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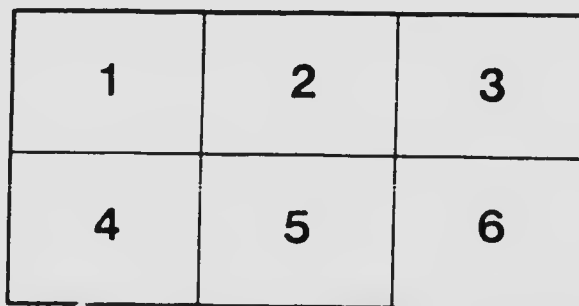
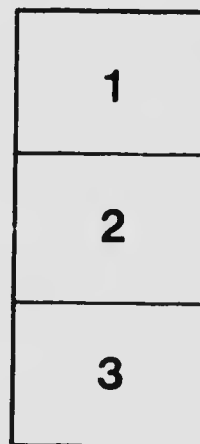
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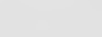
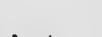
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1

HOUSE-MATES

By the Same Author

THESE LYNNEK

THE MOUNTAINS OF
THE MOON

HOUSE-MATES

BY

J. D. BERESFORD

“ . . . A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg. . . . Why the fowl should be considered more alive than the egg, and why it should be said that the hen lays the egg, and not that the egg lays the hen, these are questions which are beyond the power of philosophic explanations, but are, perhaps, most answered by considering the conceit of man. . . . ”

“Life and Habit,” by SAMUEL BUTLER.

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HOUSE - MATES

Book I.—The Egg

I

LITTLE MILTON

I

WE are puzzled by miracles because we watch them from the outside. From that point of view we get an effect of amazing change. Ten minutes ago this slightly damp but apparently complete chicken was seen as a rather dirty egg, that might have been regarded suspiciously from a breakfast standpoint, but was, with the one exception of colour, precisely like any other egg, to be broken on the side of a basin and yield the familiar vision of an apricot wobbling in a mess of thin but sticky jelly. Not that it matters in this connection just what part expectation plays in our attitude to the miracle. The metamorphosis of a smooth still egg that might be made of papier-mâché into a differentiated entity full of passionate activities and desires is not less a miracle because it happens every time, or because we have become accustomed confidently to expect chickens from eggs. For just so long as we watch the transfiguration from the outside, the thing remains a miracle even though the failure of an egg to hatch is become the surprise and disappointment.

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I want to get this right because certain acquaintances of mine once persisted in regarding me as an egg that had wonderfully and unforgivably turned into a chicken. They looked upon me with suspicion and distrust, not so much because they objected to my being what I was, as because they could not understand the change. In this case, their expectation and sense of consequence had been shocked, one curious effect of which was that they were everlastingly expecting me to become again an egg. (The analogy fails there, indicating, I think, the part played by expectation in our attitude towards the miracle.) But the important point is that they watched the transformation from outside.

Not that I wish to imply that any esoteric advantage is gained by my own view-point. I cannot boast that I have seen my own life from the inside. Looking back the thought of my experience appears almost purely objective. And I distinctly remember at least one occasion on which the realised change in myself came as a disconcerting surprise. It happened that I was called upon to repeat precisely an operation I had performed many years before. Parkinson had had a fire in his house at Copsfield—my first job in private practice—and as I had lost the original detail drawings, I had to redesign a gable end from the particulars on the one-eighth scale tracings that Parkinson had kept. And I could not do it. In those years I had become a chicken, and I could not conscientiously repeat the operations of the egg. Not only had my attitude changed towards design in architecture, but my draughtsmanship also had been so fundamentally affected that my hand refused to copy the weak curves of that old elevation. I sacrificed my artistic conscience and handed over the drawing to my assistant; but I sat idle for nearly half an hour, pondering the miracle.

Little Milton

Those familiar tracings of mine recalled very vividly the man I was when I first went to Keppel Street; and I could follow that man of twenty-eight steadily back into his past, back to the first faint visions of remembered things, without a break. The sequence of his life was one of expected development; there was no breaking of shells, no emergence of a hungry bird on independent legs. And for one moment I, too, regarded the change in myself as a miracle; as a sudden transformation from the inert to the active. I stood outside and compared and wondered, just as Geddes or Kemplay might have done; even, perhaps, with a little uncertainty as to whether I might not, eventually, revert in some ways to the characteristics of the Wilfred Hornby who timidly inquired for rooms at the door of 73 Keppel Street in the autumn of 1905.

And now that I want so much for a time to find distraction from the horror of recent events, I have decided to attempt some account of my experience—just for my own satisfaction and, perhaps, as a sort of note for future reference. It will amuse me to plunge back into the past and follow again the development that was taking place when Fate casually and yet with an air of fastidious precision popped me into the incubator of 73 Keppel Street. (Good Lord, what a house that was!) And to do that I must, to some extent, trace the steady process that was going on underneath the neat shell which any friend of my earlier period would unhesitatingly have declared to represent the actual Wilfred Hornby. I must search the uncertain diary of my memory for any indications of growth that were marked at the time by the little glimmer of recording consciousness which seems at the last analysis to be the thing I recognise as my personality.

What lies still behind that, what inspires and forms

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it, I cannot pretend to guess. Yet that inspiring, formative impulse surely plays the most essential part in the apparent miracle. But the history of my hatching, so far as I can trace it, is written in my consciousness. I admit that I am quite unable to explain the impulse to germination. So far the miracle remains. But I can, at least, account, objectively, for the emergence of the chicken; the phenomenon that seemed so incredible to some of my friends.

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My first great experience came to me when I was eight and a half years old.

My father was a country parson and I was an only child. Until I was eight I was petted and spoiled at home by my father and mother and the too indulgent governess who undertook my early education. But in the spring of 1885 I was sent to a boarding-school in the cathedral city of Medboro', some nine miles away from home. I was badly bullied during my first few terms at that dame's school. When I went there I was a rather prim, fair-haired mollycoddle, with no conceptions of schoolboy honour; weakly resentful of the brutal treatment I received from my schoolfellows—the oldest of them was barely thirteen—but without the confidence or, indeed, the temper to defend myself in any way other than by a whimpering or, at most, peevish expostulation. No wonder that I was bullied. I remember that in my second—autumn—term, I was once tied to a tree in the playground and pelted with "conks," which is short for conquerors, otherwise chestnuts.

It was natural enough that I should hate that school during my first term, even if I had not been bullied. The differences between school and home were in-

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calculable. The headmistress was, I believe, a kind-hearted creature and ready to make allowances for such a tender-skinned product as myself, newly unwrapped and suddenly exposed to all the jostlings of school life; but, to her, I was only one little boy among eighteen other little boys, superficially much alike—and up till then I had been not “only one,” but the one and only boy.

I do not now remember the emotions of joy and expectancy that must have thrilled me at the prospect on going home for my first summer holiday. Those emotions must have been very intense, but they are confused in my mind with the emotions I afterwards experienced on so many other similar occasions. The memory that remains is of the experience that was undoubtedly an outcome of my long and ardent anticipations.

My father and mother drove in from Little Milton to fetch me home, so that my relief from slavery must have been more than an hour old when we arrived at the vicarage, and my former relations with what I regarded as my real and true life were firmly re-established. Yet I remember nothing whatever of the meeting with my father and mother, nor of the details of the drive home. The whole of the facts are focused for me by my sight of the house as we came slowly up the drive, through the avenue of rhododendrons.

The drawing-room end of the vicarage was covered with a dark green trellis of woodwork to give a ladder for the tendrilled hands of the purple clematis, which with that aid had climbed up between the two French windows of the ground floor, spread itself across the width of the elevation and now displayed its vigour in a decoration of leaf and flower right up to and, in places, beyond the eaves gutter of the lichened slate roof.

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And the sight of that rich colour, outlining the beauty of form that was so sharply picked out by the direct light of the high sun, stirred me for a moment to a higher consciousness of being. I hovered for an instant, with a keen sense of expectation, on the edge of some amazing adventure. It was as if I had discovered some pin-prick in the world of my reality, a tiny hole that let in the dazzling light of a richer, infinitely more beautiful world beyond. It seemed to me that if I could but hold myself intensely still, I might peep through the curtain of appearances and catch one glimpse of something indefinable that was the fountain of all ecstasy.

I had no words, nor perhaps ideas, then, for that sudden emotion of happiness; I am unable now, after many repetitions of it in diverse forms, to express what is in my own mind regarding them; but I know that that experience is my first vivid memory of existence and that nothing could extinguish it.

And it was broken by my father's voice, saying with a familiar accustomed cheerfulness, "Ah! well; here we are at last."

At least I presume that was what he actually said on that occasion—he always did say it.

After tea I went out again into the garden, to stare at the clematis on that south wall; and I admired immensely what I should now call the design of it, which had, in effect, the feeling of a particularly brilliant cretonne. But there was no return of ecstasy; no peep-hole; nothing opened.

Other instances occur to me now of the same sudden emotion of happiness, combined with—or should it be, arising from?—a sense of some amazing comprehension.

Little Milton

Sometimes that state of rapture followed a dream, apparently meaningless when considered in relation to the common affairs of life, but, to me, charged with a mysterious significance that endured, gradually, weakening, in some cases for years. One such dream that still remains in my mind as a transcendental experience, concerned the slaughter of a lamb, an elephant and a little white bull. They were led on, each by its attendant, across the space of a great arena, on one side of which I stood alone, while on the other an incalculable crowd of vaguely realised spectators were massed along the tiers of a grand stand that must have been built on the face of a mountain. In my dream I knew that the solemn procession of animals, led to formal sacrifice, was made in order that I might learn to die without hesitation or regret; and for many years afterwards, I cherished the thought of some old dignity of mine that had glorified another life lived in the deeps of history.

I reached my rapture in many ways; along the music of the organ in Mēdboro' Cathedral; by a glimpse of the cathedral pinnacles faintly lit by the winter sun and pricking up through a lake of mist that drowned the flooded meadows by the river; by a combination of magical green lights, when I stood in a summer wood of young beeches and gazed up towards the brightness of the unseen day; and once, I remember, by the smell and colour and touch of a great Princess Bonnie rose that had flowered just at the level of my face on the wall of my father's study. I kissed the velvet of the deep crimson petals, and for a moment I seemed to understand the secret joy of a flower's opening to life.

But I am not going to write the story of my commonplace youth. Those transitory flashes of ecstasy were few enough, and did not perceptibly influence the normal course of my thought, which was not more touched by

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imagination than the thought of the average boy. I never mentioned those moments of mine to anyone, not even to my mother. They were private, delightful experiences, peculiar, as I then believed, to myself, and I did not care to confess my peculiarity. When I grew older I drifted into a name for them. I called my state, clumsily, "being exalté"—the English word "exalted" meant something quite other to me; it was a Bible word, and all Bible words carried with them some atmosphere of tedium, some association of classwork or Sunday-school, or dreary hours in the arid solemnity of my father's church.

I see that I am getting my proportions all wrong. In my endeavour to trace some signs of the change that was going on underneath the shell, I have, as it were, turned my egg inside out and exhibited the germinal vesicle under a microscope. (This metaphor of the egg is growing tedious and too elaborate.) And yet I suppose it is impossible for me to show the Wilfred Hornby, assumed by my relations, friends and acquaintances. Incidentally, I wonder whether any two of them made precisely the same assumptions? They would, however, have agreed upon certain obvious characteristics, and when I come to consider that "lowest common measure" of myself, I can get no farther than the conclusion that I was absurdly mediocre.

When I went to Oakstone at the age of twelve, I was put in the lower second, and when I left five years later, I was in the upper fifth, with the prospect, if I stayed on at the school, of a move up to the lower sixth and the dignity of becoming a prefect. I occupied a respected place in the first game at cricket, I was regarded as a certainty for the eleven next year, and I got my colours for "Rugby" in the last match of the Easter term. I had a bosom friend whom I have never seen since I left

Little Milton

school, and I did not achieve the distinction of being either remarkably popular or unpopular. Then, too, in appearance, I am neither fair nor dark; and good-looking enough to escape any sort of comment.

But all these details are without any kind of value. They are just such foolish particulars as a friend may give you when he is asked to describe someone he has met; someone whom, perhaps, you think you know yourself. Such descriptions are a weariness, although they do uphold my point with regard to seeing people from the outside. Until I went to Keppel Street, I should have given some such account of any casual acquaintance.

The real test for my mediocrity must be applied to the life I lived inside my shell; and although I still have a doubt whether my "moments" may not constitute a weak claim to distinction, I can find no other grounds for the boast that I was not as other boys. This modesty, however, is retrospective. I am looking back with a cold, detached criticism; seeing myself with that uninspired accuracy of knowledge which we cannot bring to the study of any other human being. It is a knowledge that gives a curious flatness to the image evoked. The romantic possibilities of another person's inner life are eliminated. I fail to find now any delightful potentialities in the man I was. And yet, I am conscious of them in myself as I write, and at any moment in my past the same consciousness was present; ready to flare up full of zest and confidence at the least provocation.

As a boy I certainly regarded the religious emotions that first began to shake me when I was coming through the crisis of puberty, as an intensity peculiar to myself. Many boys suffer those emotions in one form and another, but few of them confess their experience

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at the time. Shame and spiritual pride are common impediments to speech, I suppose, but I do not find either very clearly marked in my own case.

My first serious attack developed quite unexpectedly when I was fifteen.

I was home for the summer holidays, and the incident that apparently started my fit was a conversation with my father.

He was a tall, handsome man, clean-shaven except for rather bushy grey side-whiskers; and he had a manner well adapted to confirm the general impression of a scholar who had settled down to the ease of a University living. He was, indeed, a very sound classic, and his qualifications kept him always provided with the two pupils whose fees enabled him to keep me at Oakstone. He had no scruples about coaching the sons of other men, but he had a queer diffidence concerning his ability to educate his own son.

And it was this subject which led him on, that afternoon, to talk with a most unusual confidence of his hopes for me. He had taken me over to tea at a friend's house some three miles away across the river, and we had a delightful walk home through the meadows. It was a particularly serene evening in late August, and we had the country to ourselves. No corn was ever grown in that wide stretch of low pasture, it was too subject to winter flood, and all the life of the neighbourhood had been drawn away to the arable of the higher lands, where the harvest was in full swing. I have a strong impression now of the black green of the water under the shadow of the hanging woods on the farther side of the river, and I think that when my father began so unexpectedly to give me his confidence, my thoughts were at first somewhat distracted by considerations of a likely place for chub.

Little Milton

He opened familiarly enough with some reference to the peace of the evening, and some phrase he found—it was, I think, "*otia liberrima*"—bored me by recalling the association of the schoolroom. I always regarded him more as a schoolmaster than a father; and I suppose nothing could ever have cured him of his habit of Latin quotation—principally Horace. And when he became a little reminiscent and touched on the dreams of his own youth, I was still sheepish and self-conscious. I was quite unable to think of my father as a fellow-pilgrim; his calling and age—he must have been about fifty-five at that time—ranged him too definitely with the pedagogues, with those mechanical, infallible beings who inspired respect but could never be imagined as asking for sympathy.

My father concluded that wistful survey of his drowned ambitions with a slightly whimsical twirl of his Malacca cane and the inevitable tag of "*Pulvis et umbra sumus.*" I came in happily, sure of my ground for once, with a reflective "*Quo pius Aeneas.*"

My father was obviously pleased. "Ah! magnificent fellow, Horace," he said, "one can take him anywhere. I'm glad to find you're already beginning to appreciate him, my boy. But"—and he sighed with a sort of spacious reflectiveness—"I don't know that I particularly want you to go into the Church."

That suggestion instantly caught my attention. My mother had no ambition for me other than the taking of Holy Orders, and often wearied me with her well-meant advice on the subject. Her chief argument was that the Church, as a profession, was so "safe"; her regard being for my spiritual and not my worldly protection. She had had a brother who had gone very wild, and she was the more anxious to protect me from similar perils of the soul.

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"Don't you, pater?" I said eagerly. "I thought—mater has always said——"

"Not unless you have an urgent call," he returned, shifting his ground a little. "In that case, of course, I should be the last person in the world to stand in your way. And your dear mother, as you say . . . No, no, all I meant was that I don't want you to drift into Orders as the easiest means to a profession—if, as I say, you have no particular bias. I, myself . . ." But he apparently thought it wiser to avoid that confession, for he pulled himself up and went on: "However, I dare say you hardly know your own mind yet. Time enough in a couple of years . . ."

"I think I should rather like to be an architect, pater," I suggested, timidly. This was the first time I had given utterance to that ambition, but it had been my secret desire for two years. I had a natural gift for drawing, and the subjects I selected had always been architectural. I believe that I recognised, subconsciously, even as a boy, that the wider powers of the artist were denied to me. I was too conscientious, or had not enough imagination to attempt landscape. But I put out my suggestion with considerable shyness and hesitation. I could not, in those days, avoid the feeling that any such proposition of mine must inevitably be, for some esoteric reason, puerile and foolish.

"Ah!" remarked my father as if he were sampling the quality of a wine, and then added after a moment's consideration, "Well, well, it's a very fine profession."

I was encouraged to enlarge on my proposition, and it was not cunning or dishonesty on my part that induced me to speak almost exclusively of ecclesiastical architecture as the object of my dreams. I had been brought up under the shadow of a church, and there were some really fine bits of work in our church at

Little Milton

Little Milton—the flamboyant tracery of the three-light west window is illustrated in all the textbooks of English Gothic.

My father listened to my boyish enthusiasms with evident pleasure, but his thought must have been engaged with the possibilities of my chances of livelihood, for when he answered me, he began to speak of the difficulties of ways and means. “So few churches are built, nowadays,” was one of his objections, a remark that shows how deeply he had sunk under the influences of his provincial surroundings. He had forgotten the growth of cities, and was studying the problem from his knowledge of our own neighbourhood in which there had been no new church built within living memory. “Restoration, of course,” he put in, continuing his local test, and he brightened up a little with a comment on Truro Cathedral.

“Of course, I needn’t do only churches,” I reminded him.

“No, no, of course not,” he said, and went on to tell me that he had been at King’s with Sidney Baxter, of Heaton & Baxter, the well-known ecclesiastical architects in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

We had quite decided my future by the time we came to the bridge over the lock, and we stood there for a few minutes, more nearly understanding one another than we had ever done before. The sun was setting blood red, and the slender leaves of a willow on the farther bank traced a graceful pattern in dead black against the dying splendour of that indented circle of fire. (Years afterwards I got rather a good design for a wall-paper out of that memory.)

Perhaps my father had a “moment” just then, and found in his visions for me some vicarious satisfaction for his own failure. I remember that he came out with

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"Usque ego postera Crescam laude recens," which could only have been induced by the thought of some very magnificent achievement. I wonder whether I should have got nearer to him if he had not worn that wide-awake and frock coat and "all-round collar"? I suppose not. We have often bathed together, and even in the water one would have known him for a parson. It was not only his whiskers that stamped him; there was something bland and a little feminine in his face, something that was yet not in contradiction to his height and the square breadth of his fine shoulders.

No doubt I was a little stirred emotionally by that new intercourse with my father, and by the promised effect of what seemed to be the successful result of my argument for architecture as a profession. But the religious fervour which first attacked me that same evening and continued with slowly abating fury for nearly a week was due almost entirely to my sense of relief, and to the gratitude it engendered. Subconsciously I had been aware of my future as the entrance to servitude. I had hardly believed it possible that I could escape that "sacred calling" of my mother's ambition, a calling that in my mind was associated with an endless barrier of self-repression and restrictions. "Duty" figured so overwhelmingly in her picture of my career, and it was a word that had come to stand as a synonym for all the restraints of school life. I had to become my own schoolmaster and live in a perpetual pupilage to the teachings of the Church as expounded and practised by myself. Indeed, my mother nearly always referred to life as a school. It is true that I regarded the reward of Paradise as eminently desirable, if only as an escape from the horrid alternative of Eternal Punishment that we conscientiously accepted in our evangelically-minded household.

