invented itself? That's the fundamental question.'

'It's like the question of the authorship of the Iliad,' said Mr. Cardan. 'The author of that poem is either Homer or, if not Homer, somebody else of the same name. Similarly, philosophically and even, according to the new physics, scientifically speaking, matter may not be matter, really. But the fact remains that something having all the properties

we have always attributed to matter is perpetually getting in our way, and that our minds do, in point of fact, fall under the dominion of certain bits of this matter, known as our bodies, changing as they change and keeping pace with their decay.'

Calamy ran his fingers perplexedly through his hair. 'Yes, of course, it's devilishly difficult,' he said. 'You can't help behaving as if things really were as they seem to be. At the same time, there is a reality which is totally different and which a change in our physical environment, a removal of our bodily limitations, would enable us to get nearer to. Perhaps by thinking hard enough . . .' He paused, shaking his head. 'How many days did Gotama spend under the bo-tree? Perhaps if you spend long enough and your mind is the right sort of mind, perhaps you really do get, in some queer sort of way, beyond the limitations of ordinary existence. And you see that everything that seems real is in fact entirely illusory — maya, in fact, the cosmic illusion. Behind it you catch a glimpse of reality.'

'But what bosh your mystics talk about it,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Have you ever read Boehme, for example? Lights and darkneses, wheels and compunctions, sweets and bitters, mercury, salt and sulphur — it's a rigmarole.'

'It's only to be expected,' said Calamy. 'How is a man to give an account of something entirely unlike the phenomena of known existence in a language invented to describe these phenomena? You might give a deaf man a most detailed verbal description of the Fifth Symphony; but he wouldn't be much the wiser for it, and he'd think you were talking pure balderdash — which from his point of view you would be. . . .'

'True,' said Mr. Cardan; 'but I have my doubts whether any amount of sitting under bo-trees really makes it possible for any one to wriggle out of human limitations and get behind phenomena.'

'Well, I'm inclined to think that it does make it possible,' said Calamy. 'There we must agree to differ. But even if it is impossible to get at reality, the fact that reality exists and is manifestly very different from what we ordinarily suppose it to be, surely throws some light on this horrible death business. Certainly, as things seem to happen, it's as if the body did get hold of the soul and kill it. But the real facts of the case may be entirely different. The body as we know it is an invention of the mind. What is the reality on which the abstracting, symbolizing mind does its work of abstraction and symbolism? It is possible that, at death, we may find out. And in any case, what is death, really?'

'It's a pity,' put in Chelifer, in his dry, clear, accurate voice, 'it's a pity that the human mind didn't do its job of invention a little better while it was about it. We might, for example, have made our symbolic abstraction of reality in such a way that it would be unnecessary for a creative and possibly immortal soul to be troubled with the haemorrhoids.'

Calamy laughed. 'Incorrigible sentimentalist!'

'Sentimentalist?' echoed Chelifer, on a note of surprise.

'A sentimentalist inside out,' said Calamy, nodding affirmatively. 'Such wild romanticism as yours — I imagined it had been extinct since the deposition of Louis-Philippe.'



Chelifer laughed good-humouredly. 'Perhaps you're right,' he said. 'Though I must say I myself should have handed out the prize for sentimentality to those who regard what is commonly known as reality — the Harrow Road, for example, or the Café de la Rotonde in Paris — as a mere illusion, who run away from it and devote their time and energy to occupations which Mr. Cardan sums up and symbolizes in the word *omphaloskepsis*. Aren't they the soft-heads, the all-too-susceptible and sentimental imbeciles?'