Little Milton

And that, too, had its influence in evoking the strenuous resolves of the period that immediately followed the prospect of release. I was suddenly confronted with a new responsibility that I must shoulder for myself. A clergyman was holy, was "saved" by hypothesis. It was to me incredible that a clergyman should not go to heaven. If you went into the Church you had to be good, was the way I argued. The school-master was always with you. But a mere secular architect had to choose his own path to heaven. I set about choosing mine at once.

Yet I do not wish to convey the impression that my little spell of religious emotion was deliberately induced. It was primarily evoked by my sense of relief, and it was to that extent at least spontaneous. Only the expression of it was necessarily deliberate. I had not many sins to recant, but I made the most of those I had.

I made vows of unselfishness, for example, of a more willing obedience to my parents and masters; and of a greater devotion and attention during prayers and church service. I had not, then, been confirmed, but I was being tentatively prepared for that ceremony, and I decided to fix my mind on my final acceptance into the Church with a great seriousness. But the true characteristic of my conversion was associated with those sexual yearnings which had just begun to find queer forms of expression. I had one or two drawings in my pocket copied from the illustrations of a smuggled copy of *Ally Sloper*, which had been privately cherished for a couple of days and then burnt in the kitchen garden under dread of discovery. These drawings would not have shocked the ordinary conventional mind. The worst of them presented a chubby-legged young woman in a short skirt, who boasted a turnip-shaped torso not too shamelessly *décolleté*. But to

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me she represented some mysterious, alluring, quite incomprehensible Sin. She was the emblem of immoral, irresponsible femininity. If I had met her in the flesh in the vicarage garden, I should certainly have fled from her in horror; but the contemplation of her image, very carefully copied on a sheet of my mother's writing-paper, had upon me the effect of enjoying a furtive, delightful wickedness. I burnt her with less successful emblems in another specially constructed bonfire; and added to the pile a copy of Eugène Sue's "Mysteries of Paris," purloined from my father's study. The book had not interested me; indeed, I had only read the first few pages; but it had an air of being definitely profane and prohibited, and I had sometimes crept up to my own room just to touch it where it lay, carefully concealed, I hoped, under a pile of winter vests in my bottom drawer. The very touch of the book gave me the sense of an ecstatic surrender to the delicious wiles of the devil.

Yet my vows and renunciation of the sinful lusts of the flesh were made without effort. They represented my willing offerings in the cause of righteousness, inasmuch as my mood did not arise from any conviction of sin, but from a sudden urgent desire to become what I called simply and effectively "good." It is true that later manifestations were more complex; and some of them more enduring. One that followed a definite lapse from virtue—I was about twenty-five at that time—lasted for several weeks. But the general effects of them, upon myself, were always much alike. I had a feeling of being singled out from the mass of my fellows; I experienced an uplifting and serenity of mind; a consciousness of immediate satisfaction as a reward for the noble resolutions that I was making. It seems, indeed, as if the whole manifestation arose from an egotism

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that might in extreme cases develop into megalomania. Not that I advance this statement as in any sense an explanation of the phenomenon. I must leave that to some inspired psychologist of the future. I note it here simply because these religious fits of mine were an essential part of my make-up; and what I have referred to as my emergence from the shell seems very closely related to them. And I must insist once again that I was a very ordinary boy.

4

Another piece of evidence which confirms that obstinate affirmation is to be found in the manner of my first serious love affair.

I had earlier fallen temporarily under the glamour of various distant influences. When I was eleven I was desperately in love for some hours with a red-haired little girl I met at a Christmas party. Three years later I had a shy, adoring passion for the wife of our Squire—she was then a big, handsome woman of thirty-five or so, and was afterwards the subject of a surprising scandal in the parish. (I am mentioning only the more outstanding examples of my amorous precocity.) And, at sixteen, with a new boldness, I was seriously contemplating the experiment of kissing our exceedingly pretty new housemaid.

This last affair, however, was somewhat different in kind. It was related to my furtive pleasure in contemplating the figure of the lady I had offered as a burnt sacrifice, rather than to the spiritual drench associated with my other absorptions. Louisa did not appear to me as a goddess. She was a dummy, an improved method of portraiture. I urgently desired to embrace her; in my mind I planned extravagant situations which would give me the desired opportunity; but in my thought of

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the embrace the object of desire was submissive to the point of dullness. For some obscure reason I never questioned Louisa's willingness to be kissed, although she never gave me the least encouragement, and I have, now, no doubt whatever that any rash experiment of mine would certainly have ended in my humiliation.

A further sign of the unworthiness of these longings towards Louisa is to be found in their intermittence. There were days on which I deliberately and with the best intentions refrained from looking at her; there were days on which I forgot that she was anything but a domestic servant. My worst time was Sunday morning. I do not know whether this was because there was an added wickedness in giving thought to my desires on that day, or whether they were not partly induced by the contact of clean underclothes, which always gave me a feeling of physical fitness; but I remember that the hour or so I spent alone between breakfast and eleven o'clock service was the time when I came nearest to putting my longings into action. I used to go upstairs when Louisa was doing the bedrooms and find some excuse to watch her surreptitiously while she was at work. At my boldest I may have brushed against her as I passed, but I never attempted to make love to her, nor even to lead up to any familiarity of speech. I did not see the intrigue in those terms. To me she was nothing but a subject for experiment. And I lacked the courage to make the attempt, not from the fear of rebuff, but because it would in some way have outraged my own code—the code from which I was, nevertheless, so painfully eager to escape.

But what I have called my first serious love affair killed my shameful longings towards Louisa stone dead.

The subject of my new adoration was the daughter of a neighbouring rector, and I first saw her when she

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came over to sing at a concert in our schoolroom at Little Milton. There was certainly good excuse for me on this occasion. She was undoubtedly pretty. That opinion does not rest solely upon my own infatuated judgment. During the concert I overheard various comments on her good looks. She was probably at her best that night, a little flushed with the excitement of her performance (she had a charming little mezzo-soprano voice, and sang with a vivacity and a touch of pertness that were distinctly fascinating), and her blue eyes seemed to me dazzlingly bright. She must have been about twenty then, but to me she had no age. She was an ideal of beauty, and in my thought she was raised to an extravagant power of femininity that made her something more than mortal. I may add that she was in white that evening, and that the modest exposure of her throat was but the most distant recognition of evening dress.

The brightness of her, seen in the glamour of those surroundings, would have been enough to enrapture me, and the brilliance of her effect was further heightened by the fact that her family had a certain prestige in the neighbourhood. The Lynnekers, without any snobbery, in some way conveyed the impression of breed. The three boys had all been at Oakstone, and the youngest of them, who was two years senior to me, had only left at the end of the previous summer term. He got his first-eleven colours when he was only sixteen, had had a tremendous ovation on the following prize-day, and had always figured to me as something of a hero ever since. He was, in fact, a worthy brother for so adorable a vision as his sister Adela. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding my new object of worship all helped to put her on a plane recognisably higher than that of the commonplace vicarage of Little Milton.

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She came in to supper afterwards, with her elder sister and a grown-up brother in deacon's orders. I did not actually speak to her, but once she definitely smiled at me. She may have understood the awed rapture of the gaze I could not avert from her as she sat nearly opposite to me at the supper table, and have accepted my devotion as a modest addition to the many tributes she was receiving that night.

I only saw her once afterwards. Her father's parish was five miles from Little Milton; and two tremendous excursions that I made the following summer, ostensibly to study the Norman architecture of Halton Church, were not rewarded by any sight of her. I had not the courage to go up to the rectory for the church key, which I obtained from the sexton down in the village; but I spent an hour on the battlements of the church tower, a point of vantage that commanded a liberal view of the Lynnekers' garden. Possibly she was away at the time. I saw other members of the family from my safe distance. The second time that I caught a glimpse of her was in Medboro'. She was with her father and sister, driving in a stanhope; and she never even saw me.

She eloped with the son of a village carpenter rather more than two years later. My father was dead then, and I was living with my mother in London. I had outlived my infatuation by that time, but the news came to me as a shock, nevertheless. I could not understand how such a young woman as Adela Lynneker had appeared to me could have married a common workman. My mother was equally surprised. "It will be a terrible blow to the Lynnekers," she said. "I always thought she looked such a nice girl." I often wonder, now, how that elopement came about.

But my present concern is solely with the effect that

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that youthful adoration had upon me, an effect which can only be compared with my fits of religious enthusiasm. I was quite beautifully in love, boy as I was, with Adela Lynneker. I was purified. I went about rapt in moods of exaltation. I looked upon Louisa with loathing. I had no obscene material for sacrifices, but, if I had had, I should have stamped upon the holocaust with a horrified disgust that had not figured in my earlier burnt-offering. In place of that disavowal, I sacrificed all that I found impure in my thought, whispering the wonderful invocation of the sacred name, Adela, whenever I was tempted—as, for example, by the sight of a book of my father's with illustrations of Greek sculpture that I had often pored over, on the pretence of studying architecture. And I cherished a copy of the concert programme, as a Catholic might have cherished a fragment of the True Cross. To this day there is a certain magic associated with that simple announcement: "Song . . . Die Forelle . . . Schubert. Miss Adela Lynneker."

I am quite sure that my first serious love affair was very good for me.

5

My father died when I was seventeen.

He was apparently perfectly well when we went to bed. It was a Sunday night in the middle of September, and I was going back to Oakstone for my last year at school on the following Wednesday. He had preached twice that day and had eaten a very hearty supper. He always had a healthy appetite, but on Sunday night he ate more than usual. He used to say that preaching gave him "an edge." My mother invariably gave us fish for supper on Sundays. She had some theory as

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to fish being a "brain food," a theory founded on some chemical explanation of the properties of phosphorus. Unhappily my father, when he had fed his brain with fish, went on to feed his body with cold roast pork. My mother never attempted to restrain his appetite. She ate very little herself, but she believed that "a man's frame required meat," as she put it; and often worried me because I was naturally inclined to follow her example rather than my father's.

I am a light sleeper, and I heard my mother come out of her bedroom at two o'clock and go downstairs. I sat up in bed and listened for her return. I had a vague idea that the house might have been burgled, and wondered why my father had not gone instead of my mother. Then I heard her returning. She did not seem to be hurrying. She went back to the room she shared with my father, and closed the door gently and deliberately, as if she were afraid of waking the rest of the household.

I was nearly asleep again when she knocked at my door. She came in without waiting for my reply. A queer little figure she looked, in a pink flannel dressing-gown and a white frilled nightcap. She was carrying one of the small bell-shaped benzoline lamps we used instead of candles, and she had turned it too high so that the little pencil of flame wavered up into a thin wreath of gloomy smoke.

"Wilfred, there's something the matter with your father," she said with a little running anxiety that nearly tripped her speech. "I went to fetch him a mustard leaf, and when I got back . . . I don't understand what's wrong with him. He's so quiet now. I wish you'd come and look at him."

I began to ask questions. I think my chief feeling at the moment was one of slight annoyance. I tried to

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diagnose my father's symptoms before I got out of bed.

"Has he got any pain?" I asked.

My mother looked at me as if I had propounded some deeply obscure problem that she was quite unable to grapple with. "I wish you'd come and look at him," she repeated. She was holding the lamp all askew, and the wreath of dark smoke waved a shaky response to the trembling of her hand.

"I say, mother, is there anything wrong?" I said. Her fear was being communicated to me, but it was for her that I was afraid. She looked so odd, I thought. I was not quite sure whether she was not walking in her sleep. I had no qualms concerning that great strong man, my father.

"Oh! Wilfred, do come quickly," she said.

"All right. Look out with that lamp, mother," I returned, as I got out of bed. I expected her to go back to her room while I put on my trousers and slippers, but she stood perfectly still in the same attitude, and stared at the bed with the same look of puzzled apprehension.

"You had better take the lamp, dear," she said, when I had partly dressed.

"Why? Aren't you coming?" I asked impatiently. The truth is that I was a little frightened of her.

She held the lamp towards me. "You go first," she said, and she followed me no farther than the threshold of the other room.

My father lay on his back, with his mouth wide open, and I thought that his lips and face seemed a strange colour. His eyes were half open and the eyeballs horribly rolled up.

"I say, pater, is anything wrong?" I asked.

I did not guess even then that he was dead, but I

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was terrified. I retreated from the bed and looked round for my mother. She was standing just outside the room, with her two hands clasped over her mouth. She looked rather as if something had set her teeth on edge.

"It's—it's some sort of a fit," I said. "I'd better go and get the doctor."

My mother nodded and took her hands away from her mouth. "Perhaps I'd better call the servant?" she said.

And then we hung for a moment in a ridiculous suspense as to whether we ought to wake the two maids. We did not discuss the point, but we looked at one another with evident hesitation.

I solved that by putting the responsibility upon her. "Yes, take the lamp, and go up to them," I said. "I must get my things on. And, mother, I think you ought to *do* something while I'm gone. Give him brandy or something."

We spoke in whispers; I from some fear of disturbing the living; my mother from the older, more potent fear of disturbing the dead. She must have known that my father was dead when she came into my room.

It may appear a little strange that I had not then, nor for the next hour or so, even a passing apprehension of my father's death. But life wears such a different aspect when it is regarded from the cool vantage ground of one who looks back. There in the baffling confusion of the tragedy I had no quietness to weigh an inference, no time to consider. And suddenly waked from sleep, as I had been, my mind had accepted without question the first statement my mother had made. There was "something the matter" with him, she had said, and I had understood her statement in the terms of my common experience. He was not well, I

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concluded, and my sight of him had only intensified my realisation of his illness.

"My father has had some kind of fit," was the manner of my announcement to the unqualified assistant who lived in the village. I could get no further than that.

The boyish impetuosity of my onslaught upon the door of his lodgings had brought Mr. Fernsby to his window with commendable promptitude. He was a queer little hunchback with a big head, who managed a certain effect of dignity by wearing a long beard. The explanation of his failure to obtain a diploma was probably his inebriety, although it is true that might equally well have been an effect. He was a shrewd little fellow enough, and all that we had to depend upon in case of emergency; the nearest qualified doctor lived at Nenton, three miles away.

"Apoplexy?" Fernsby asked, exhibiting the same symptoms of procrastination I had shown when my mother had waked me.

"I don't know," I said. "He's lying frightfully still with his mouth open, and his eyes look awfully funny."

Fernsby either evaluated that at its full significance, or considered that my unprofessional diagnostics were not likely to help him. "I'll come at once," he said, and withdrew into the obscurity of his bedroom. He had looked quite big and impressive when I saw only his head.

I waited outside for him. I was afraid to go back to the vicarage by myself; afraid of my own incompetence to deal with the unknown terrors of serious illness. I knew that my mother and the two maids would depend upon me, and I could think of nothing that ought to be done. I was singularly lacking in

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confidence and independence at seventeen; but then so are the majority of boys.

Fernsby hardly spoke as he trotted beside me on our way back, but now that I had in tow some more or less dependable expert, who would take all the responsibility of decisive action, the excitement that had been sub-consciously working in me found an outlet in chatter. I told Fernsby every detail of my conversation with my mother and of my brief examination of my father; I told him the whole story two or three times with improving accuracy.

Fernsby's single question displayed a shrewdness that seemed to me then a trifle callous.

"What did he have for supper?" he asked; and if I was a little offended by what I regarded as an attempt to common the importance of my news, I answered him to the last potato.

And below all the ebullition of my excited chatter, another personality, reserved and timid, held itself aloof, occupied with some general impression of things that had little relevance to all this apparent preoccupation with the new experience I was suffering. When I look back now I see that rather fair-haired, callow youth of seventeen from outside. Memory recalls a picture of him and the sound of his voice, but nothing of what he felt. I watch him walking beside the queer little image of Fernsby, whose dwarfed figure, ceremoniously buttoned into the ridiculous little frock-coat that was his only wear, makes the boy look unusually tall and graceful.

But my vision of the boy fades when I recall the beauty of the night; the waning moon, with one edge just beginning to melt into the deep hollow of the sky; or the rigid solemnity of black trees in the avenue, every leaf stiff and alert in the suspense of an absolute calm.

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And although I see then with his eyes and feel with his senses, I seem to have no part in the conversation he is holding with the little doctor.

(Was my sight of the boy the vision of a marionette that was the physical expression of myself, constantly changing, dying and being renewed from within? And if so, why did the renewal fall always into such similar combinations, so that when I look now at a photograph of the youth I can still recognise his likeness to the image I see in the mirror? This flesh I am wearing is not the same I wore then, but some force—of inertia perhaps—has built the cells of it always on the original plan. It is possible that if the will were resolute enough, it might change the shape of the man's physical expression! I can, indeed, discern small but characteristic changes in my own features—the mouth has altered, and, I think, the eyes and the chin.)

My mother was downstairs when we got to the house. She took Fernsby up to my father's room without attempting any account of his illness, and returned almost immediately to join me in the dining-room.

"How is he now?" I asked. My excitement seemed to have withered as I entered the house. Already the first whispers of a dreadful doubt were coming to me.

My mother shook her head without speaking. She was sitting, very upright, on a chair by the door, and her two hands were up at her mouth again with that same suggestion of allaying some almost unbearable nervous pain.

I turned down the lamp a little and sat in one of the armchairs by the fireplace. The room wore an unfamiliar aspect; it seemed in some way as if it, too, had been disturbed in its rest, and was unable to adjust itself to the common appearance of every day. The

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lamp's steady brilliance was an unaccustomed intrusion imposed upon the room by extraordinary circumstances.

"You don't think it's serious, mother, do you?" I asked after a few seconds of listening silence.

She nodded and looked at me apprehensively.

"Very serious?" I said, approaching a climax I dared not as yet boldly face. And then as she nodded again, I went on: "But I say, mother, you don't mean. . . ."

I do not believe that she could have dared a complete admission of the truth just then, but she was saved from a y equivocation by the return of Fernsby. He had not been upstairs more than a minute. My mother instantly got up and met him in the hall. I could not hear what they said, but I knew then. I knew so surely that I did not even seek for any confirmation.

I heard little Fernsby go out, and then my mother came back to me in the dining-room.

"I shall go and lie down in the spare room," she said. "Mr. Fernsby says there may have to be an inquest."

I made no attempt to detain her. We, neither of us, at that moment, sought any consolation from the other. I was self-consciously facing a dramatic situation. I did not know what I ought to *do*; and it is the truth that I had not, then, any sense either of loss or of sorrow. And my mother was suffering from an immense shock. She had not, had never had, a passionate love for my father; but the sight of him so unexpectedly dead had frozen her sensibilities for the time being.

She had a reaction next day. She collapsed as if the strain had been suddenly released. She was seriously ill for nearly a fortnight, and was unable to attend the funeral. . . .

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I fell fast asleep in the armchair in the dining-room. For some reason the thought of going to bed again seemed incongruous, and even a little heartless. When I woke I was very cold; the lamp was nearly out, and the room was taking on its old familiar aspect in the first light of a September sunrise.

I discovered then that I, too, must have been immensely disturbed by the sight of my father's body. I found that I had forgotten to take off my nightshirt before putting on my everyday clothes.

6

The death of my father affected me very deeply when I had had time to recover from the immediate paralysis of the shock; but for a few hours my imagination was numbed, just as the body may be numbed by the concussion of a severe wound. Pain came to me gradually. Even when I awoke in the cold dining-room to an intellectual realisation of our loss, I was unaware of suffering and wondered at my own indifference. My insensibility seemed to me a horrible thing, and yet I was, in a way, a little proud of it, as if I had come through some great ordeal without hurt.

The first apprehension of some terrifying injury that had been done to me came when I went down to the river to bathe—I had no desire to sleep again; it was after six o'clock, and the sun was already beginning to shine weakly through the mist. The lawn was white with dew, and as I went down through the garden I repeated a phrase of my father's. "A catch of frost at sunrise" would have been his comment on the morning's weather.

Perhaps that characteristic sentence of his first began to draw my attention to the wound I carried; and the

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bathe and its associations necessarily confirmed my realisation that the hurt would surely ache. The anæsthesia was passing; the nerve-ends were beginning to smart.