'On the contrary,' Calamy replied, 'in point of historical fact they've generally been men of the highest intelligence. Buddha, Jesus, Lao-tsze, Boehme, in spite of his wheels and compunctions, his salt and sulphur, Swedenborg. And what about Sir Isaac Newton, who practically abandoned mathematics for mysticism after he was thirty? Not that he was a particularly good mystic; he wasn't. But he tried to be; and it can't be said that he was remarkable for the softness of his head. No, it's not fools who turn mystics. It takes a certain amount of intelligence and imagination to realize the extraordinary queerness and mysteriousness of the world in which we live. The fools, the innumerable fools, take it all for granted, skate about cheerfully on the surface and never think of inquiring what's underneath. They're content with appearances, such as your Harrow Road or Café de la Rotonde, call them realities and proceed to abuse any one who takes an interest in what lies underneath these superficial symbols, as a romantic imbecile.'

'But it's cowardice to run away,' Chelifer insisted. 'One has no right to ignore what for ninety-nine out of every hundred human beings is reality — even though it mayn't actually be the real thing. One has no right.'

'Why not?' asked Calamy. 'One has a right to be six foot nine inches high and to take sixteens in boots. One has a right, even though there are not more than three or four in every million like one. Why hasn't one the right to be born with an unusual sort of mind, a mind that can't be content with the surface-life of appearances?'

'But such a mind is irrelevant, a freak,' said Chelifer. 'In real life — or if you prefer it, in the life that we treat as if it were real — it's the other minds that preponderate, that are the rule. The brutish minds. I repeat, you haven't the right to run away from that. If you want to know what human life is, you must be courageous and live as the majority of human beings actually do live. It's singularly revolting, I assure you.'

'There you are again with your sentimentality,' complained Calamy. 'You're just the common variety of sentimentalist reversed. The ordinary kind pretends that so-called real life is more rosy than it actually is. The reversed sentimentalist gloats over its horrors. The bad principle is the same in both cases — an excessive preoccupation with what is illusory. The man of sense sees the world of appearances neither too rosily nor too biliously and passes on. There is the ulterior reality to be looked for; it is more interesting. . . .'

'Then you'd condemn out of hand all the countless human beings whose life is passed on the surface?'

‘Of course not,’ Calamy replied. ‘Who would be such a fool as to condemn a fact? These people exist; it’s obvious. They have their choice of Mr. Cardan’s eighty-four thousand paths to salvation. The path I choose will probably be different from others. That’s all.’

‘Very likely,’ said Mr. Cardan, who had been engaged in lighting a cigar, ‘very likely they’ll find the road to their salvation more easily than you will find the road to yours. Being simpler, they’ll have within them fewer causes for disharmony. Many of them are still practically in the tribal state, blindly obeying the social code that has been suggested into them from childhood. That’s the pre-lapsarian state; they’ve not yet eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — or rather it’s the whole tribe, not the individual, that has eaten. And the individual is so much a part of the tribe that it doesn’t occur to him to act against its ordinances, any more than it occurs to my teeth to begin violently biting my tongue of their own accord. Those simple souls — and there are still a lot of them left, even among the motor buses — will find their way to salvation very easily. The difficulty begins when the individuals begin to get thoroughly conscious of themselves apart from the tribe. There’s an immense number of people who ought to be tribal savages, but who have been made conscious of their individuality. They can’t obey tribal morality blindly and they’re too feeble to think for themselves. I should say that the majority of people in a modern educated democratic state are at that stage — too conscious of themselves to obey blindly, too inept to be able to behave in a reasonable manner on their own account. Hence that delightful contemporary state of affairs which so rejoices the heart of our friend Chelifer. We fall most horribly between two stools — the tribe and the society of conscious intelligent beings.’

‘It’s comforting to think,’ said Chelifer, ‘that modern civilization is doing its best to re-establish the tribal régime, but on an enormous, national and even international scale. Cheap printing, wireless telephones, trains, motor cars, gramophones and all the rest are making it possible to consolidate tribes, not of a few thousands, but of millions. To judge from the Middle Western novelists, the process seems already to have gone a long way in America. In a few generations it may be that the whole planet will be covered by one vast American-speaking tribe, composed of innumerable individuals, all thinking and acting in exactly the same way, like the characters in a novel by Sinclair Lewis. It’s a most pleasing speculation — though, of course,’ Chelifer added guardedly, ‘the future is no concern of ours.’