And as I walked back to the house the very beauty of the morning increased my pain. We were going to have one of those glorious, still days that come only in September. The mist was dispersing, and the drenched fields were no longer dead white as if they had been covered with a smooth blanket of thistle down; now, each tiny globe seemed to have been miraculously clarified, transformed from milk to crystal-clear water. The smoke from the labourers' cottages lifted from each chimney in a perfect, slender column, with never a bend or break between its base and the feathered capital of its fading dispersion into the hazy sky. The little birds were twittering and peeping from every hedge; up behind the vicarage the rooks were in full chorus; and from the glebe farm came the low, monotonous humming of a threshing-machine, with its steady rising moan, followed by the sudden fall of a major third as fresh corn was thrown into the feed.

At that moment I had only a sense of loss. I had not been intimate with my father, I knew nothing of his inner life; but he had been a companion, and I missed him. I wanted to find joy in that wonderful morning, and I could not because he was not there to share it. It seemed to me an irreparable calamity that he could never again be there with me to echo my delight in the stillness and beauty of a September day. My mother did not respond to these influences. She turned them all into a moral lesson upon the necessity for thankfulness, and even at seventeen I was dimly aware that while she thanked God with her lips, my father and I thanked Him better by the intensity of our

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enjoyment. We could be glad with the morning; my mother locked, nodded a perfunctory appreciation, and went about her work. If she had so thanked a friend for some priceless gift, she would surely have been accused of ingratitude.

But it was my own loss that hurt me, then; the real ache did not come till the afternoon. It was the report of the Nenton doctor that brought home to me the true sorrow of my father's death. There was to be an autopsy, and the thought of that seemed to me quite unbearable. I could not endure the idea that his body should be so irreverently mangled.

I lay in the woods that afternoon, prostrate with a grief I could not quite understand. I found no consolation in the thought of my father's soul being in heaven; I could not believe that he would find happiness there. I felt that he must be lonely and suffering even as I was; and the longing to console and help him, and the bitterness of my impotence, threw me finally into an agony of tears.

And I never found any true solace for that grief. Time slowly took all the sting and the ache out of it; but, quite recently, I felt again the desire to comfort my father in his loneliness.

II

HAMPSTEAD AND LINCOLN'S INN

I

My mother and I went to live at Hampstead after my father's death. We took a tiny house just off the North End Road, not far from the "Bull and Bush." It had originally been decided that I was to go into Heaton & Baxter's office when I was eighteen, but now it was deemed advisable for me to cut my last year at Oakstone and begin to serve my articles without delay. Mr. Baxter was very decent about the affair, and accepted £150 for my indentures, a sum that was exactly half the firm's usual fee.

Our choice of Hampstead was determined by my mother's wish to live near her elder brother—the younger one, the scapegrace, had been dead some years.

This one surviving uncle of mine, David Williams—my father had outlived his two brothers,—was a solicitor, with offices in Moorgate Street. His business was almost entirely confined to conveyancing, and although he had long since accumulated a respectable fortune, he continued, at sixty-three, to devote the greater part of his time to his profession. He had a big house, with a fine garden, nearly at the top of Heath Street, and drove down to the City every day in his brougham. He and his wife had only one child, a daughter, Gladys, who was four years my junior.

I had seen very little of these relations of mine before

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we came to live in Hampstead. Gladys and my aunt Agatha had twice stayed at Little Milton for a few days, and once my mother and I had stayed in Heath Street during my one and only visit to London.

Gladys was a fair, thin child who treated me with a mixture of fear and contempt. I had disliked her quite actively after my visit to Heath Street; she was eleven then and had given me to understand that she regarded boys as a very inferior creation.

Our relations were a little changed when I came up to Hampstead to live. I was only seventeen and still a gauche youth in country-made clothes, with stove-pipe trousers at least a couple of inches too short. But I was on the verge of comparative independence, and I could afford to treat my little girl cousin with an air of tolerance. I was relieved to find that I could put on the airs of an adult and return the snubbing I had received two years before. Gladys's method of reply was to toss her head and look a trifle sulky. Even at thirteen she was too dignified to be pert, or, perhaps, she had not the wit. There was only one thing I liked about her. She had beautifully clear blue eyes; they reminded me of Adela Lynneker.

My uncle was a curious mixture of old fashions and new ideas. He was a clean-shaven man with an Early Victorian type of face—he could have worn Dundreary whiskers without exciting attention—and the cut of his frock-coat and the shape of his top hat enhanced the suggestion that he belonged to the 'forties. When I had stayed at Ken Lodge I had in my careless, youthful way set him down as a prejudiced old foggy, and had thought no better of him for being a Radical in politics. (No doubt something of this attitude was due to my father. I do not think that he and Uncle David were ever on very friendly terms.) But when my mother and

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came to live so near her brother, and we saw him and his family almost daily, I gradually changed my opinion of him.

The discovery that he was not a strict Sabbatarian first inclined me to regard him with more favour. He always attended mattins at the parish church, setting out decorously with his wife and Gladys, in the approved Mid-Victorian manner. But after that duty had been decently performed, he had no prejudices about the keeping of the Lord's Day. Indeed, he frequently had friends in to play whist on Sunday evening.

My mother regarded this laxity with grave misgivings, but to me it seemed a delightful release. I accepted Christianity, spirit and dogma, without one doubt or question, but the tendency of my youth was towards revolt against the bigotry of Puritanism. Secretly, I threw over Sabbatarianism and the doctrine of Eternal Punishment before I had been in London twelve months; but another year elapsed before I dared confess my apostasy to my mother.

Uncle David managed all our affairs for us after we left Milton. My father had left a little money; enough to pay the ecclesiastical dilapidations and the cost of my articles and to purchase an annuity of just over £100 a year for my mother. She protested at first against sinking all the capital in this way, but I took my uncle's part and persuaded her that I should never need the money. I was young and eager, and the prospect of a possible £1,500 coming to me at my mother's death did not interest me nearly so much as the thought of present necessities for both of us. I knew little enough about the value of money, but I was somewhat staggered at the idea of living on £2 a week; and if the money were invested in the ordinary way it would, I was told, produce little more than half that amount.

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My uncle's attitude is not quite so comprehensible. The truth of the matter is that he had a vein of miserliness, which cropped out on occasions such as this. He knew very well that my mother and I could not live on £100 a year, and had made up his mind to double that income for her. But while he was willing to allow her two pounds a week, he stuck at three. There is no explaining these queer kinks in a man's mind. My uncle died worth £6,000 a year. At the time he promised my mother that he would provide for me later, but he never put that promise in writing, and I was not told of it until my mother was on her deathbed.

The third person in the Ken Lodge household, my aunt Agatha, was a professional invalid. She never, as far as I knew, was seriously ill at any time, and she is still alive; but she devoted her best energies to curing various imaginary weaknesses in herself, and so dwelt on the thought of her ailments that she was, in fact, never really well.

2

The offices of Heaton & Baxter are in Lincoln's Inn Fields; and I began my work there on a Monday morning at the end of October, 1894.

I had been to the offices once before, with my mother, to sign the agreement for my articles; but whether I was in a more receptive mood or more nervous on the second occasion, the impression that remains most clearly in my mind is of my timid approach and of the presentation of myself on that Monday morning.

The offices were on the fourth and fifth floors, a position chosen for the sake of light rather than of economy; and something about the tedious ascent of those eight flights of stone stairs had a curiously depressing effect upon me. The damp smell of the stone,

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the suggestion of mustiness that came from the solicitors' offices on the way up, a general deadness and moist, cold stuffiness about the whole building gave me the feeling that I was going into a prison. The feeling was not justified. Heaton & Baxter's offices were light and warm, and the routine of work there was certainly not dull. But I never lost my distaste for those stairs. There have been mornings in spring when I have hesitated at the doorway, on the verge of deciding for some great adventure; when it needed but some tiny further inducement to make me throw up architecture as a profession, and go straight away to Australia or Canada, to some place where I might make a living under the sky. If only I could have run away without preparation; turned my back then and there on those repulsive stone stairs and taken ship east or west or south the same morning, I should certainly have gone; but there was always my mother to be considered. I could not have left her without warning; and when I was at home with her in Hampstead, the impulse to run away appeared wild and foolish.

A tall, dark young man of twenty-four or so passed me as I was going up on that first day of my pupilage. He was very smartly dressed in a morning coat with braided edges, dark grey trousers, top hat and brown leather gloves. He mounted the stairs quickly, but with a curious deliberation; he went two steps at a time, emphasising each rise with a nod as if he were counting or marking the beat of some tune that ran in his head. He passed me on the second-floor landing, stared at me for an instant as he went by, and then continued his ascent with the same oddly mechanical dance.

I wondered whether he were Mr. Heaton's son. I took it for granted that he was bound for the same destination as myself.

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I was taken to Mr. Baxter's room again when I had been admitted to the office. He was a man of sixty then, I should imagine; a big, rather bluff man, with a square grey beard that had a distinct tinge of blue in it—his hair had originally been very dark—and rather humorous brown eyes. The shape of his head and the cut of his beard gave him a recognisable likeness to the late Lord Salisbury.

He greeted me with a pleasant nod.

"Well, young man, ready to start work?" he asked, and got up immediately. I learnt afterwards that he was always nervous with new assistants or pupils. "Let me see," he went on, "you've had no experience, have you? H'm! well, you'd better begin by copying a sheet of building construction, just to learn the use of your tools. I'll put you up with Kemplay and Geddes and tell them to look after you. Come along!"

He led the way back into the lobby and then to a little circular iron staircase that ran up out of what once might have been a deep cupboard—a convenient means of communication that had been added by the firm when they took the offices.

"Mind your head!" he warned me.

Geddes turned out to be the smart young man who had passed me on the landing. Kemplay was a man of between thirty and forty, short and thick-set, with very curly dark hair and a yellow complexion.

I was very shy when left alone with them. I felt like a new boy at school, and was prepared, I think, for a certain amount of chaff or even bullying. But both Kemplay—who occupied the position of "manager" to the firm—and Geddes were exceedingly polite, if faintly contemptuous. Kemplay found a drawing of a roof truss, pinned down a sheet of Whatman's paper on a double-elephant board, and gave me a few instruc-

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tions concerning the management of a T-square and a scale. After that I was left to puzzle out for myself a method of reproducing the roof truss. The other two plunged almost immediately into a technical discussion concerning the detail of some plan upon which they were privately engaged in the evenings—a set of competition drawings for baths and wash-houses in South London, as a matter of fact.

Kemplay came over to me once or twice in the course of the morning and corrected my blundering with a sort of official good-nature; but Geddes addressed no remark to me until he was going out to lunch. He had changed his coat and was untying the little cloth apron he wore round his middle as a protection against the edge of the drawing-board. He paused by my stool and looked at the brand-new box of instruments my mother and I had bought on the day we had come to sign the agreement.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Stanley, eh? Swagger!"

"Mr. Baxter told me to go there," I explained.

"How much?" Geddes inquired.

"Five pounds ten," I said.

"Jolly," was Geddes's only further comment, but I understood that he had intended his remarks as an overture of friendship, however condescending on his side. I was only seventeen, and my dress proclaimed me a provincial; but I was an articulated pupil, with five pounds to spend on drawing instruments, and must sooner or later be admitted to the fellowship of my social equals.

Geddes had, also, served his articles with Heaton & Baxter, and was now staying on as an "improver" at a nominal salary of £1 a week. He was younger than he looked. I discovered later that he was only just twenty-one when I came to the office.

The afternoon was more convivial than the morning. I had my lunch at an A.B.C. in Carey Street, and when

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I came back at a quarter to three I found Kemplay at his desk smoking a pipe, and Geddes, with a cigarette, standing in front of the fireplace.

I changed my coat and returned meekly to my job of copying the roof truss.

"Do you smoke?" asked Geddes, after a minute or two, addressing me.

"Not yet," I said, and then, feeling that it was time I did something to assert myself, I added, "I only left school last July."

"Where were you?" Geddes encouraged me.

"Oakstone," I told him. "I don't know if you have ever heard of it."

"Oh! yes, rather," Geddes said. "Pretty decent school, isn't it? I was at the City of London."

"Were you?" I replied on a note of admiration.

Geddes completed that paragraph with a nod, and went on. "Jolly office, this. It isn't every office that you can smoke in. We're allowed to smoke after two o'clock. That's old Heaton's doing. You never see him without a pipe. Baxter doesn't smoke—he's a bachelor, you know."

"I see," I remarked, trying to look intelligent. I was not quite sure whether Geddes intended to imply any connection between Mr. Baxter's two forms of continence. But I was not encouraged to offer any further contribution to the progress of the acquaintanceship. Geddes's glance had suddenly gone through me, and he appeared lost in some deep abstraction that engaged his whole attention. He stood gazing at nothing for a moment or two, and then walked, still abstrusely occupied, to his board.

"Thirteen four and a half," he remarked, addressing his drawing, "with a rise of six and a half, gives twenty-five stairs. . . ." Then he threw the end of his

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cigarette into the fireplace and plunged into his work. He did not speak again until nearly five o'clock.

Kemplay visited me occasionally during the afternoon and gave me mild encouragement. The rest of my time was occupied in my mechanical copying, with brief intervals of staring out through the window at the people who passed diagonally across the gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields. Nearly all of them, whether they walked briskly and with obvious intentness, or lounged a trifle drearily, hopelessly, perhaps—nearly all made their way from our corner by the chapel up to the centre, and, so far as I could see, out at the farther corner towards the Little Turnstile. And when the children came soon after four o'clock, they, too, ran straight to the centre of the garden and played there among the seats under the trees. It struck me that they were like bubbles drawn to the centre of a little whirlpool.

Twelve years later I, too, was drawn into that idle nucleus one morning, and realised the attraction of the still centre where one can sit and watch the happy employed go eagerly by in the delight of their steady occupation. . . .

I saw only one more member of the office staff that day. He was a youngster of nineteen or so, with brown, restless eyes. He stood at the door for a moment, remarked "Lord, you swatters!" and then vanished. He was dressed for the street.

Neither Geddes nor Kemplay took the least notice of him, but when he had gone, Geddes yawned enormously, and then, turning to me, said:

"That's our riotous pupil."

I smiled my acknowledgment of his humorous intention.

"Perfect young ass," Geddes added.

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"Is he?" I said. "What's his name?"

"Budge," Geddes replied.

I thought it was a joke, but the pupil's name was, indeed, Budge.

"Of course, we call him Toily," Geddes concluded, "when we call him at all, that is. There's a sort of place to wash in downstairs. Have you got your own soap?"

I blushed at the reminder that I had neglected the important function of washing before I went out to lunch.

"No! I didn't know. . . ." I stammered.

"You can use mine this evening. Come on!" Geddes said. "It's half-past five."

3

That day and the two or three days that followed are still very clear in my memory. They were differentiated by their strangeness from all the days that followed. Everything was new and remarkable to me, and all my impressions were associated in some way with that queen-post truss I was copying. I have never had to design a roof with a queen-post principal; I don't suppose I ever shall have to—that type of construction gradually disappeared with the use of rolled steel sections,—but whenever I happen to see the stock illustration which still holds an important place in all the building-construction books, I have a vivid sense of my first reactions to those unfamiliar surroundings.

Sidney Baxter figures very definitely in those memories. He had a conscience about his pupils. Many architects take the fee from their artiled pupils and allow them to pick up the detail of architecture and building construction at their own sweet will, while they

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are serving a useful part in the general work of the office. But Mr. Baxter used often to devote a whole hour a day to my instruction; and he was a particularly able teacher. He would come up in the morning before we had begun to smoke and stand over my board, and explain to me the reason for the thing I happened to be drawing. I believe I was an unusually apt pupil—he more than once assured me that I was; but, judging from the incompetence of the ordinary architect's assistant, I feel inclined to congratulate myself on having had Baxter for a master. He made one understand. Geddes has said the same thing.

I was eleven years in that office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and while I often regret that I wasted, in one sense, such a great slice of my life, I certainly learnt my profession there as thoroughly as it was possible for me to learn it anywhere.

Poor old Baxter! I met him in the "Tube" two or three years ago, and wanted to thank him for all he did for me. But he had nearly lost his hearing, and was more nervous than ever. He did not recognise me at first—his eyesight is failing, too—and then he called me "young man" in his old manner and asked me how I was getting on. I tried to tell him, but the horrible clatter of the Tube was too much for us, and as I shouted he evidently grew more and more shy, looking round at the other passengers as if he knew that they must be gathering more from my narrative than he was himself. I did wind up, in desperation, by shouting something about "All due to you, sir," but I know he failed to get the gist of that. I believe he got out a station or two before his destination in order to save me from further embarrassment. That is my explanation of the fact that he left me at so unlikely a stopping-place as Mornington Crescent. He looked,

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I thought, very little older—the blue had faded from his beard, and even his eyebrows had become white; but he was still wearing the same steel-rimmed spectacles, the solid gold watch-chain with the Freemasons' pendant, the same shade of fawn in his spats, and his rather shabby top hat was rammed on the back of his head at the familiar angle; he often wore it in the office; he forgot to take it off, I suppose.

Heaton was a very different type, a withered, little, clean-shaven man, as precise in his professional methods as he was in his dress. He represented the practical side of the firm, and had a fine head for a plan and for economy in construction. Baxter had the genius. All our elevations—and we did many things besides ecclesiastical work—bear the stamp of his personality. I was looking, a little while ago, at the front Pennycuik offices on the Embankment, and thinking what Baxter would have made of London if he could have had a hand in all the new building that was going up. There is a kind of "gentleness" about his elevations. I know no other word for it.

And yet I cannot say that he markedly influenced the style of the three men from his office who have since made some kind of mark in private practice. Geddes, Horton-Smith (who came after I had been in Lincoln's Inn for two years), and myself were very much affected by Voysey's work. We admired it from the outset, and allowed ourselves to be carried away by our enthusiasm for the "New Art" style in building and decoration that ran a little to seed just at the beginning of the present century. Geddes has never quite recovered, in my opinion. He still carries the "simplicity" idea altogether too far. Heaton used to laugh at us. "Any more toasting-forks?" was his stock joke, referring to the conventional design that was almost the only

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decoration used in the style at that period. "Those infernal squiggles of yours" was a less placid criticism of his that used to annoy Geddes.

But Geddes was a man with one idea. He deserved to succeed in his own line. He lived for architecture. The contemplation of it absorbed him. When one saw him lost in those fits of abstraction that were so characteristic of him—fits that took the form of stopping in the street to wrestle mentally with some problem of building construction, or, as I first saw him, of assisting his calculations by counting the stairs up to our office,—it was always certain that architecture in some shape was engrossing his whole attention. He would stop in the middle of a game of dominoes to sketch a "toasting-fork" on the marble top of the table; and I will swear that when he lost his place in the Marriage Service it was not due to nervousness consequent upon the leading part he was playing in the ceremony, but to some sudden inspiration that had come to him in connection with his work. During the time he was at Heaton & Baxter's he went in for no fewer than twenty-three competitions (I collaborated with him in eleven), and he never received the encouragement of so much as a third premium; and anyone who knows the enormous labour entailed in getting out a set of competition drawings in one's own time, after working in an office for eight hours a day, will appreciate Geddes's devotion and singleness of purpose.

The only time I ever saw him depressed was when young Horton-Smith walked off with the Birmingham job—his third essay in competition work. "There must be a rotten lot of luck in these bally things," Geddes confided to me on that occasion; a remark that did not do justice to Horton-Smith's peculiar cleverness. He has proved since that he has the knack of pleasing com-

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petition assessors, a difficult knack that has nothing to do with luck. I think Geddes was too conscientious and perhaps too original to win an open competition.

The only other man in the office who had any sort of influence upon me during those eleven years was Kemp-
lay, and he was one of those mediocre people who defy description. He was married, had two children, and earned £5 a week with no hope of ever getting more unless he had young Horton-Smith's "luck." But Kemp-
lay gave up going in for competitions five years or more before I left the office. Fortunately for him he had a very equable temperament, and his marriage was a happy one. To me he looks much the same now as he did when I first saw him in 1894, the only striking difference being the vividly white streaks in his black hair. His hair was very coarse—I think he must have had a strain of black blood in him somewhere—and the first white strand that came showed up like a false thread in some stiff, dark material. That harbinger disappeared after a couple of days—his wife had pulled it out, he told us.

Young Budge enlisted in the Yeomanry at the beginning of the South African War, and died of enteric in the spring of 1900. . . .

Mine was a very uneventful life during those eleven years, and in a sense I, too, was little older at the end of the time. I gained much technical knowledge, but scarcely any knowledge of the world. The routine of the office and the restraint of my home life shut me into a cloister. There were moments when I vaguely resented my confinement, and I plunged into one desperate adventure that would have greatly shocked my mother, if she had ever guessed my defiance of her precious belief in the steadily respectable piety of such young men as myself and my colleagues in the office. But, for the most part, I was tame and compliant. I

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liked my profession; I was presently earning two, and later three, pounds a week; and I always had before me the hope of one day setting up for myself in private practice. I passed my final examination at the Royal Institute when I was twenty-five, and thereafter had the right to the use of the letters A.R.I.B.A. after my name, and an authority for protesting against the State neglect of architecture as a profession. If no architect were allowed to practise until he had passed a qualifying examination, and was thereafter liable to lose his diploma for any flagrant breach of the London or provincial building regulations, the various Acts that have been passed might really protect the public from the enormities of the jerry-builder. . . .

I realise now that what I missed in those Lincoln's Inn days was some near friend. I was intimate enough with Kemplay and Geddes, but neither of them was capable of responding to something in me that was urgently calling for expression. Geddes was a Puritan in sexual matters. I remember young Budge's coming into our room one afternoon when I had been at the office a few months, and telling us a story that was really funny, even if it was not fit for publication. Kemplay laughed, with perhaps a touch of self-consciousness; I giggled and blushed; but Geddes told Budge not to be "a dirty little beast." Budge lost his temper, and told Geddes that he was a "rotten prig," but Geddes was perfectly cool—he had a most annoying way of keeping his temper—and from his sure and comfortable platform of conscious righteousness he was able to maintain a lofty attitude which there was no assailing. "Clean" was the word he insisted on, and poor young Budge, getting redder and more furious every moment, had no better answer than to swing out of the room and slam the door.

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That incident had a strong effect upon me at the time. I was young, impressionable, and innocent; I had been brought up at home in an Evangelical atmosphere, and had naturally found my friends at Oakstone among boys of more or less the same temper; also, during those first years in London, I was always under the restraint of my mother's influence; and, finally, I looked up to Geddes, with his technical knowledge and his smart clothes, as to a very superior creature. I attribute much of the gaucherie and shyness of my youth to the habit I acquired in those early years of peering at sex with a blush and a sense of shame.

A friend of the right kind might have helped me, but, as luck would have it, no friend came my way until I had left Lincoln's Inn.

4

I was twenty-three when I met Nellie Roberts.

My mother, my uncle and his wife, the little circle of our rather elderly acquaintances at Hampstead, even the obsessed Geddes, would certainly have regarded that interlude as shameful, but I feel no kind of shame or regret, now, when I think of it; although the strong religious reaction which finally terminated my relations with Nellie, brought with it a conviction of sin, and a finite feeling of remorse.

I have had little experience of the ways of London's underworld, or of the women who frequent it (unless I can count my later observations of the unfortunate Rose Whiting as experience), and I cannot say whether Nellie Roberts was a rare exception to her kind. She was not in the least like the women I have seen at night in the streets off Piccadilly Circus, nor those more successful courtesans I have observed in the promenades of various

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music-halls. But she may represent a select class, and I can only regard myself as being unusually fortunate to have met so simple a representative of it.

I met her one Saturday afternoon in August, 1900, near the band-stand in Hyde Park. I was far too shy to be a woman-hunter even if I had dared the thought of such a ferial pursuit; and it was the merest accident that I happened to sit down so near her. Only one empty chair separated us.

The initiative was hers, of course; but she was not hunting any more than I was. She was there for pleasure, simply, even dowdily dressed, and with no "make-up" on her face. And when she turned and made some remark to me about the fineness of the afternoon, she had no ulterior purpose in her mind. My bashfulness and embarrassment appealed to her, at that moment; she wanted someone to talk to, and she saw, I suppose, that I was very unlike the sort of young man with whom she was all too familiar.

When I had partly overcome my first shyness, I enjoyed her company. She had an inquisitive, critical mind, and her comments on the passers-by amused me. She was the entertainer; I had nothing to do but express my appreciation of her wit.

And she would have left me without making any further advances, if I had not summoned up my courage to ask her whether she often came to Hyde Park on fine Saturday afternoons. She looked at me suspiciously for a moment, but my ingenuousness was too patent for doubt, and she smiled with the first hint she had given of approaching a flirtation, as she said she would meet me there again the following Saturday.

I suppose I imagined myself to be in love with her during the week that elapsed before I saw her again. I thought of her constantly with a vivid recognition of the

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fact that I hoped to continue the acquaintance, and I was perfectly aware that the meeting would be considered improper from the Hampstead point of view, an impropriety that had a peculiar attraction for some tendency which stirred within me at that time. I was in the unfulfilled condition of a young man who has no outlet, and my yearning took the form of a desire for the society of young women—my cousin Gladys was in Brussels then. In such a condition a man may imagine himself in love with his aunt, and Nellie Roberts was about my own age, and pretty in her simple, pert way. No doubt I believed myself to be in love with her.

Our second meeting put the affair on quite another footing. The afternoon was dull and threatened rain, and we presently took a 'bus up to Piccadilly and had tea together in a restaurant in Panton Street to which Nellie introduced me.

We were on the verge of parting before she sprang her surprise on me; I had paid the bill and was reaching up for my hat, an action that for some obscure reason gave me the courage to proffer my prepared question: "Shall I see you again, next Saturday?"

Her face set in a sudden expression of resolution. "I suppose you know what *I* am," she said.

But I had had no intuitions.

"Do you mean——?" I began timidly. I was still standing wedged between the table and the plush-covered seat, and supporting myself with one hand against the wall. I believe my first guess was that she was married, and I looked down, now, for the first time to see whether she were wearing a wedding-ring.

"Oh! sit down," she said, with a touch of petulance; and then, "You surely don't mean to tell me that you're as innocent as all that?"

My expression of bewilderment must have convinced

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her; she pursed her mouth and seemed to hesitate as to whether she would not, after all, keep me—a single entry perhaps—on her list of innocent men friends. She had had all my history that afternoon. She had prompted me with questions and had appeared to take a deep interest in my willing replies. I was less ready than ever to lose her society after that second meeting.

“Well, I suppose you know what——” She started, broke off with a shrug of her shoulders, and said, “Didn’t you guess I was a light woman?”

Even then I was still puzzled for a moment.

“Do you mean——?” I began again.

“Well, you didn’t think I was a lady of fortune, did you?” she asked. I believe the temper in her voice was assumed to cover her own confusion.

I understood, then—not fully, because my mind had been filled with stories of the bold adventuress who enticed such as I was, to strange, secret places for robbery and murder. But my most urgent desire at the moment was to say the “right thing,” whatever that might be.

“I don’t know,” I stammered—I saw I must say something. “I thought perhaps—you don’t look the least like——”

She was brutal. “I don’t look like what?” she insisted.

“I thought perhaps you were in a shop or something,” I said.

“I used to be a hospital nurse,” she returned. “I’ve got a photograph of myself in uniform at home.”

I did not understand her indignant claim to a social position above the shop-girl class, but I jumped at the opportunity to get to what seemed a safer topic. Her show of temper made me horribly uncomfortable.

“Why did you give it up?” I asked humbly.

“The usual thing,” she said.

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I said "Oh!" as if I understood, but she saw through my pretence.

"He was a medical student," she explained. "We're going to be married as soon as he can make a living."

I was hopelessly at sea again. I believed her statements, which were indeed true—even the last one, incredible as it may seem. And I could not reconcile them with the general vague conception I had formed of the "bad women" against whom my mother had once or twice nervously warned me.

"He wouldn't like it much," I tried, "if he knew that you were having tea with me, would he?"

"Well, I've got to live, I suppose?" she snapped.

It was impossible for me to understand all the complex motives and feelings that were disturbing her. Even now I can only guess dimly how she was influenced by a kindly feeling for myself, by a longing to retain some vestige of social dignity, and by the urgent money troubles that were harassing her that August. I judged her attitude, so far as I judged it at all, from certain general premisses—partly gathered from romantic fiction; I was incapable of allowing for the fact that she had twenty-five years of individual life behind her, and that her character, training, and experience were all finding expression in that scene with me at the restaurant. My one source of concern just then was to regain the pleasant terms of our former intercourse.

"Of course. Rather," was the form my conciliation took.

"You don't suppose I like it any more than he does?" she said sharply. And through the density of my ignorance some appreciation of the true state of the case began slowly to filter. Fortunately I was inspired, at last, to a happier response.

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"You see, I'm so fearfully innocent about things," I said. "I've never met anyone before who could explain about them to me."

She smiled. "Innocent!" she said. "Yes, you are that, I must say."

"Well, when shall I see you again?" I asked cheerfully.

"Afraid to go out in the evenings, I suppose?" she asked.

I admitted that I was. My mother would accept an excuse for my absence on Saturday afternoon without making detailed inquiry, but an evening out would necessitate some elaborate lie that I was not then prepared to fabricate.

"Well, next Saturday?" she suggested. "You can come to my rooms." She looked at me searchingly as she said that. "You're sure you want to come?" she added; and I am not certain that my ready assent altogether pleased her.

She gave me a card with an address in Paddington. . . .

She changed her shape for me during the week that followed. I no longer imagined myself in love with her—she was not, for some physiological reason, the type that attracted me—she gradually assumed the shape of Louisa, the housemaid, and this time there was no vision of a glorious Adela to divert me.

And I want to confess that I was not ashamed when I returned to Hampstead the next Saturday evening. My chief feeling was one of release. I did not blush when I greeted my mother; on the contrary, I was aware of a new strength and confidence. I felt that I had somehow vindicated myself.

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I met Nellie many times in the course of the next two years. She was my one experience in this kind, and I came to have a very friendly, companionable feeling for her.

She was a simple creature, and our only quarrels were provoked by her mention of the medical student who had promised eventually to marry her. She saw him every Sunday, and it irked me that she should put him in a class by himself, a class from which I was inevitably excluded. After one such quarrel I did not see her for nearly five months. The man, himself, must forever remain a mystery to me. I never met him—Nellie never suggested that I should do that—but I have seen his photograph, and remember it still so well that I believe I should recognise him if I saw him in the street. He had a heavy, rather stupid face, but he looked honest. Nellie insisted that he was well connected. I should like to know whether he ever married her. . . .

And not for eighteen months did my conscience begin to reproach me. My cousin Gladys's return from Brussels was the chief cause of that change of attitude. I had lost the habit of going to Ken Lodge after our first year or two in Hampstead, and I had seen very little of Gladys since she was eighteen.

I remember going to dinner with my uncle and aunt, soon after she returned, and finding that our alternations of superiority had settled down into something approaching equality. We began to talk about Poelaert's Law Courts at Brussels, a building that had already won my enthusiasm from sketches and photographs. She discussed it very intelligently, and was evidently delighted to find that I was eager to listen and approve without attempting to contrast some English example. Her three

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years at the finishing school had given her a proprietary interest in Brussels, and so far I was the only person she had met since her return who had been willing to admire her authority.

And after dinner, when Gladys was singing to us in the drawing-room, I remembered Nellie with a sudden horrible consciousness of the sordidness of that intrigue. Nellie's rooms, her accent, even her simple, honest self seemed so impossible when considered in my present surroundings. I had an unpleasant sense of not being fit company for my own relations.

I only saw Nellie twice more after that; and the second time definitely closed our intercourse.

I had grown bolder and less honest, then. I used to tell my mother that I spent the evening with Horton-Smith, who, conveniently for me, had rooms not very far from Nellie's.

I left her about eleven o'clock that night, with no premonition that we should never meet again. Indeed, I was in a boastful mood, inclined to regard Hampstead society, as I knew it, with contempt; and it was mere pride that made me go on to the rooms of Horton-Smith on the chance of finding him still up, in preference to making my way home by the Metropolitan to Gower Street, where I could catch the yellow "Camden Town" 'bus up to the Lower Heath. I knew that I risked missing the last 'bus, but I wanted to miss it. I felt equal to any adventure, any challenge to respectability.

And Horton-Smith was up, and had two other men with him, one of whom I had met there before, a quiet chap from an architect's office in Moorgate Street. They greeted me with enthusiasm, and insisted upon playing solo whist. They had been playing the three-handed game before I arrived, and were rather sick of it. I was quite willing, and we kept it up till past three in the

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morning, by which time only the quiet man and myself were capable of distinguishing the cards. Horton-Smith and the stranger were hopelessly drunk. I take no credit for my own sobriety. I have never been able to drink more than one glass of whisky in an evening; the smell of the second always produces a horrible feeling of nausea.

The quiet man and I left the house together, but he lived at Notting Hill, and we parted on Horton-Smith's doorstep.

I was still very elated when I came out into the stillness of the July night—all sense of sleepiness had left me about one o'clock. I had been chaffed by Horton-Smith and his friends upon arriving so late in the evening. They had put but one construction on my employment of the time before I joined them, and although I had given them no confidences, I had not denied the truth of the charges they brought against me. I had been, I thought, a man of the world. I was pleased with the part I had played.

And now I wanted to enjoy the sense of my own completeness and well-being. I did not feel the need for any companion; I was in a mood to enjoy my own company and the realisation of my own powers of sensibility and vision.

London seemed wonderfully opened to me during that long walk. As I went down Bishop's Road and over the railway bridge, there was a lift in the sky towards the north-west, and the weak reflection of daylight was creeping in to mingle with the flicking violet light of the arc-lamps in the sidings. The night was hardly disturbed by the jolt and clankings of trucks, and by the occasional sound of men's voices, hoarse and distant, shouting unintelligible instructions in the darkness of an abyss that ran into the mouth of the station.

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But when I had come down the Harrow Road, and through Chapel Street, I found another impression that was better suited to my mood. The light ahead of me was steadily growing, so that now the hard silhouettes of roofs and distorted chimneys stood up against the sky. Everything here was very still. The town was asleep; and it pleased me to find in it a vision of some place that was not London.

I walked in an older city, exploring unknown mysteries. Every side turning was an avenue that led to some deep wonder. . . . I was a spirit alone and undaunted, come to a place that existed only for me; that was mine to hold and presently to change at will. All the potentialities of it were there, but my strength was sufficient to mould them as I would. I could be at once the explorer and the master. . . . The place was crying to me for release from its own ugliness. Within it was a fugitive soul that knew its own distortion of form, and sought my strength to lift the pressure that had forced it into so gloomy a shape. . . . I floated in a calm serenity of power. I was no more aware of myself as an individual presence. My spirit was entering into the body of London, and every brick and stone of her was becoming a cell that would presently reflect the brightness of my desire for beauty. . . . I knew that all cities were the expression of men's thought, but whereas my own thought was clear and lucid, able to conceive grace and delicacy of form, this new body into which I had so lately come was the outcome of greed and an agonisms, of jealousy and mean ambitions, of clumsy, turgid thoughts that had no sureness of direction. . . . I was filled with a delicious sadness of regret for all the desires of men who had lived and died and found no steadiness of expression. . . .

I came back to the body of Wilfred Herby by passing

Hampstead and Lincoln's Inn

with sedate regularity along the Marblebone Road, a little to the west of Park Crescent; and the picture I saw with his eyes at that moment was endowed with the ecstasy of my recent vision. The invisible sun had brightened the east to a hard, cold glow, and before me the asphalt shone like silver, steaming wet from the foaming whiteness of a great jet of water that lifted in a splendid curve from the nozzle of a black serpentine hose. And the dark figures of the men who moved deliberately here and there were rimmed with the brightness of the morning that hovered round them, and drenching splashes of light from every brimming receptacle of the spray-soaked oilskins.

I stood quite still. I wanted to have my arms and hail the coming day with a shout.

But afterwards my mood slowly declined, and when I stood on the summit of Hampstead Heath and looked down over the blinding streets of London, blown clean of smoke, and sparkling here and there under the vivid newness of the sun—I saw it as one who stands to watch the glint of a sail nearly lost on the horizon. I was separated, a man in the fields of endeavour. I had no supreme power, no

And then my eyes sought the white spire of Highgate Church and all the world of the night shrank into a single solution.

III

GLADYS

I

My religious fit lasted for about six weeks, counting from its very definite and sudden access to the last fitful effort, the final desperate convulsive clinging to the skirts of a mood I could not recapture by a deliberate effort of will.

I call it a mood now, but the name I had for it at that time was "the Holy Spirit." I believed that I had been "called," that some great destiny of martyrdom was before me. I read the lives of the mystics, and was much comforted to find that some of them, like myself, had been profligates and sinners before their conversion. The one real doubt that had beset me in the first days of my inspiration was whether so great a sinner as I had been could be found worthy of saintship. Nevertheless, I believe that the thought of my justification marked the first decline of my endeavour. Perhaps I was too greatly comforted by the recognition of my own worthiness.

Yet, from the beginning, my emotions were curiously mixed. On the one hand, I was filled with a fury of self-abasement. I humiliated myself. I sought methods of discipline, searching out my secret sins and being particularly severe with any tendencies towards selfishness and hypocrisy. I even went so far as seriously to consider the necessity of taking Orders—as a penance, for through all that mood I persisted in my distaste for

Gladys

the orthodox profession of religion. On the other hand, I was secretly elated, full of a sense of power and holiness, proud of the distinction that had been conferred on me.

And those two violently opposed attitudes subsisted quite equably side by side, reacting upon and stimulating each other, so that even as I abased myself and considered such forms of discipline as ordination, I sat in pleased approval of my own humility.

The declination of my spiritual rapture was so gradual that only in retrospect can I mark the stages of my reversion to the normal. But when I, now, consider myself in relation to some memory-stimulating incident of that period I can clearly discern a difference in intensity between, say, the third and fifth week of my seizure. By the third week there were lapses of consciousness, periods gradually extending, during which I *forgot* both the splendour and the irk of my religious intentions. For, curious as it seems, I did, in effect, finally-forget altogether. I remembered with my mind, as I still remember, all the long diminishing phase of my rapture; but this intellectual memory no longer awoke my spiritual desires. And after each interval of spiritual forgetfulness the response to the ideal of sanctity was less spontaneous, more mental, so that towards the end I had to work myself up into a state of devotion by an effort of will.

I think the last such effort was made about six weeks after my first vision.

I never made any complete confession to my mother. She guessed something of what was in my mind, and began her approach to the winning of my confidence by looking at me with an encouraging, hopeful expression. At last, after some four or five days of my new life, she found courage to put her question into words: "Haven't

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you anything to tell me, dear?" she asked, and went on, "I have noticed a change in you lately." She evidently hoped to pave the way for me. She might have been asking me if I were in love.

I made no evasion on the score of misunderstanding her question, but I would not "open my heart" to her as she presently suggested. "Not yet," was the encouragement I gave her, implying that her guess was a true one, but withholding all confidence. I was influenced by several motives. In the first place, I was not ready then to share my glory with anyone; I was afraid of diminishing my rapture by trying to express it in words; and I knew that my mother would, unconsciously, lower the plane of my emotion. She would have seen it all in terms of a "call" to take Orders, and this, to me, was but a minor phase of the grand intention.

But beyond that sufficiently powerful motive for silence, I was aware of the danger of hypocrisy. I was afraid to proclaim my selection, lest the boast should condemn me. And, again, I believe that I recognised in some dim way the danger of openly making any pledge. The taking of vows reminded me too nearly of my bonfires in the vicarage garden; and at the farther heights of my new devotion to holiness, I fervently denied the least relation between my present state and those earlier brief conversions. The precedent was altogether too ominous.