Mr. Cardan nodded and puffed at his cigar. ‘That’s certainly a possibility,’ he said. ‘A probability almost; for I don’t see that it’s in the least likely that we shall be able to breed a race of beings, at any rate within the next few thousand years, sufficiently intelligent to be able to form a stable non-tribal society. Education has made the old tribalism impossible and has done nothing — nor ever will do anything — to make the non-tribal society possible. It will be necessary, therefore, if we require social stability, to create a new kind of tribalism, on the basis of universal education for the stupid, using the press, wireless and all the rest as the instruments by which the new order

is to be established. In a generation or two of steady conscious work it ought to be possible, as Chelifer says, to turn all but two or three hundred in every million of the inhabitants of the planet into Babbitts.'

'Perhaps a slightly lower standard would be necessary,' suggested Chelifer.

'It's a remarkable thing,' pursued Mr. Cardan meditatively, 'that the greatest and most influential reformer of modern times, Tolstoy, should also have proposed a reversion to tribalism as the sole remedy to civilized restlessness and uncertainty of purpose. But while we propose a tribalism based on the facts — or should I say the appearances?' — Mr. Cardan twinkled amicably at Calamy — 'of modern life, Tolstoy proposed a return to the genuine, primordial, uneducated, dirty tribalism of the savage. That won't do, of course; because it's hardly probable, once they have tasted it, that men will allow *le confort moderne*, as they call it in hotels, to be taken from them. Our suggestion is the more practicable — the creation of a planet-wide tribe of Babbitts. They'd be much easier to propagate, now, than *moujiks*. But still the principle remains the same in both projects — a return to the tribal state. And when Tolstoy and Chelifer and myself agree about anything, believe me,' said Mr. Cardan, 'there's something in it. By the way,' he added, 'I hope we haven't been hurting your susceptibilities, Calamy. You're not *moujiking* up here, are you? Digging and killing pigs and so on. Are you? I trust not.'

Calamy shook his head, laughing. 'I cut wood in the mornings, for exercise,' he said. 'But not on principle, I assure you, not on principle.'

'Ah, that's all right,' said Mr. Cardan. 'I was afraid you might be doing it on principle.'

'It would be a stupidity,' said Calamy. 'What would be the point of doing badly something for which I have no aptitude; something, moreover, which would prevent me from doing the thing for which it seems to me just possible I may have some native capacity.'

'And what, might I ask,' said Mr. Cardan with an assumed diffidence and tactful courtesy, 'what may that thing be?'

'That's rather biting,' said Calamy, smiling. 'But you may well ask. For it has certainly been hard to see, until now, what my peculiar talent was. I've not even known myself. Was it making love? or riding? or shooting antelopes in Africa? or commanding a company of infantry? or desultory reading at lightning speeds? or drinking champagne? or a good memory? or my bass voice? Or what? I'm inclined to think it was the first: making love.'

'Not at all a bad talent,' said Mr. Cardan judicially.

'But not, I find, one that one can go on cultivating indefinitely,' said Calamy. 'And the same is true of the others — true at any rate for me. . . . No, if I had no aptitudes but those, I might certainly as well devote myself exclusively to digging the ground. But I begin to find in myself a certain aptitude for meditation which seems to me worth cultivating. And I doubt if one can cultivate meditation at the same time as the land. So I only cut wood for exercise.'

‘That’s good,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I should be sorry to think you were doing anything actively useful. You retain the instincts of a gentleman; that’s excellent. . . .’

‘Satan!’ said Calamy, laughing. ‘But do you suppose I don’t know very well that you can make out the most damning case against the idle anchorite who sits looking at his navel while other people work? Do you suppose I haven’t thought of that?’

‘I’m sure you have,’ Mr. Cardan answered, genially twinkling.