My mother's prayer with me on that and one or two subsequent occasions confirmed me in my resolution to tell her nothing until I was, as I put it, "quite sure of myself." Her very phrases flattened the wonder of my experience. "Grant that he may be led to serve Thee," was the dominant motive of her request; and that side of me which walked among the stars was, in some odd

Gladys

way, a little offended by the significance of that prayer. . . .

2

All that exciting ebullition had subsided before my mother and I went to Eastbourne for our summer holiday. We were to be the guests of my uncle and aunt, who were already installed in very comfortable furnished apartments when we joined them. This was the first time that I had spent my holiday with the Williams; and I believe the plan was the beginning of an unostentatious campaign to encourage a greater intimacy between myself and Gladys.

I seemed to meet her for the first time that September. Until then she had been nothing more than a cousin, some kind of impersonal relation, an appurtenance that I had accepted as being in the general scheme of family life. In as far as I had regarded her as an individual, I had, before her return from Brussels, rather disliked her than otherwise.

She was undoubtedly very pretty. She had the very fair hair, the blue eyes, and the delicate, smooth features that are often ascribed to the "doll" type of beauty. But she was saved from that inanity by the shape of her face and the thinness of her lips. And her eyes had an intellectual steadiness that regarded everything, including myself, with a questioning criticism; no one could have likened Gladys to anything so insipid as a doll. She inherited her fairness from her mother. My uncle's hair showed its original warp of black through the graying silver. His eyes, too, were dark. The Welsh strain showed more dominantly in him than in my mother.

My attitude towards Gladys during that fortnight at

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Eastbourne passed from that of a casual relation into a recognition of friendship. The change came about one morning quite early in the holiday.

I had had a swim before breakfast, and went on alone to the parade to read the morning paper, while Gladys had her bathe. She never wetted that soft, fair hair of hers in salt water; and she looked deliciously neat and fresh when she joined me about half-past eleven. She was wearing a frock of blue linen—a rather keen blue, which she had almost perfectly matched in her sunshade—and she gave a definite effect to our little patch of the parade. There was a certain fitness, I thought, about her appearance there. I felt that the crowd round us would be aware of a blank in the scheme of colour when she went away. The blues, reds, whites and greens in other women's dresses had a temporary, invading air; Gladys came with an effect of completing her immediate surroundings. She was decorative and satisfying to my sense of values. And the blue lights with which she had surrounded herself gave an added clearness and transparency to her delicate, clear skin; it reminded me in those conditions of the soft glaze on some fine, mature piece of china.

She came prepared, I think, with a plan of conversation. She began at once by reverting to our little discussion of the Brussels Law Courts, and from that we presently drifted into an argument on the merits of design in town-planning. My vision of London on that night in the Marylebone Road had survived, and was now thrusting up through my religious emotions as the fresh, green shoot of what was to me, then, a new idea.

"It's this awful haphazard way of building," I said, "that makes places like this"—and I waved a reproving hand in the direction of Eastbourne.

Gladys

Gladys considered that for a moment. "Sometimes it's all right," she began with a little perplexed hesitation; "old Brussels, for instance; the Square, you know; and the way the town clings to the hill." And then she evidently saw the solution she was looking for, and went on: "It's only modern towns that are so ugly, isn't it? I think I hate all modern things; they're so crude."

"Oh no," I protested; "you can't sweep them all into one heap. There's a lot of good stuff being done."

"Like the things in the *Studio*?" she asked.

I agreed to admit the instance.

She shook her head fastidiously. "It doesn't *mean* anything," she said. "It doesn't express any spirit. Don't you think that it's all rather *artificial*?"

I was not prepared for that flat condemnation. I had never had to defend my theories of a new spirit in architecture against a serious attack. Mr. Heaton's criticisms had no weight, we knew that his strong points were all on the practical side; Geddes dismissed Heaton with a contemptuous shrug. And the only other person who had attempted an argument against us was Kemp!ay, and he did it for the sake of talking—he always ended by admitting that he thought we were right.

"Oh, it does. It isn't," I protested. I wanted to be very lucid and convincing. I had no sort of doubt that Gladys was wrong, probably through ignorance, and I was eager to convert her at once; it seemed so absurdly easy, but I had nothing to say.

She turned and looked at me, and the blue of her clear, steady eyes shone out at me from the shadow of her parasol.

"You believe in this . . . this New Art, then?" she said, and her voice conveyed a faint surprise.

"Oh yes! Rather," I affirmed.

"You think it's going to grow into something?"

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Her tone flattered me. She made me feel that, however unexpected my view had been, she was willing to defer to the opinion of an expert.

"I think it is something now," I said, and catching at some echo of Geddes's creed, I went on: "You see, what we're after is a much greater simplicity, and in architecture, anyway, we mean to get more meaning into building. All that old Georgian stuff, you know, and the imitation Gothic is just bad copying. Poelaert was different, but he was an exception. What we've got to do is to express modern city construction in a characteristic—er—*twentieth-century* way." (It had been such a relief to us when we came to the end of 1800 and could boast a new era.) "And there are the beginnings of a new style in some of this recent work—Smith and Brewer's Settlement in Tavistock Place, and things like that. They're not properly evolved yet, I daresay, and some of them have got rather a Byzantine feeling that must be got rid of; but they are, well, pioneers." I paused to find some final example, and concluded lamely, "Don't you like Voysey's stuff?"

"Those funny houses with the queer little buttresses?" she asked.

"Some of them are ripping," I said with conviction.

"Yes, I think, perhaps, some of them are," she admitted. She still regarded me with that air of poised attention.

"You're very keen, aren't you?" she continued.

"Oh yes," I said. "But what Geddes and I want to see is a whole new town built on those lines; all planned from the beginning, you know. There is some talk, now, of a scheme to try that—as an experiment in housing. . . ."

She seemed to brood over that for a moment, and then made some comment on the vulgarisation of East-

Gladys

bourne that was quite beside the point. "I can't think where *that* type of young man comes from," she said, indicating by a quick turn of her eyes two youths who had been persistently promenading up and down our end of the parade.

"City clerks," I said. Geddes and I were terrible snobs in those days

"They stare so horribly," Gladys replied.

I had not been displeased by the promenaders' interest in my companion, but I made some expression of disgust at their bad manners.

"You must tell me a lot more about the new style in architecture," Gladys began again, after a pause. "I'm not *quite* a convert yet, but I daresay I shall be."

"I shall certainly do my best to convert you," I said, smiling.

"Will you?" Gladys asked. "Why?"

"It would be so jolly if we could talk about it sometimes," I said. I was aware at that moment of stepping over some quite negligible obstacle that I had hitherto regarded as insuperable. Gladys had taken a new semblance for me during the last few minutes. She had shown interest in my opinions; she had, by her criticism of those two persistently staring clerks, placed me in the privileged circle from which she chose her friends; and I felt that she and I were forming some kind of alliance against the indifferent crowd who took no interest in the future of Art. Her next sentence warmed me still further.

"I think you are one of the people who are sure to get on, Wilfred," she said. "You are so keen, aren't you? It's such a splendid thing really to care as much as you do about your work."

I blushed an invisible blush—invisible because, like many fair people, I tan red instead of brown, and my

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face was then in a transition stage of inflammation that no flush could deepen.

"I mean to have a good try," I mumbled, and then I recovered my self-possession and boldly stepped over the appearance I had deemed an obstacle, into my cousin's friendship.

"It's a tremendous help in a way," I said, "to have someone like you to talk to, Gladys. In the office the men are all more or less on the same tack as I am. But you've been abroad and got a wider view of things, and you're—I don't know exactly what it is—I suppose it is that you are not prejudiced."

She looked at me with a frank, kindly smile—she was twenty years older than I was. "You mustn't imagine that I'm an expert," she said.

"Experts are always more or less prejudiced," I returned.

I expected a further compliment from her, I think. I was certainly conscious of being an unprejudiced expert just then; but it was my cousin's turn for praise, and her trap was a better one than mine.

"But I suppose you often talk to Aunt Deborah about your work and your ideas," she said.

"Oh yes, of course," I agreed; "but——"

"But——?" she prompted me; she was determined to enjoy her little triumph.

"Oh well, of course she doesn't really understand," I said. "She listens and agrees with me, but she can't criticise and so on, as you can."

Gladys gave her sunshade a little spin and watched the slowly revolving ribs with deep attention. "I've read a lot about architecture," she admitted modestly, "but I've never had much chance to apply my reading. Talking to you makes it so real."

I had had my return and was satisfied with it. As

Gladys

we went back to our rooms for lunch we were very well pleased with each other. But her pleasure and mine must have been of very different kinds. Mine was largely due to the feeling that I had found a friend in my cousin. I had come suddenly to an appreciation of her quality. She was, I thought, both clever and sympathetic. I was ashamed of my old dislike for her, and glad that we should have so many opportunities in the next ten days to exchange ideas. One impersonality still remained, and if I had examined it that morning I should have regarded it as a still further cause for satisfaction. Gladys in becoming a friend had not become more sensibly a woman. I admired her. I liked to watch her face and the finished effect of the crisp, fair waves of hair over her forehead. I thought her repose and her capacity for stillness very beautiful. I wanted to model her head and neck and cast it in some delicately tinted soft china. But I felt no desire to kiss her any more than I felt a desire to kiss the marble statue of a nymph in my uncle's drawing-room at Ken Lodge.

And I can only guess what shape *her* pleasure took.

"I do so much want to know about these things," she said as we went home. But I fancy that knowledge for its own sake had little attraction for her. It was enough if she could, convincingly, appear to know.

3

She must have kept up that appearance most admirably during the Eastbourne time.

We were free to see as much of one another as we pleased. My uncle only came down for long week-ends—he had had ten days' holiday before my mother and I arrived; my aunt Agatha was just starting a new

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illness, neuritis, and found that her skin was peculiarly affected by the sunshine that we were enjoying in such magnificent abundance; and my mother very rarely imposed her company upon us. She would come out for half an hour in the morning, after she had done her prescribed course of religious reading, and would then return to sit with her sister-in-law. My aunt was not particularly religious, but my mother was a gentle, sympathetic creature, who seemed capable of enduring endless accounts of the appearance and precise significance of my aunt's more complicated symptoms.

So Gladys and I spent much of our time alone together. We went long walks to Cuckmere and Pevensey and Bexhill, which was then in a more or less experimental stage and did not tempt us to repeat the visit. And once we made a day excursion to Hastings by steamer.

Our conversation during these walks was not by any means confined to the theory and practice of a new style in architecture. Gladys had a way of letting our discussions slip into irrelevancy; indeed, sometimes when I was deeply interested in my own subject, she would chill me by an interruption that made me wonder whether she had been listening. Yet she often initiated those discussions of ours, generally by asking a question. It seemed as if she could only maintain her interest for a little time, as if our talk of architecture called for an effort that soon tired her. She would come, prepared, to the opening of the day's argument, but when her lesson had been said she would venture no further contribution on the inspiration of the moment. So it usually fell out that we began by sharpening up some point that had been left hanging the day before, and then came to some account of Gladys's experiences in Belgium. After the first two or three days I had definitely become the teacher

Gladys

in my own subject, and it was only fair to give her an opportunity to play the informant.

I am putting this all down as I see it now; but as a matter of fact I did not come to any serious reflections on Gladys's intelligence for nearly two years. And during that Eastbourne holiday I only remember one occasion on which I approached anything like criticism.

We were on the steamer, coming back from Hastings. It was a clear, still evening, but after the warmth of the day the air felt cold, and the wind of our movement had driven the majority of our fellow-excursionists to take up positions aft of the deck-houses. Gladys and I were standing in the bows staring at the headland which formed the other point of the long, shallow bay we were crossing on the chord of its arc. We could not believe that that point was Beachy Head, it looked so absurdly near, a quarter of an hour's journey, at most; and yet we knew that the distance from Hastings to Eastbourne by sea was fifteen miles.

"There can't be any doubt about it," I said at last. "Look, that's the awful Bexhill over there; the half-way mark."

"It does seem incredible, though, doesn't it?" Gladys commented. We were both a little excited, as people are when they meet some unusual phenomenon of this kind. The sight of an extraordinary meteor, the experience of an unprecedented storm, the realisation of any happening that suddenly contradicts the dull normality of our expectation, puts us for a moment outside physical life. There is something of mystery and adventure in most abnormalities. I have wondered whether the spirit is quickened by a memory of all that lies beyond the logic of natural law. And is not some element of surprise present in every true work of Art—surprise that stirs a sense of amazed recognition?

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And then Gladys shivered and snuggled herself a little closer inside the knitted coat she had brought to wear on the steamer.

"Yes, it is cold now," she said in answer to my comment.

"Let's get behind one of the deck-houses," I suggested.

She looked back along the deck and shook her head.

"Why not?" I asked.

She screwed up her nose in a pretty little intimation of disgust. "I—don't—like—the people—*much*," she said, confidently.

"Oh! I see," was my rather hesitating response.

"They're dreadfully common, aren't they?" she persisted.

"Quite clean and sober, though," I admitted.

She screwed up her nose again. "Oh yes," she said, "but one doesn't want to be *too* near them."

I feebly concurred, preferring to remain in the limelight of my cousin's approval rather than attempt the expression of the thought that had been weakly stirring within me.

I think I must have been on the edge of a "moment" just then. I knew that the little excitement of watching the phantom headland, so mysteriously near and unapproachable, had roused in me a feeling of fellowship with humanity; a feeling that had, curiously enough, not been very prominent in my great religious upheaval. And Gladys broke my mood. She interfered between me and something precious that I longed to grasp. For one dragging second of time I was resentful; I had moved beyond the circle of her influence, and I criticised her. Then the day enclosed me again, and I wondered at my own impulse.

But of all the surreptitious creepings within the hard

Gladys

shell that still so lightly bound me, this was the first that seems now to have been truly indicative. I think my feathers were coming.

4

I became engaged to Gladys the following summer.

I was cuddling down into orthodoxy, with every hope of establishing myself before long in a comfortable niche that would enclose and protect me from the risks of life.

My uncle had recently introduced me to his friend Rollo Parkinson, who was vaguely "looking about for a place down in Buckinghamshire," and had stated his intention of building a house for himself as soon as the ideal place was found.

I had done a few sketches for him, and he had told my uncle that I seemed "a very clever young fellow," and that he might be able to put a lot of work in my way.

As a prospect, Parkinson and my uncle seemed to promise better than the company of Geddes and I so faithfully and fruitlessly entered into.

I proposed to Gladys one Sunday morning after service. We left her father and mother and the prayer-books at Ken Lodge on our way up Heath Street, and went on up to the Flagstaff. The vicinity of the White-stone Pond, however, was unendurably clamorous with the barking of dogs retrieving, or refusing to retrieve, sticks; and we wandered down towards the Vale of Health and found a quiet little seat facing over the valley towards Highgate. From that distance I can always deceive myself into thinking of Highgate as a village, and I get a romantic satisfaction from the pretence. For some reason it has always delighted me to imagine parts of London as being something other than they actually are.

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I began to display the fancy to Gladys, but her response did not encourage me. She played the game too intelligently; and by recreating the Highgate associated with Whittington, somehow turned my vision into a history lesson.

I was quite ready for a change of subject when she began to talk of Parkinson.

"I'm so glad you pleased him, Wilfred," she said. "He has got a heap of influential friends, and he may be very useful to you."

I agreed willingly. My only objection to Parkinson was his obstinate insistence that the Queen Anne manner was the one possible style for the house he had in mind. I had supplanted myself to his opinion in the designs I had made, but Geddes had been down on my weakness. "After all, it's *his* house," I had said; and Geddes had given me a lecture on the necessity for educating one's clientele. I should have liked to see him educating Parkinson. He would have tried, of course, and lost the job.

"I'm sure if you once get a start in private practice that you'll be a big success," Gladys went on thoughtfully, and she turned her eyes from their contemplation of the Heath, and looked at me with a gentleness and a shyness I had not seen in her face before.

"It's ripping of you to take so much interest in me," I said. Her interest still flattered me. If there is a charm to some men in the ideal of an exquisite remoteness, they would surely have found my cousin a beautiful object for worship.

She blushed delicately, her cheeks warming for a moment to the timid rose of a shell. "I have always felt," she said in a low voice, "ever since Eastbourne, that your destiny and mine are mixed up together."

Before she made that speech I should have regarded

Gladys

the idea of asking Gladys to marry me as nothing more than ludicrous. I had never thought of her as a possible wife. But now I knew, beyond the possibility of doubt, that she intended to be engaged to me; that she had amazingly offered me this wonderful gift of herself. I felt a little as if someone had offered me a priceless piece of statuary.

I was dreadfully clumsy over my acceptance.

"By Jove, have you really?" I said, and my tone was one of awestruck wonder rather than rapture.

"Always," she said. She sat very still, and was apparently gazing at the south elevation of Highgate Church, starting out clear-cut in the sunshine like a plaster model.

"But, Gladys," I said, "you don't mean that you could ever . . . that I could . . .?"

"Because of our being first cousins?" she asked without moving.

"No, I hadn't thought of that," I said. I was paralysed by a doubt as to whether I ought to kiss her. I found an escape from that in the reflection that our situation was too public. I gently touched one of her white-gloved hands instead. The hand was conveniently near mine at the moment.

"But, Gladys," I repeated, determined to have the conditions of my option perfectly clear, "is it possible that you like me enough to marry me?"

"I have always liked you," she said quietly. Her hand moved confidently in mine, and she dismissed Highgate Church from her attention, and looked at me with the same gentle shyness that had introduced our new relations.

"It—it seems so incredible—that you should," I murmured. I tried to look at her, and had not the courage. My blush was to hers as the peony to the wild rose.

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For what seemed a very considerable time we sat in silence, still nervously holding each other's hand. I believe that some obscure corner of my mind was wondering where I should put her. I knew that she must always have a pedestal. I found my way back to speech by the usual conventional suggestion.

"Do you want me to tell them?" I asked. "Uncle David and my mother?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't," Gladys said.

"You don't think he'll mind; Uncle David, I mean?"

She smiled confidently. "You can leave him to me," she said, and then added: "Are you so frightened of him?"

"I am, rather," I admitted.

"You're not frightened of me, too, are you?" she asked.

I found courage to look up at her then, and her eyes were bright and had in them some light of conquest that reminded me of the eyes of Adela Lynneker.

"You are so very beautiful, Gladys," I said with a sigh. "In a way you—you do, rather, awe me."

"How silly!" she commented gaily, but I saw that she was pleased.

"I should never dare to—to kiss you," I said.

She looked gaily over her shoulder, shifted her sunshade and bent towards me with a quick gesture of invitation.

My hand tightened convulsively on hers as I touched her soft, smooth cheeks; and then my other hand clasped her arm and I kissed her lips.

She permitted me that embrace long enough for my consciousness to be aware of her touch before she jumped up, blushing warmly now, as if she had, at last, felt the pulse of hot life.

Gladys

"You soon overcame your fright, dear," she said with a little air of reproof.

"Let's go and tell them," I said, and I took her hand in my arm as we walked back. I had no doubt, just then, that I loved my cousin to distraction.

5

My uncle took me into his study after dinner. They dined in the middle of the day on Sunday and had a cold supper at night. Our talk, however, was the merest convention; there was nothing to be said.

I always think of my uncle as being a little man. He was, I suppose, about five feet seven, or eight, but I am exactly six feet in my socks, and apt to forget that my height is something above the average. I cannot pretend that I understood him or his motives. He was just an uncle to me then, a fact to be accepted as one accepted the usual phenomena of existence. His face was deeply lined, more particularly about the mouth, and he had a way of peering at one with a rather suspicious frown that made some people feel uncomfortable. But I fancy that that was largely an acquired mannerism due to an effort to disguise a tic that perhaps had worried him in earlier life. The facial spasm took the form, in his case, of a portentous wink of the left eye; and no doubt he had had to assume a forced sternness in order to allay the suspicion that his wink might be due to an unprofessional levity. He had, too, a very deliberate habit of speech, filling his pauses with a sound that might be written "er—hum—er," the "hum" taking the shape of a cough that never went deeper than the back of his throat. It would be too tedious to report him; but the effect he had upon me was chiefly due to these external symptoms which filled me not with

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laughter, as might possibly be expected, but with an odd sense of apprehension. Whenever he spoke to me alone I felt as if he were preparing the way for some awful revelation.

That Sunday afternoon I certainly had cause for uneasiness. Gladys had spoken very confidently of her father's attitude towards our engagement, but I was painfully aware of my own ineligibility when Uncle David began :

"Gladys has told me—er hum—has told me—er—that you have," and then came a pause for that tremendous wink, "er—hum, made her a proposal of marriage." And it all came out in the tone of a speaker who makes a solemn announcement at a public meeting.

I believe I was in the study with him for the best part of an hour, but, as I have said, neither of us had anything to say. My uncle winked and "er-hummed" himself gravely through the ceremony of what he supposed was the inevitable interview, and left me only wiser by the knowledge that I was to make some sort of a position for myself before the marriage could take place. He said something about three years as the probationary period, but he did not make a special point of it.

I was not at all depressed by the advice that I must be making a living as an architect in private practice before I married my cousin. I meant to achieve that ambition fairly soon in any case, and I could count now, more surely than ever, on my uncle's backing. Also, I was not in any hurry to marry Gladys. It was glorious to be engaged to her, but the thought of her affected me with none of the impatience that I had sometimes felt before a visit to Nellie Roberts.

I was proud of that difference of feeling. I counted

Gladys

it as a sign that my love for Gladys was of the best and purest quality, purged of the physical yearnings that seemed to me at that time horribly gross and material. There was, I think, a great similarity between my emotions during the first months of my engagement and those I had experienced during my religious fit. Both were etherealised and abstract; they lacked the element of love for my own kind that might have given them reality. If that motive had stirred me during my evanescent worship of some tenuous ideal of purity, I should have certainly taken Orders and gone out into the world as an evangel, instead of secretly cherishing some pharisaical conception of my own righteousness.

What would have been the result if Gladys had warmed me to a more urgent desire I cannot say; but I imagine that she would have shrunk from any manifestation of passion. Once or twice, when I kissed her with unusual zeal, she winced a little; and afterwards I felt ashamed, as if I had taken too coarse a liberty with so fine and sensitive a creature.

Another point of similarity between my spasmodic devotions to God and Gladys was shown in my desire to cherish the secret of my ecstasy. It is comprehensible enough that I should have said nothing to Geddes or Kemplay; for just as I had known myself unable to express to them my new-found idea of God, so also was I aware of my inability to describe the exquisite quality of my fiancée. But I might have found a confidante in my mother. She was willing enough to listen, and I believe she wished to see me married.

She knew, of course, that she would come to live with us; our relations were such that a separation was inconceivable; but we only spoke of that once, when she rather shakily inquired where I thought I should live after my marriage.

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I was of opinion that we could not do better than Hampstead or Highgate.

My mother agreed; these two suburbs were all London to her—she very rarely went as far as Oxford Street, and had never been inside a theatre in her life. Then she made her one tentative suggestion by saying :

“I suppose I could stay on here?”

I laughed. “But, of course, you’ll come to live with us wherever we go,” I said.

“Are you sure Gladys would like that?” my mother asked.

I had never mentioned the idea to my cousin, but I replied without the least hesitation. “Rather. We’ve never thought of anything else,” I said.

My mother was watching my face with a certain anxiety, but her doubt was not as to my intentions with regard to herself.

“You might feel that you wanted to be alone for a time,” she ventured, and she knew that she was approaching the subject I dared not discuss, the reality of my love for Gladys.

“I couldn’t possibly marry if you didn’t come to live with us,” I said. “So we needn’t talk about that any more.”

And nothing more was said then. My mother kissed me, and thanked God for having given her such a good son. But afterwards she often hovered on the verge of a more direct question.

I wonder, now, whether she was not divided between her love for me, between her genuine desire for my happiness, and something that can only be called jealousy. She had moments when she realised far more of my feeling for Gladys than I knew myself. She was afraid for me, and yet at the same time glad that my devotion to herself was not interfered with. She must

Gladys

have had some crucial struggles with her own conscience, if I am right, for she was extraordinarily honest with herself.

Perhaps if I had been equally honest I should have drawn some inference from the sincere statement of my determination not to marry unless my mother came to live with us. But if a doubt crossed my mind I put it away from me at once. I was in love with my enjoyment of life; my chief outside interest at the moment was my engagement to Gladys, and I would not have sacrificed it from any scruple of conscience. I turned my back on my doubts as upon some denial of beauty, or, better still, dissipated them by watching Gladys and thinking myself into a condition of worship.

6

It was a very trivial incident that suddenly woke me from my dream and set me to face what I could only regard as the very difficult problem of my future.

We had been engaged for nearly eleven months then, and the first fruits of my uncle's influence and backing had matured in the form of a definite commission from Mr. Parkinson. He had at last found a site that suited him, not far from West Wycombe, and I had been down to see it, and was getting out drawings for the house he proposed to erect. It was to cost £3,500. My mother spoke hopefully of a scheme to set me up with an office of my own. Nothing had been said of that to my uncle as yet, but she believed that he would be willing to finance me until I was earning enough to pay my own way. The corollary to this proposition was an early marriage with Gladys. In my mother's mind the last suggestion figured partly, I think, as an insurance against all possible failures. She knew her brother's

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weakness with regard to spending money, and wanted to clinch his responsibility. He might find some excuse for neglecting me, but he would never permit his daughter to suffer.

And, at the time, that proposition appeared to me as just and honourable. It was all in the general scheme of life as I knew it. I had confidence in my own ability to earn a comfortable income as soon as I could make my name known. I had already had designs and articles published in two building papers, and received a few letters concerning them, one of which contained a definite inquiry from a possible client. That was another way of escape from Lincoln's Inn, and it seemed to promise well. I had, indeed, little doubt of my professional future, and I should, therefore, have had no qualms about accepting temporary assistance from my father-in-law. I was planning my niche in society just as Geddes and Horton-Smith were planning theirs. We were intent on the common purpose that had been held up to us as the chief object of our lives. We had to mark out our place in the congeries, find security, a home, a limited circle of acquaintances, set a label on ourselves, and live within the rule of our class. At twenty-seven I had outgrown the more romantic ambitions of my youth. Cathedrals and great public buildings no longer filled my dreams. I had discovered my limitations and marked my future place in society. At the best I saw myself succeeding Norman Shaw as an architect of private houses.

These anticipations were quite definitely in the foreground of my consciousness. If they had been fulfilled, I should have remained a shapely, admirable egg. But, all unknown to me, another spasm was convulsing my spirit, and this time it found expression in a new shape. . . .

Gladys

Gladys had always refused to play tennis or croquet with me in the Ken Lodge garden. Games did not interest her, she protested. I should often have preferred tennis, and even croquet, to conversation in the presence of Aunt Agatha—I have always been as keen on games as the average young Englishman,—but none of my tentative efforts after persuasion had ever induced Gladys to take up a racket or a mallet. She did not, theoretically, condemn games; she would sit and watch them being played; but she said that she never felt the least wish to play herself.

I accepted that attitude without resentment or criticism. It seemed to me typical of Gladys. It seemed to keep her on the pedestal she graced so becomingly. And then, one Saturday afternoon, I saw her with both feet on the earth, and I could never put her back on her throne.

I called at Ken Lodge on my way back from the office. I had told Gladys that I should not come that afternoon; I had meant to go home and work; but as I came up on the 'bus to Pond Street, I was tempted by the beauty of the day, and I decided to fetch Gladys and go for a walk across the Heath to Highgate.

It must have been nearly three o'clock when I came to the house, and the maid told me that my aunt was in bed and my uncle not yet home from the City, but that she believed Miss Gladys was in the drawing-room. I was very much at home in that house, and I walked into the drawing-room unannounced.

Gladys was not there; she was playing tennis on the lawn outside with a little girl of fourteen or fifteen, the daughter of a Hampstead friend.

I stood at the drawing-room window and watched them, and all the spell of my engagement was suddenly broken.

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The Gladys I saw was no longer the still, graceful woman who had seemed to me the incarnation of delicate beauty. She was a gawky, clumsy creature, incredibly inept at the game she was attempting to play. She ran awkwardly, the movements of her arms and body were horribly ungraceful; and yet she was entering into the game with something of eagerness. She was manifestly doing her best to win.

And I saw her instantly as a "poseuse." I felt no resentment against her for having lied about her distaste for games. She had, indeed, a most excellent reason for lying, since she must certainly have known that the effort could only be made at the sacrifice of her whole effect. I could understand and endure her untruth, even applaud her motive for maintaining it. What released me was my realisation of Gladys's personality. She was, I saw all too vividly, only a semblance. More than once, recently, I had had passing doubts as to her intellectual capacity. We had seen so much of one another during the past twelve months that it was inevitable she should slip sometimes; and she had slipped on occasion quite unmistakably. And I had wondered for a moment, and then found half a dozen explanations; she was tired, she had been inattentive, I had misunderstood her. . . . Now, I understood beyond any possibility of doubt. I knew that her interest in Art and Literature was no less a pose than her still grace of movement. She affected those interests; she wore them tastefully displayed in telling suggestions, reserves, and admissions of ignorance. One talent she had, and, so far as I guessed then, only one: her genius for knowing what suited her. There was a real woman underneath her affectations, but it was not the woman that had won my admiration.

I crept quietly out of the drawing-room as if I had

Gladys

witnessed something disgraceful and obscene. As I walked home the sight of the gawky girl who was my fiancée haunted me.

I wanted, now, to confide in my mother—to tell her the whole story of my illusion. I desired her consolation when I was in pain, if I had an instinct to conceal my joys. But I could not tell her about this because I believed that it was a secret I was bound in honour to hide. I had no excuse for breaking off my engagement, and I still meant to carry out my part in the contract, even to marry the woman who lived under the appearance I had known.

7

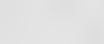
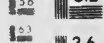
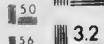
It is quite possible that self-interest played a part in the making of this decision; but the alternative might have daunted a braver, more honest man than I was. Much courage is required to defy the conventions when the defiance will make one appear not as a hero but as a fool. The world in which I lived would not have accepted the excuse that I had ceased to care for Gladys. My mother would have been deeply grieved, my uncle permanently offended, all our friends would have thought me dishonourable; and Gladys—no, I do not know how Gladys would have been affected. It certainly weighed with me that she might suffer. After my first violent reaction against her I found something very pathetic in her magnificent effort of make-believe; I could not have sustained such a part for a week. And beyond and after these excellent reasons for carrying on the engagement remained a perfectly reasonable consideration for my own future.

I awoke to a depressed struggle with this problem early on Sunday morning, and answered it as most other



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young men would have answered it. Something must be sacrificed, and the offering I proposed to lay on the altar was some vague idea of love or it may be only of emotion. Outwardly the glory remained. None of our friends would know, as I did, that Gladys was a mere simulacrum.

One more point remained to be settled, and that was my attitude towards Gladys herself. In the course of morning service I had a romantic yearning to be quite honest with her. I saw myself as being rather splendid, and having an effect upon her that amounted to "conversion." I could just see her perfect profile from my seat, and I pictured a scene in which Gladys wept, honestly, but still beautifully. I was moved to great tenderness at the thought of her confession. I believed that I might find a way out of all my perplexities, by creating a new image of our relations to one another; and she was to be adoring, pliable, and grateful.

That sentimental dream was finally dissipated before dinner.

We did not go on up to the Heath together that morning. There had been a heavy shower while we were in church, and the streets were steaming in hot sunshine when we came out. But wonderful tumultuous masses of cumulus were piled high in the south-west, and Gladys thought we had better not go too far from home; so when she had taken off her hat, we went and sat on the back lawn, where we were not overlooked from the house.

I was foolishly nervous. Now that I was alone with her I could not recall the picture of a Gladys either pliable or grateful. She was so amazingly the same as she had always been; and my memory of her as she appeared playing tennis was as the thought of a

Gladys

phantasm that had had no reality. If the initiative had been left to me I should have made no reference to the previous afternoon, but she began at once by saying :

"Ellen says you came yesterday after all. Why didn't you stay?"

I looked in vain for any sign of embarrassment as she spoke. There was a shade of asperity in her tone, but she had often censured me recently with just the same suggestion of thin disapproval.

"Oh! I don't know," I said. "I had to go home and work."

"But you told me you weren't coming at all," she persisted. "Why did you change your mind?"

I began to suspect an uneasiness underlying her indirect questions, but I had no intention of leading her on when I replied :

"It was such a jolly afternoon. I thought you might like to come for a walk."

She frowned without disfiguring the smooth whiteness of her straight forehead—just the least puckering of the eyes and a droop of the eyebrows expressed her annoyance.

"But, my dear Wilfred," she remonstrated, "why *are* you so mysterious? Really, I don't understand. You came to tell me you had to work, you say, a fact that I knew already, and in the same breath you say that you came to fetch me out for a walk. Now, which *do* you mean?"

"I came to fetch you out, I suppose," I said; and even then she feinted rather than ask me directly why I had changed my mind. I was sure, then, that she knew.

"You are perfectly incomprehensible at times, dear," she said.

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I felt as if I were doing a very brave thing when I replied, "You were playing tennis. I didn't care to interrupt you." I looked away across the lawn with an instinctive wish to spare her. I believed that she would be shamed. I was genuinely astonished when I heard her little tinkling laugh.

"Oh! Wilfred, I wasn't," she said. "That little Burton child came round, and I had to amuse her somehow. You know I hate tennis; we were only knocking the balls about. I should have thought you would have guessed how thankful I should have been for any interruption. You really are extraordinarily dense at times."

I could not go on with that subject. In a sense I was afraid. I had realised the perfect futility of the dream I had had in church, and understood, now, far better than I had the day before, the quality of my cousin's pose. It had crystallised; taken, as it were, a hard, unvarying surface that she could present without effort against any attack. Her very personality had in it something of the characteristics of the porcelain to which I had so often likened her physical beauty. One might break her by a sudden blow, but she was no longer plastic. Her outline was set and could never be altered. And if one broke her nothing would be left—nothing that would be worth keeping.

"I'm sorry," I said feebly. "I suppose I knew that I ought to be working, and when I saw that you had someone with you. . . . It wouldn't have been any fun going out with Elsie Burton. . . ."

She held her advantage.

"I do wish sometimes that you wouldn't be quite so lackadaisical," she said coldly; and I saw that it was I who would presently be moulded into a new shape.

Gladys

8

The year that intervened between that conversation and the death of my mother must have been a particularly dreary one. Looking back upon it I have an impression of myself patiently frowning my way into the acceptance of a future that appeared, even then, to be singularly uninspiring. I can recall no moments of inspiration throughout those long months. I was resigning myself to the steady contemplation of the commonplace, and my thoughts were blurred by an increasing cloud of depression.

All the incidents of that time are associated with Gladys. Such small excitements as going to the theatre, or, when Aunt Agatha was well enough, an afternoon on the river, or a little dinner-party at Ken Lodge, come back to me now as connected with some further tightening of the chain that I was fitting myself to wear. Only in the early mornings was I ever able to delude myself that the future still held some enchanting possibilities for me. I sometimes dreamed then—deliberately reckless of the chain—dreams in which Gladys had no place.

I have dated this period as definitely beginning with our conversation on that Sunday morning, and I think I am right in marking that talk as the first indication of a change of relationship between me and Gladys. I knew then that any feeling I had for my cousin was nothing more than admiration of her physical beauty; and after I had seen her gawky attempts to play tennis, even that compensating excuse for our engagement was denied to me. I could not forget that she was only graceful by acquired habit. It was as if I had exposed some fine piece of furniture as a clever fraud. By accident I had chipped away a fragment of veneer and had seen the coarse material below, even the horrible

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glue that served to maintain the deceit. I tried desperately at times to delude myself that nothing was altered, that the appearance was no less beautiful than before, that even the fraud itself was brilliant enough to demand my admiration. But it was no good. The surface remained, the grace of the lines, all the outward evidences of beauty; but I could not forget my sight of the deal and the glue, and I saw that as I had carelessly exposed that foundation once, I might blunder into further experiments. I might be tempted to pick again at some tempting edge of what I knew to be nothing more than veneer.

Gladys's change of attitude was not less inevitable than my own. She knew. I am certain, now, that she knew all I had guessed. How far she deceived herself, I cannot say. She would have found a hundred reasons for keeping her own admiration. Nevertheless, I believe she grew to hate me during that next year of our engagement, and she may have held me to my promises mainly to support her own pride. If she had let me go, taken the initiative and thrown me over, she would have admitted the fraud; and she may have been honest enough to dread the making of such an admission to herself. And yet I am not sure. I cannot pretend to understand her secret thoughts. Indeed, I have occasionally been driven to the conclusion that she never had any secret thoughts; but that in some positive, instinctive way she simply persisted because she was subconsciously aware that retreat meant some kind of self-revelation.

Whatever her motives, the effect of them was displayed in what I can only call an increasing cruelty to me. She no longer condescended to any admiration for my work or my opinions, but began quite openly to mould me that I might fit the destiny of her invention.

Gladys

She had our future all cut and dried, and she did not disguise the fact that she meant to rule me.

I remember, for example, a dinner-party at Ken Lodge that autumn, and the public attack that Gladys made upon me. And the occasion is further remarkable inasmuch as that was the first time I saw Morrison Blake, whom I disliked so peculiarly at the time, and to whom I had reason later for being so uncommonly grateful.

He was a man of nearly fifty then, I should say; a rather stout man, not very tall, but producing an effect of authority. He wore a full beard and moustache, the former cut something in the style shown in the Nineveh reliefs, but the crisp curl of the brown hair was not, in his case, artificial. His pate was nearly bald, but the tufts of hair over his ears and along the nape of his neck suggested that originally his hair had curled tightly all over his head.

I had heard of him by repute as the greatest living expert on antique furniture, and I had looked forward to meeting him. What repelled me from my first sight of him was the too evident delight he took in himself, in his appearance, his opinions, and everything that belonged to him. I have never known a man so overpoweringly conceited. He was a great talker, too. He flowed on in his rich tenor, giving us anecdote after anecdote of his experiences as an expert and a collector. I will admit that the majority of his stories had considerable point and interest, and that he told them well; but he never for one instant attempted to disguise the important part that he himself had played in the revelation of a fraud or the swindling (I called it swindling) of the unhappy, ignorant possessor of some article of vertu.

My uncle and aunt were very attentive to him. He had been a client of my uncle's for some years, but this

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was the first time they had been able to persuade him to dine with them. The only other stranger present was Lady Hoast, the widow of old Sir George Hoast, who made his money in leather; and she contributed little to the conversation. She was a very tall, stiff woman with a long, thin nose and an air of having always been about her present age.

Gladys was very charming to Blake throughout the interminable length of dinner. She listened to his stories with absorbed attention, and laughed with an appearance of abandon that was splendidly convincing. After about the third course Blake was obviously telling his stories more particularly for Gladys's benefit, although his other listeners were not less attentive than she was. Lady Hoast had a queer, silent laugh that seemed to ripple through her, beginning at the head and so trembling down from her shoulders to invisibility. I imagined it passing away with a final tremor of her feet. There were only the six of us; my mother was even then too ill to come out at night.

It was in the drawing-room, after we had joined the three women, that Gladys made her attack upon me.

Blake had been telling a story about a piece of Queen Anne silver, and no doubt the mention of the period reminded her of my objections to the architectural style beloved of Parkinson.

"Do you admire the Queen Anne style, Mr. Blake?" she asked, and I guessed at once what was coming.

"In silver, certainly, Miss Williams," Blake said; and then, waving one of his exquisite white hands, he went on: "But nearly all the old stuff has the virtue of real design and feeling. It's only the abominable things they make to-day, the defective imitations, or poor, fumbling attempts at originality; it's only these

Gladys

nineteenth-century things that I unhesitatingly condemn. I've always been catholic in taste. I have said that you can find beauty in any piece of an earlier date than the end of the eighteenth century, if you'll take the trouble to look for it. I believe that. Real Art died with the French Revolution."