‘The case looks damning enough, no doubt. But it’s only really cogent when the anchorite doesn’t do his job properly, when he’s born to be active and not contemplative. The imbeciles who rush about bawling that action is the end of life, and that thought has no value except in so far as it leads to action, are speaking only for themselves. There are eighty-four thousand paths. The pure contemplative has a right to one of them.’

‘I should be the last to deny it,’ said Mr. Cardan.

‘And if I find that it’s not my path,’ pursued Calamy, ‘I shall turn back and try what can be done in the way of practical life. Up till now, I must say I’ve not seen much hope for myself that way. But then, it must be admitted, I didn’t look for the road in places where I was very likely to find it.’

‘What has always seemed to me to be the chief objection to protracted omphaloskepsis,’ said Mr. Cardan, after a little silence, ‘is the fact that you’re left too much to your personal resources; you have to live on your own mental fat, so to speak, instead of being able to nourish yourself from outside. And to know yourself becomes impossible; because you can’t know yourself except in relation to other people.’

‘That’s true,’ said Calamy. ‘Part of yourself you can certainly get to know only in relation to what is outside. In the course of twelve or fifteen years of adult life I think I’ve got to know that part of me very thoroughly. I’ve met a lot of people, been in a great many curious situations, so that almost every potentiality latent in that part of my being has had a chance to unfold itself into actuality. Why should I go on? There’s nothing more I really want to know about that part of myself; nothing more, of any significance, I imagine, that I could get to know by contact with what is external. On the other hand, there is a whole universe within me, unknown and waiting to be explored; a whole universe that can only be approached by way of introspection and patient uninterrupted thought. Merely to satisfy curiosity it would surely be worth exploring. But there are motives more impelling than curiosity to persuade me. What one may find there is so important that it’s almost a matter of life and death to undertake the search.’

‘Hm,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘And what will happen at the end of three months’ chaste meditation when some lovely young temptation comes toddling down this road, “balancing her haunches,” as Zola would say, and rolling the large black eye? What will happen to your explorations of the inward universe then, may I ask?’

‘Well,’ said Calamy, ‘I hope they’ll proceed uninterrupted.’

‘You hope? Piously?’

‘And I shall certainly do my best to see that they do,’ Calamy added.

'It won't be easy,' Mr. Cardan assured him.

'I know.'

'Perhaps you'll find that you can explore simultaneously both the temptation and the interior universe.'

Calamy shook his head. 'Alas, I'm afraid that's not practicable. It would be delightful if it were. But for some reason it isn't. Even in moderation it won't do. I know that, more or less, by experience. And the authorities are all agreed about it.'

'But after all,' said Chelifer, 'there have been religions that prescribed indulgence in these particular temptations as a discipline and ceremony at certain seasons and to celebrate certain feasts.'

'But they didn't pretend,' Calamy answered, 'that it was a discipline that made it easy for those who underwent it to explore the inward universe of mind.'

'Perhaps they did,' objected Chelifer. 'After all, there's no golden rule. At one time and in one place you honour your father and your mother when they grow old; elsewhere and at other periods you knock them on the head and put them into the pot-au-feu. Everything has been right at one time or another and everything has been wrong.'

'That's only true with reservations,' said Calamy, 'and the reservations are the most important part. There's a parallel, it seems to me, between the moral and the physical world. In the physical world you call the unknowable reality the Four-Dimensional Continuum. The Continuum is the same for all observers; but when they want to draw a picture of it for themselves, they select different axes for their graphs, according to their different motions — and according to their different minds and physical limitations. Human beings have selected three-dimensional space and time as their axes. Their minds, their bodies and the earth on which they live being what they are, human beings could not have done otherwise. Space and time are necessary and inevitable ideas for us. And when we want to draw a picture of that other reality in which we live — is it different, or is it somehow, incomprehensibly, the same? — we choose, unescapably — we cannot fail to choose, those axes of reference which we call good and evil; the laws of our being make it necessary for us to see things under the aspects of good and evil. The reality remains the same; but the axes vary with the mental position, so to speak, and the varying capacities of different observers. Some observers are clearer-sighted and in some way more advantageously placed than others. The incessantly changing social conventions and moral codes of history represent the shifting axes of reference chosen by the least curious, most myopic and worst-placed observers. But the axes chosen by the best observers have always been startlingly like one another. Gotama, Jesus and Lao-tsze, for example; they lived sufficiently far from one another in space, time and social position. But their pictures of reality resemble one another very closely. The nearer a man approaches these in penetration, the more nearly will his axes of moral reference correspond with theirs. And when all the most acute observers agree in saying that indulgence in these particular amusements interferes with the exploration of the spiritual world, then one can be pretty sure it's true. In itself, no doubt, the

natural and moderate satisfaction of the sexual instincts is a matter quite indifferent to morality. It is only in relation to something else that the satisfaction of a natural instinct can be said to be good or bad. It might be bad, for example, if it involved deceit or cruelty. It is certainly bad when it enslaves a mind that feels, within itself, that it ought to be free — free to contemplate and recollect itself.'

'No doubt,' said Mr. Cardan. 'But as a practical man, I can only say that it's going to be most horribly difficult to preserve that freedom. That balancing of haunches . . .' He waved his cigar from side to side. 'I shall call again in six months and see how you feel about it all then. It's extraordinary what an effect the natural appetites do have on good resolutions. Satiated, one thinks regeneration will be so easy; but when one's hungry again, how hard it seems.'

They were silent. From the depths of the valley the smoky shadows had climbed higher and higher up the slope. The opposite hills were now profoundly black and the clouds in which their peaks were involved had become dark and menacing save where, on their upper surfaces, the sun touched them with, as it declined, an ever richer light. The shadow had climbed up to within a hundred feet of where they were sitting, soon it would envelop them. With a great jangling of bells and a clicking of small hard hoofs the six tall piebald goats came trotting down the steep path from the road. The little boy ran behind them, waving his stick. 'Eia-oo!' he shouted with a kind of Homeric fury; but at the sight of the three men sitting on the bench outside the house he suddenly became silent, blushed and slunk unheroically away, hardly daring to whisper to the goats while he drove them into their stable for the night.

'Dear me,' said Chelifer, who had followed the movements of the animals with a certain curiosity, 'I believe those are the first goats I have seen, or smelt, in the flesh since I took to writing about them in my paper. Most interesting. One tends to forget that the creatures really exist.'

'One tends to forget that anything or any one really exists, outside oneself,' said Mr. Cardan. 'It's always a bit of a shock to find that they do.'

'Three days hence,' said Chelifer meditatively, 'I shall be at my office again. Rabbits, goats, mice; Fetter Lane; the family pension. All the familiar horrors of reality.'

'Sentimentalist!' mocked Calamy.

'Meanwhile,' said Mr. Cardan, 'Lilian has suddenly decided to move on to Monte Carlo. I go with her, of course; one can't reject free meals when they're offered.' He threw away his cigar, got up and stretched himself. 'Well, we must be getting down before it gets dark.'

'I shan't see you again for some time, then?' said Calamy.

'I shall be here again at the end of six months, never fear,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Even if I have to come at my own expense.'

They climbed up the steep little path on to the road.

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye.'

Calamy watched them go, watched them till they were out of sight round a bend in the road. A profound melancholy settled down upon him. With them, he felt, had gone all his old, familiar life. He was left quite alone with something new and strange. What was to come of this parting?

Or perhaps, he reflected, nothing would come of it. Perhaps he had been a fool.

The cottage was in the shadow now. Looking up the slope he could see a clump of trees still glittering as though prepared for a festival above the rising flood of darkness. And at the head of the valley, like an immense precious stone, glowing with its own inward fire, the limestone crags reached up through the clouds into the pale sky. Perhaps he had been a fool, thought Calamy. But looking at that shining peak, he was somehow reassured.

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