Gladys looked up at him, demure and yet ecstatic. "Oh! I do so agree with you," she said. "I have been trying hard lately to convert Mr. Hornby. He is an architect, you know, and so obsessed with the idea that the only possible style is this 'New Art.'"

Blake looked at me as if he had for the first time become conscious of my presence, and his glance pitied my profound ignorance rather than my wrongheadedness.

"I have only two objections to your 'New Art,' Mr. Hornby," he said. "It isn't new, and it isn't Art." He laughed as if he had said something original.

Gladys gave me no time to reply, even if I had had any adequate retort to Blake's stale witticism. "I was sure you'd think that," she said, as if no other opinion was now possible. "You must really convert Mr. Hornby—he is so obstinate about his theories."

Blake looked a trifle bored. "Oh these theorists!" he returned with one of his fat gestures. "They'll recover their good sense if you give 'em time—those that are worth bothering about. The others can go mad in their own way; they can't do any harm." He was so superbly confident that opposition failed to make him angry. He looked down on me and my like with good-humoured contempt. He was rich, he was clever, he was handsome in his corpulent, curly-haired way, and above all he was treated with the respect and admiration due to a specialist who has no near rival. To him the struggling Geddeses and Hornbys were callow youths

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whose opinions were not worth one instant's consideration.

Gladys looked at me with a kind of tender commiseration. She had successfully demonstrated in that company the worth of my taste in art.

And I, poor, drudging creature that I was, exhibited no outward sign of my resentment. I blushed and mumbled, and allowed the magnificent Blake to roll over and then forget me, in the recountal of another story from his interminable list. I was coiled up so closely within my shell, and my one thought was to reconcile myself to that tight enclosure. I hugged the thought that one day I, too, might be rich and regarded as an authority. My chief desire just then was to stand on my own hearthrug, surrounded with the furniture of my own taste, and to exhibit, in his own presence, the poverty of Morrison Blake's truckling to the antique. I was hardly aware of any need for inhibiting that desire. I had my model, and if I had any dread of my future it was due to my doubt of Gladys. It is not well to start a collection with a piece that one knows to be fraudulent.

But I dreamed a new dream as I took my tub next morning—we had no bathroom in the little house in the North End Road. I pictured Blake falling in love with Gladys—I put it that way because I had no doubt of her response; she would never be able to resist the glory of such a marriage. And for a moment or two the dream gave me relief. I looked into an unfurnished future that expanded into vague enchanting depths without any kind of boundary. I had come near to the edge of a vision when I found myself facing the dreary stairs of the office in Lincoln's Inn.

April was coming in, and in the Gardens the pressure of young life was thrusting its way to freedom. I would have run away that morning if it had not been for

Gladys

my mother's need of me. I knew that she was failing rapidly, and I could not leave her then.

9

I find it impossible even after this length of time to write about my mother's last illness. I cannot explain my reluctance. I propose presently to write of something much nearer to the heart of my life than the emotions I experienced in the long three months that intervened between our knowledge that her death was inevitable, and the last gradual slipping through unconsciousness to separation. But that slow parting had a quality that I cannot define in words, and I prefer to leave the description unattempted. She and I came to understand one another very well before her recognition of all material life ultimately failed, some ten days before the obstinate vital functions ceased from the hopeless effort to maintain the form of her body. She was curiously less religious during those last two months. Some certainty had come to her, and she no longer grasped at the straw of written words. Her Bible lay always on the table by her bed, but I know that she seldom opened it. We spoke little in that time. Her certainty must have been so near that she assumed my understanding of her faith. And, indeed, I did understand. There were moments when I was inclined to envy my mother for the speeding of her destiny.

And the effect of her willing resignation to a change of which she knew neither the manner nor the result has remained with me till now, and will remain with me always. After my mother died I was plunged into the turmoil of the world as I had never been plunged before. I have become involved in what would be described as material loves, interests, and anxieties. I am at this

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moment intensely concerned with the common movement and exigencies of life. But I know that when the warning comes to me I shall receive it without fear or anxiety. I shall have no concern, then, with the casting of my moral account with God. A certainty will visit me as it visited her; and I shall not reach out for the show of repentance nor concern myself with any interpretation of old doctrine. That is what my mother's faith meant to me during her last illness; and that is the faith I have carried since she died. I have never tried to know the Unknowable; I believe in Him, and I am content.

10

After the funeral I had an interview with my uncle, and he put my affairs before me in the clearest language. My capita! amounted to just under £200 and the furniture of our little house in the North End Road. My mother had been a yearly tenant of the house, and the agreement had only another fortnight to run. No notice had been given of our intention to leave the place, but my uncle had seen the landlord, who was willing to waive that formality on condition that I moved my furniture as soon as possible. My position was clear enough. All that remained was for me to decide what I proposed to do.

That decision may appear an easy one, but I was absurdly perplexed by it. I was still a schoolboy in the management of affairs. Until then everything had been done for me; I had never even lived in rooms. The whole business of deciding where to live seemed to me full of difficulty and anxiety.

And I was expecting my uncle to make some offer to provide for me. I had not seriously considered the idea of living on the £3 a week I earned at Heaton &

Gladys

Baxter's. I rather anticipated the suggestion that I should now marry Gladys with as little delay as possible; but I was confident that, in any case, my uncle would allow me an income.

I sat in the little L-shaped room off the hall that he used as a study, and waited for the proposition to come.

Uncle David looked down at the poor little collection of papers that represented all my personal property, rolled out the drum of his sonorous cough, and winked prodigiously.

"Er-hrum—rum—rum," he began, "I should advise unfurnished rooms as being cheaper and—hum, hum—likely to give you the best investment for your furniture."

"For a time, at least," I said, and then by way of showing that I was not quite such an idiot as my earlier silence had made me appear, I went on: "Some of it might be sold, I think. There wouldn't be enough for an auction; perhaps. . . ."

"I will manage that for you. Uncle David rumbled, winking solemnly at my mother's will.

I waited for a moment, and as the offer still hung fire I tried the broadest hint I dared, to get the affair settled.

"Of course it will only be necessary to take rooms for a time," I said firmly. "Meanwhile I might be looking about for a house for Gladys and myself."

Uncle David's tic became more violent than I had ever seen it. He had to put his hand up to his face and cough himself quiet before he could answer me.

"Yes, yes," he said, "but I made it clear—er-rhum—from the beginning—that I expect you to be making a decent income—before you marry Gladys."

"That job of Mr. Parkinson's is actually started at

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last," I put in, but my uncle ignored the interruption and continued :

"I should expect you to be making an income of—of at least £800 a year. When you see your way to that I—I should be prepared to make a—a—a suitable settlement for Gladys. Quite against my principles to—to—to encourage you in the belief that work is unnecessary."

"Oh! well, of course," I said. I was annoyed by what I regarded as another exhibition of my uncle's meanness. "The only point is that it is very difficult to get together a private practice when you're working in another man's office. If I could make a start. . . ."

"You've got two hundred pounds," my uncle said, with his portentous wink.

"I suppose that would be enough to start on?" I said in the tone of one making mental calculations.

"And the commission on Parkinson's house coming to you?" Uncle David continued.

"About £180 spread over fifteen months or so," I supplied.

"I began with less," was my uncle's only comment.

I got up with an air of having the business settled. "Well, then, I had better see about getting an office," I said.

My uncle exchanged confidences with the papers in front of him. "I would advise you," he said, "to—to—to limit your ideas of luxury for the time being. Two rooms would be—er-rhum, hum,—sufficient. In a cheap neighbourhood."

That idea had never presented itself to my inmost mind. An office was an office to me. When Geddes and Horton-Smith left Lincoln's Inn they had both plunged, the former with a couple of rooms in King Street, Cheapside, the latter into a suite of chambers in Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn.

Gladys

"Do you mean that I should have an office and sitting-room combined?" I asked.

"I see no reason against it," my uncle said.

"Very well, then. That's settled," I returned petulantly.

"I will manage your affairs for you," my uncle added as I was at the door. "The proving of the will will be a very simple affair, but I can let you have a little ready money at once if you require it."

"Oh! that's all right. Don't bother," I said as I went out. . . .

I saw Gladys in the garden and joined her on the back lawn. My temper was still hot, and I meant, for once, to assert myself.

"I've been talking to Uncle David," I announced, as I sat down beside Gladys on the garden seat. "I've got two hundred pounds and the prospect of another hundred and eighty from Parkinson; and Uncle David advises me to set up in private practice with two rooms in Bloomsbury or somewhere!"

Gladys looked at me in her composed, thoughtful way, and then said:

"Well? Why not? You must make a beginning somehow, I suppose?"

"I'm perfectly ready to make a *beginning*," I said, and found myself quite unable to state my grievance. I was very conscious that I had been hardly used, but I saw no way of suggesting to Gladys that her father was, in the phrase of my thoughts, "a mean old skunk."

"Why are you in such a temper about it, then?" she asked.

I fell back on the obvious, which was none the less obvious because it was certainly not the true reason for my discontent.

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"I thought we might be married fairly soon now," I said, "but Uncle David says he won't hear of it till I'm making £800 a year. And it's all jolly fine," I went on, working myself up and trying to avoid the necessity for becoming amorous or sentimental, "but starting in two poky little rooms like that, it won't be so easy to work up a practice. People haven't much confidence in a chap who hasn't even got an office of his own."

"Do you want father to keep you?" Gladys asked with that faint, reproving pucker of her forehead I knew so well.

"Rather *not*," I replied, and tried to turn the tables on her by adding: "Are you content to wait for ten years before we can be married?"

She looked down at the toe of her slipper, which was thickly embroidered with little golden beads, that shone in the warm September sunlight. "No, I'm not," she said, and I had no sort of suspicion that she was procrastinating, keeping me in hand until such time as she was sure of her game.

"Well, then!" I remarked.

She looked up at me with a sudden kindness, as if she were, after all, genuinely sorry for my distress.

"It will be all right, old boy," she said. "We must wait a month or two—and see. Leave it to me."

And I immediately took heart so far as my financial prospects were concerned, and at the same moment relapsed into the old depression at the thought of what seemed again to be my inevitable future. I had not been aware until then that underneath my petulance and disappointment there had been some glimmer of relief.

Gladys

II

I have tried to be honest in describing the kind of young man I was when I left Hampstead and the shelter of my mother's supervision. I was a fair specimen of a certain type, a type that exhibits the usual characteristics of a public school boy. None of the men I knew during that period would have described me as a mollycoddle. I had the usual accomplishments, I was pretty good at my profession, I was not a prig. Any of my colleagues in Lincoln's Inn would have described me as "a good chap." And yet when I look back now on the way in which I faced life after my mother died, it seems to me that mollycoddle and prig are the only words that fit me.

I had so little independence of mind. I should have been content to accept an allowance from my uncle without a single qualm. Worse still, I was ready to marry Gladys for the sake of an assured future. If I sought any excuse for that dishonesty it must have been found in my belief that I had a future as an architect. I could not have disguised from myself the fact that I proposed to marry Gladys for the sake of an income and a position; but I forgot to examine that aspect of my intentions in my concentration on the plan of life that appeared then as my only possible ambition.

I had chosen my niche, or it had been chosen for me, and I looked for nothing more. I had a profession, and I meant to become a professional man. The things I desired were a little fame, a reasonable income, and a circle of friends who thought in much the same way as I did. These were the factors which constituted success. Any one of my acquaintances would have agreed in that definition. I thought of the world as a place divided into a thousand compartments that had a definite

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relation one to the other; and the compartment that chiefly interested me was that in which I hoped to occupy an honourable place. In that world of my imagination everything was relatively settled and accounted for. Science provided one with occasional exciting discoveries; politics with material for argument; art with beauty; and religion with a final refuge from all perplexity. It was, in fact, a nice, accommodating shop of a world, in which everything had its appointed place, and if you had money enough all the doors of the shop were open to you. I thought that you could, indeed, buy the appearance of respect and esteem there, just as you can in an ordinary shop.

And when I left Hampstead to take two rooms in Bloomsbury, I had no intuition that any real change was coming into my life. I did not go out of my old world, joyfully, to seek adventure; but rather with a sense of depression. I believed that Gladys would persuade her father to make her such an allowance as would permit us to be married. I saw with perfect distinctness a future in which my chief annoyance would be the irk of my marital relations. I dreaded the conflict of wills between Gladys and myself, and the bone of our contentions would be, I believed, the principle of my æsthetic.

More particularly I dreaded the influence of Morrison Blake. I had forgotten my dream of marrying him to Gladys; he had come again more than once to Ken Lodge, but I had perceived no sign of any amorous intention on his part. I thought that he was too deeply in love with himself and his celebrity to bother about marriage. I had more than once heard him congratulate himself on his celibacy. And just at that time I should certainly have regarded Gladys's unfaithfulness to me as a great calamity. She stood between me and poverty.

Gladys

I knew, now, that my uncle would do nothing for me unless his daughter's future was involved.

But Morrison Blake's intimacy with the family was a threat to my future nappiness. The Williams all believed in him. He was in my compartment, and I was not strong enough to assert my æsthetic against his. When Gladys and I were married she would, I believed, continually urge me to change my style in design; or, at least, to supple myself—as I had already done in Parkinson's case—to the taste of my client. And some little spark of individuality within me was resenting that interference. The walls of my compartment were being raised and strengthened; and, little as I guessed it at the time, my unknown self was uneasily struggling within its hardening shell. . . .

Such was the egg, labelled "Wilfred Hornby," which, after one or two other tentative and forbidding experiments, knocked at the door of 73 Keppel Street on the 23rd of September, 1905.

It was a wet Saturday afternoon, and I was nervously irritable.

Book II.—The Incubator

IV

ON THE GROUND FLOOR

I

A MAN opened the door to me—a broad-shouldered, squat little man with a bullet head. He was in his shirt-sleeves, but he did not look like a servant. He was wearing what appeared to be an authentic gold watch-chain across the width of his dirty but rather ostentatious waistcoat. He had opened the door wide, and stood square across the threshold looking at me with a suspicion that was half-defiant.

“Vat ees your beesness?” he asked.

“I see that there are some unfurnished apartments to let here,” I said, pointing to the card propped on the meeting-rail of the ground-floor window.

The little man resisted the temptation to follow the indication of my hand, and continued to stare at me. I noticed that his left eye had a tendency to look absently over my shoulder while its fellow kept watch.

“Ach! Zat is so,” he agreed, making no attempt to move.

“I’m looking for two unfurnished rooms,” I returned, “but if you don’t want to let yours. . . .” I was turning away when he stepped back into the hall and said:

“Come een. I vill show zem to you.”

I hesitated. I was annoyed by his manner, and had

On the Ground Floor

a foolish wish to take some sort of revenge upon him. "Oh! It doesn't matter in the least," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

The little man's answering shrug showed me how feeble a thing mine had been.

"Zat ees as you like, of course," he said. "You reeng and go away. Eet happen so more times zan I can say."

"Are they on the ground floor?" I asked.

"Zey are on the groundt floor," he said.

"I'm afraid they might be rather dark," I said. "I should want to use one as a drawing office."

"So? An offeece? You are zen an architect, perhaps?"

When I had admitted that I was an architect, the little man finally dropped his last air of suspicion, and I noticed that his left eye steadied itself and looked at me with a strict attention to business. "Ach, come and see ze apartment," he urged me. "Zey are very fine apartment and cheap. You would have a sign on the post, yes?"

"Have a what?" I asked.

He smiled at my dullness, came forward and smacked the door frame in a friendly way. "A sign of your name and profession," he said. "In brass, yes?" And he indicated an oblong with a gesture of both hands.

"Oh! a plate? Yes, I suppose I should have a plate on the door. Do you object to that?" I asked.

"No, no," he assured me with considerable vigour. "I desire a sign on the door. Eet look very well, zat. In brass, yes?"

He was ecstatic over the beauty of the rooms and, indeed, he had some excuse. No. 73 was one of the older houses that went with the others when Keppel Street was demolished, but it had a claim to considera-

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tion. It might very well have come within the recognition of Blake as having been designed and built slightly previous to the French Revolution. The window was rather good. It was in two lights, with a heavy architrave, and the upper sashes were divided with heavy sash-bars into quite decently proportioned oblongs. The cornice was good, too, in that style, and its heaviness was in keeping with the height of the room; but what chiefly interested me was a great semicircular niche in the wall facing the window. This recess was about twelve feet wide and six deep, framed with squat, Ionic pilasters that carried the bold mouldings of the arch. It was all a plaster sham, of course, and beneath contempt as art from my point of view; but I could not deny that it was effective as decoration. The mantelpiece was later, and too small for the general scale of the room; but the door was original, with solid bolection-moulded panels and brass furniture. The place looked clean, and its bareness was oddly mitigated by two vases and a large clock, in soapstone, conventionally arranged on the mantelpiece. The vases were copies of an Etruscan model and the clock simple enough in design to pass muster. Also it was going and set to the right time.

"Those are not included, of course," I said, pointing to the mantelpiece.

The little man put his head on one side and shrugged his right shoulder. "Zat ees as you vill," he said. "I can move zem or not move zem as you like. Zey are very fine apartment. You take zem, yes?"

I rather thought that I should take them. The bedroom was more commonplace, but that did not matter. I had taken a liking to the front room.

"What about re-papering?" I asked. The sitting-room paper was beastly—pale pink flowers on a faded yellow ground.

On the Ground Floor

"Ah! Zat!" he said, and I saw the pursing of his red mouth through the thicket of his moustache and beard. "No, no!" he went on. "I cannot move the papers."

"But you wouldn't mind my doing it?" I asked.

"You not like ze paper?" he said. "It fade itself." And he rubbed it thoughtfully with a broad and dirty thumb. "Vat paper you like?" he asked.

There was a picture rail about nine feet from the ground, a poor Victorian thing as I guessed, but fortunately in the right place, not too near the cornice. "I should like a brown paper with no pattern," I said. "Not too dark; and I should distemper the frieze dead white."

The little man nodded. "Very nice," he said. "You are an artist, I see zat, and you like ze apartment; but no, I could not afford ze new papers. It ees not possible. I am unhappy to lose you; you are an artist, and zere is also ze sign on the post, but I have not ze house now for so long. For one year more only I have ze house, now. Ze lees give himself up."

I did not believe that I should want the rooms for so long as that. I looked upon this plan as merely a temporary expedient until Gladys and I were married, but I felt that I could not ask Geddes and Horton-Smith to see me there unless my ideas of decoration were carried out. I have no doubt, now, that my little landlord would have done anything I had asked him. He was merely bargaining, preparing the way by his reluctance for an increased rent. But I was as innocent a bird as ever set out to engage in business of that kind, and I accepted his statement as final.

"Well, look here," I said. "I think I'll take these rooms and do the decoration myself. But what about the rent? I can't afford very much."

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The little man again congratulated me fervently on my artistic abilities before he said, "Ze rent is nussing. As I tell you, ze lees run away and I take nussing to prefer a lodger." (I never knew such a man to leap at what he supposed to be an English idiom.) "Ze rent?" He shrugged his shoulders again and made a gesture of immense resignation with his hands. "I take one pound each veek," he concluded with the despairing air of a man who accepts the awful inevitable.

"Does that include attendance?" I asked. I had expected him to ask more.

"Viz attendance," he admitted gloomily, as one who had been condemned and no longer cared to discuss the details of his fate.

"Oh! and I say, is there a bathroom?" I added.

"Zere ees a barze, you find heem on the entresol," he said dejectedly.

He had, however, recovered his hope in life by the time I had paid a deposit of a week's rent. He gave me a card with his name, Karl Pferdinger, engraved on it in flourishing italics.

As we were in the passage-hall, a woman came downstairs, nodded to my future landlord, and stared inquiringly at me as she passed. She was young and distinctly good-looking in a smart, rather highly coloured style, and I looked after her as she went out.

When I turned my head I found that Pferdinger was regarding me with a hesitating smile—I have seen the same kind of smile on a would-be propitiatory dog—and his left eye was again absent-mindedly forgetful of its partner's business.

"She live here," he said. "Mees Viting. She ees an actress."

I nodded carelessly. I had no intention of becoming

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involved with the other tenants of No. 73 Keppel Street. "Are there many other lodgers?" I asked.

"Zere ees some ozzers," he said. "Gentilmen, also."

His last word to me was a reminder about the "sign on the post."

2

I made the announcement of my success publicly, at dinner, the next day. I described my future sitting-room-office in detail. I was warm with the pride of new ownership, and I had a cowardly hope that I might propitiate Gladys by praising a piece of Georgian architecture. I was conscious of doing something broad-minded and generous.

Gladys responded graciously, but my uncle had one or two questions to put. The first one was as to the rent, and when I told him that I was to pay twenty shillings a week for two unfurnished rooms, he shook his head. "I presume they are in one of the squares?" he asked.

I had not mentioned the name of the street. I had preferred the larger designation of Bloomsbury, which had the air of being a fitting address for a young architect. But my temper rose at my uncle's tone of reproof. Since that business interview of ours in his study, I resented his interference with my affairs.

"No! they aren't," I said. "They're in Keppel Street."

My uncle looked down at his plate and winked profoundly. "Very risky," he commented. "Did you make sure that it was a respectable house?"

I blushed. All the enigmas of Pferdminger's behaviour, his suspicion of me at my first appearance, his relief to find that I was a professional man, his anxiety to have a brass plate on the door, all these things and

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the oddities of his manner were instantly explained. In my innocence I had looked no farther than the fact of his nationality for any solution of his queerness, but at Uncle David's suggestion I knew beyond all doubt that No. 73 Keppel Street was not a respectable house.

"Why shouldn't it be?" was all the defence I found.

"That street has a very bad name," my uncle said. "Two houses there have been raided within the past few months."

"Oh, Wilfred, do be careful where you go!" Gladys put in; and I believe it was her speech rather than my uncle's that put my back up.

"Of course," I said. "The place looked perfectly all right, but I shall make inquiries before I definitely move in."

"It would be advisable," my uncle said gravely, and the subject was dropped for the time. Gladys, however, reverted to it later in the afternoon, and took it upon herself to reprimand me for my carelessness. "You are so slack about some things," was one of her remarks, and it might have stood for the text of her sermon.

I endured her fault-finding with exemplary patience. I was wondering what she would say if I suddenly confessed my misdemeanours with Nellie Roberts. I was hardening myself against reproof just then, and one effect of that resolve to endure was an alteration of my scale of social values. There had been a time when the thought of Nellie Roberts had seemed a gross outrage on the purity of Ken Lodge; but that afternoon I was inclined to find excuses, if not virtues, in my old sins. Gladys was teaching me to resent the formal disciplines of society. Like many women, she had a strong vein of the schoolmistress in her.

And some instinctive reaction against the flat cer-

On the Ground Floor

tainty of her social dogmas was undoubtedly working in me when I went down to Keppel Street after tea the same day to make those further inquiries I had promised.

Pferdminger was not there, and the door was opened by his wife, a tall, thin, despairing woman, who evidently spoke from the book of her husband's instructions.

"Oh, no!" she said—it appeared that she was English—"we never take anyone without making sure. We have a Miss Whiting on the first floor—over you, she is, --an actress, but most respectable."

"Oh! that's all right, then," I returned.

"Perfectly respectable we've always been," Mrs. Pferdminger repeated without the least conviction or fervour, and added: "My husband told you we've only got the house for another year?" There was an accent of dull relief in her voice as she asked the question that settled any last doubt I might still have had.

But I was determined to move into the house, nevertheless. I was even a little elated. I was not sure that I had not some wild idea of making the most of what I believed to be the short remaining period of my liberty. I wondered if "the Viting," as I called her to myself, was indeed in any kind of way connected with the stage. I rather hoped that she might be. The stage gave a flavour of romance. I had never spoken to an act ess.

3

I moved into my new rooms on the following Monday week.

After my preliminary instructions, I had left everything to a man I knew in Berners Street. He was the

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head of a firm of decorators with which Heaton & Baxter had often done business; and I could trust him to do things decently. He wanted me to have a heavier picture-rail put in and one or two other things, but I resisted these temptations. I had the excuse that the sitting-room was to be my office, and ought to represent my taste in decoration; but I had to buy a lot of new furniture, and it seemed foolish to spend money on a place that was probably coming down in a year's time. I was sorry about the picture-rail. Besides being too light for the style of the room, it cut very awkwardly into the moulding of the arch that enclosed the recess.

I invited Geddes and Horton-Smith to come round on the Thursday after I had moved in, and they both agreed that the front room was quite effective. The old sideboard from Little Milton that had been such a clumsy obstacle in the North End Road house, went into the recess and was quite in keeping with the style of the pilasters and the arch. And one or two other solid pieces we had saved from the sale of the vicarage furniture carried out the general feeling of solidity and mass.

"Filthily Georgian, of course," was Geddes's summary, "but it's rather good of its kind. You've got the idea of leisure and space anyway." And he went up and down the unencumbered aisles on either side of my centre table with his queer dancing steps, and then backwards and forwards in the clear space between the table and the recess. "You've sort of modernised it, too, Hornby," he went on. "You've taken an old idea and done it better."

"He's let his books out, for one thing," put in Horton-Smith, and pointed to the long, low bookcase that the Berners Street firm had made for me. "In the proper Georgian house there wouldn't have been any

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books to speak of, and if there had, they'd have been behind glass doors."

"Oh! yes, Hornby's a modern all right," agreed Geddes, still prancing up and down. "That's what I mean, he—he has individualised bad material."

That point of view did not greatly appeal to me at the time. No doubt I had individualised my room, but I had done it unconsciously. Neither Geddes nor Horton-Smith gave any expression to my real feeling about this new lodging-place of mine, and I was too shy to be articulate about it.

For what that room meant to me was not artistic satisfaction, but release. For the first time in my life I was aware of my own independence. I felt bigger and stronger in Keppel Street. I realised a sense of power in myself. In two more days another fetter would have been thrown off. I was leaving Heaton & Baxter on the following Saturday, and then I should have leisure to do my own work.

I only had a few "full-size" drawings still to make for Parkinson's house, but I was full of plans. I had ideas for two or three articles on design that I was fairly confident would be accepted by *The Studio*; and I meant, now, to go in for a competition on my own. I believed that in my earlier collaborations the fanaticism of Geddes had hampered me.

The sense of independence was the dominant motive in the first two or three weeks of my new life. I had not changed my ambitions for the future. I still looked forward to marrying my cousin, and to the enclosing of myself within the little circle of the successful professional man. But meanwhile I was becoming more contented with the idea of making my own way, and as a consequence I lost much of my resentment against my uncle. . . .

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Gladys and Aunt Agatha came to tea with me on the following Sunday afternoon. They both approved my sitting-room-office; and Gladys was particularly charming. She talked to me as she used to talk before our engagement; and I remembered the Eastbourne holiday with quite a glow of sentiment. I felt hopeful that evening. I believed that our marriage might after all be a success.

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V

THE REST OF THE HOUSE

I

THE life of the house began its overtures to me through my sitting-room window. I had arranged my drawing-board on two stained-wood trestles, and I stood at the window to work. The light was quite good. My room faced north, and although the street was not wide, the houses immediately opposite were only three storeys high. For dark days I had two incandescent gas burners with shades. The house was not wired for electric light.

The life of the street did not seduce my attention after the first day or two; I was interested in my work, and was not afraid of distractions. But by degrees, and almost against my will, my attention was drawn to the life of the house in which I lived.

I heard the footsteps coming downstairs and along the hall, and then the opening and closing of the front door. And inevitably, as it seemed, I always glanced up to watch the departure of my unknown house-mate.

The early morning traffic was soon resolved into an orderly routine. I came to know the steps and the methods of the four men who left the house between eight-thirty and ten o'clock. Three of them turned east when they went out, and two of those three always left together. The fourth turned westwards towards the Tottenham Court Road, and passed under my window.

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He was a small, plumpish man, with hair that must have been prematurely grey, for he did not appear to be more than thirty. I guessed him to be a German. On wet days he sometimes wore a bowler hat with his frock coat. I was not interested in him, but he always looked up at my window as he passed. He did not go out until half-past nine, and I had begun work by then; and when I had learned his habits, I used to step back into the room to avoid meeting his eye. I knew that if I did not, he would begin by smiling at me, and that then we should soon be exchanging nods; and after that I might have to speak to him if I met him in the hall or the street, and so it would come to having him in my rooms. One may go on nodding to a man in a railway carriage or through a window for years without taking any further notice of him; but if one meets the same man afterwards in new circumstances, it is as if one had suddenly discovered a friend. And certainly I did not desire that plump, ill-dressed young fellow-lodger of mine for a friend. I imagined myself to be his social superior.

If the morning departure of those four men had marked an ebb which receded and left me free from distraction until the uncertain flow began to return to six o'clock, I should have remained for ever detached, stranded high and dry, as it were, on the beach of my professional distinction. But that preliminary receding was no more than an uninteresting preface to the life of the day. I have thought without consideration of the morning signs as a tide, indicative of the broad human movement from west to east that sets with such regularity each week-day. That metaphor fails, however, when I look back at the irregular swirls and currents that I presently began to watch with increasing interest.

The Rest of the House

The first of those other lives that aroused my curiosity was presented to me by a tall, thin, clean-shaven man, who wore a soft hat and walked with a stoop of the shoulders. I originally put him down as an artist. He had dark hair that he wore rather long, and a lock of it often escaped from under the brim of his hat and trailed across his forehead. His hours were quite uncertain except on Thursday, on which day he left the house about eleven, and returned carrying a parcel some time during the afternoon. On other days he might stay in the house until four or five o'clock, or not go out at all,—unless it were that I missed hearing or seeing him. But I knew unmistakably the sound of his going. He always stopped in the hall and went through the letters that accumulated during the day on the yellow oak table that stood against the wall under the gas-jet. It was not easy to read in that hall until the gas was lit. The only light came through the semicircular fan over the hall-door; and the thick wooden bars of the fan impeded some of the light, and the remains of the coloured glass most of the rest. The fan had originally been glazed in dark blue, and only those panes which had been broken and replaced permitted the passage of a thin straggle of white light. The business of sorting the letters on the hall-table was often a long one. I do not think I often missed hearing him.

The "Viting," as I still thought of her, seldom went out until the evening. I only saw her three times in the first two weeks, once through the window in the early afternoon, the next time in the evening, an illuminating vision to which I shall refer later, and once when I deliberately went out into the hall as I heard her coming downstairs—she cut me dead on that occasion.

But there were still three other people, all women,

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whom I came to know by sight. The capacity of that warren was truly wonderful.

2

I am covered with a hot shame, even now, when I remember my inferences concerning those other three women. I have been tempted to omit any account of my horrible blindness in this particular, for after the lapse of years I still blush uncomfortably at the remembrance; I feel ashamed as if I had been guilty of some unpleasant sin. And yet I can find good excuse for my blunder.

The nasty truth is that during the first week or two of my observations through the window, I imagined those other three women to be following the same occupation as Miss Rose Whiting. I had come to Keppel Street prepared to find it a harbour for prostitution; my suspicion concerning the important lodger who occupied the rooms above me was entirely confirmed within ten days of the time I arrived. And my expectation hypnotised me. I took no trouble to examine appearances or weigh probabilities. I was an infernal young fool who leapt to unwarranted conclusions without a particle of evidence. But I cannot write of my mistake without losing my temper; and the object of my indignation is that smug, would-be professional young whelp who stared out of his window. I can regard other aspects of myself in that period with a contemptuous tolerance; but that short phase of the young Wilfred Hornby fills me with an irritation and disgust I cannot control.

However, I will begin by giving an account of the incident that confirmed my suspicion of "the Viting." I want to convince myself that I had some excuse.

I had gone to the window and pulled up the blind

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about eleven o'clock one night. I had no especial purpose beyond looking at the weather. It had been raining all day and the street still gleamed in the lamp-light, although I guessed from what I could see of the sky that the clouds had broken and the moon was shining. I was not thinking of my fellow-lodgers just then, but I peered down the street when I heard the aprons of a hansom clap together a few doors off. The cab drove away immediately, and then I could see the man and woman who had alighted from it talking together. I drew back as they came past my window. I had recognised "the Viting," and I did not want her to think I was spying, but I heard the click of her latchkey and immediately afterwards her voice, making it very clear indeed that she was saying good night. When she had gone upstairs I looked out again, and saw the man walking up and down on the opposite pavement.

I wondered what he was doing. He had an air that was half furtive and half impatient. He kept looking up at the window over mine, and once he evidently saw me, and frowned and moved away as if he were afraid of being recognised. I did not move from my post of observation. I think I had some unlikely suspicion of his purpose. I was certainly astonished when he walked boldly across the road, stared a moment's defiance at me and opened our front door with a latchkey. I heard him go upstairs with the surreptitious tread of a man who attempts to evade notice. And I heard "the Viting's" door close a few seconds later.

I understood, then, that she had lent him her latchkey, and I had no more doubts as to her profession. The police were levying blackmail very freely at that time, and Miss Whiting's trick to avoid suspicion was, as I afterwards learnt, a concession to the explicit in-

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structions of our landlord, which were: "No men in ze house. In ze street outside it ees all as you like, but in ze house No."

After that incident I was on the loo! out for further intimations, and I must admit that I hoped to find evidence. I make no apologies for that. After the kind of home life that had always been mine, this plunge into what I considered the lurid wickedness of Keppel Street was immensely thrilling. I wanted to be something more than a spectator, and yet I was afraid. I realised that this occasional passion towards adventure was only a part of me, and that I dared not enter the mysterious garden of pleasure unless I were sure of a way of escape. I was intimidated by the thought that Miss Whiting might come to visit me at her own pleasure and not at mine. Nevertheless I was tempted. For some reason this game appeared so much more fascinating than my experiences with Nellie Roberts. I pictured entertaining Miss Whiting as a respectable guest in my own rooms. Loneliness excited my imagination to lurid possibilities.

It was a sudden impulse to drown the tantalisation of thought in reality that sent me out into the hall when I heard "the Viting" coming downstairs a few days after the adventure of the latchkey. I was very nervous, but I summoned up enough courage to look at her as she passed me. She returned my look with a contemptuous stare. Perhaps her illicit visitor had reported my vigil at the window. I went back to my sitting-room, humiliated and puzzled.

3

The first of the other three women whom I soon came to know by sight, was rather stout, I judged her to be approaching forty, but she was handsome still and

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walked with a certain confidence and dignity. She was always wearing a tremendous fur coat, rather shabby with age, I fancied, but it looked impressive. Her movements were too erratic to suggest any particular routine of occupation, and I do not blame myself severely for my entirely erroneous estimate of her virtue.

The other two almost invariably went out together. I saw them first on the second day of my freedom from attendance at the office in Lincoln's Inn, and for about a fortnight their habits appeared quite regular. They left the house a little before eleven and returned some time between five and seven-thirty. The shorter of the two was rather plain, with dull eyes and a clever forehead; she would have had a good figure if she had taken any trouble with it.

Her friend I cannot describe in this detached, impersonal way. I only know that one morning she looked up at me as she passed, turning her head with a little quick smile that was not meant for me. Her eyes were bright with the life of youth; eyes that displayed at the same moment both her sincerity and the eagerness of her spirit. And I did not guess that her smile was not for me. I was unexpectedly flattered and thrilled. I had no time to return her smile. She looked up with one of her eager, impulsive movements, and looked away again. But she left me changed.

I thrust the thought of Miss Whiting from me as if she had been in the last stages of leprosy. I forgot Adela Lynneker, who had until then filled some blank space of my desires, even after her inexplicable elopement with the village carpenter. And I came back to the thought of my cousin Gladys with a new feeling of despair. She appeared to me, then, as representing all that was tame and dull; all that was in some way staid and exhausted.

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That one gay little smile was indeed responsible for many effects upon me. It certainly added a new tenseness to my observations of the household. I knew by then the step for which I waited; but every time the door clanged I hoped that I had been mistaken, that despite the irrefutable evidence of my ears I should see the desired figure pass my window and that she would once more turn her head and look up at me.

She never did. And after the first fortnight of my watching she changed her routine. Her morning departures became inexplicably irregular, but for one week she and her friend left the house every night soon after seven and returned a little before midnight.

It was then I wondered and made a fool of myself; but before that I had been up to Ken Lodge and had received the present of my freedom to love whomsoever I would.

4

I did not go up to Ken Lodge that Sunday morning with any intention of breaking off my engagement to Gladys. I was still held in the thrall of my conventional ambitions.

The movement of my thoughts towards Miss Whiting, and afterwards towards the unknown girl who had smiled as she passed my window, was indicative of nothing more than a desire to take advantage of the little liberty that remained to me. I had formulated some kind of rash determination to taste once more adventure before I settled down for life. That resolve would have appeared very reprehensible to my uncle and aunt and cousin, but as I went up to see them I had no feeling of guilt. Something in me was breaking loose, and the rest of me was temporarily incapable of criticism.

I went up to Hampstead after morning service. I

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had a standing invitation to join the Williams at church and go back with them to dinner; and I felt that I was making a mild bid for independence by cutting the first half of the programme.

The parlourmaid who opened the door gave me the smile proper to an expected visitor. "I think Miss Gladys is in the drawing-room," she said, and I relieved her from further attendance on me with the nod of one who was quite at home in the house.

I must have made some noise crossing the parquet and hanging up my coat in the lobby, and I remember that I had a cold, and blew my nose quite audibly just outside the drawing-room door. Moreover, I had been standing inside the room for one of those indefinitely short but consciously measurable periods of time, before Gladys disengaged herself from Blake's arm and turned to greet me. *He* may have been too engrossed in his own affairs to notice my entrance—he was talking, of course; he was always talking,—but I am quite sure that Gladys was prepared for my entrance, and had preferred to break the news to me in that way rather than by any formal announcement.

As for me, I was too unprepared and too conventionally-minded to understand at once the real significance of the embrace I had just seen. I had forgotten my old dream of release by this very agent, and I was confusedly finding some excuse for Gladys; trying to think of Blake's attitude as in some way paternal—he must have been nearly fifty.

And then I saw that Gladys was covered with a well-assumed confusion.

"I—I thought you were alone," was the idiotic excuse I made, as if I were the culpable person. I had, indeed, a sense of having been guilty of intrusion.

Blake laughed self-consciously and my cousin took

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her cue from that, subsidised gracefully into an arm-chair and hid her eyes. I have a distinct impression at this moment of her white, rather bony hands pressed against her face.

"Oh! well, well," Blake was saying, with the nearest attempt at propitiation he ever showed towards me. "The truth of the matter is, young man, that your cousin has changed her mind. I dare say I took her by surprise." No doubt he flattered himself that the initiative was all his own.

"Do you mean to say that she has——" I began, and stopped because I could think of no phrase but "she has chucked me for you?" a phrase that I instinctively rejected as unworthy of the occasion.

"Oh well, these things happen sometimes. No need to make a scene," Blake said pompously. He was obviously bursting with pride at having, by his own personal attraction, snatched a unique possession from another collector. If he had ever had a moment's doubt as to the desirability of Gladys as a property, my claim to prior ownership must have decided him at once and for ever.

"Very rough on you, no doubt," he went on, and paused, perhaps to reject the too blatant expression of what must have been in my mind, the plain inference that I could never have had a chance after he entered the market. "But, well, there you are!" he said. "Your cousin will tell you, perhaps, how sorry she is not to have found out her mistake before. . . ."

I believe he continued to talk in the same strain for two or three minutes. One cannot gauge time in such situations as that. And I was only half aware of him. Another side of my mind was bubbling with a mischievous joy at my escape—a joy that I regarded, from the point of view of Wilfred Hornby in his best Sunday

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clothes, as quite distinctly the wrong emotion in those circumstances.

"You needn't have done it in such a rotten hole-and-corner sort of way," was my long postponed verdict on the affair, and then I gathered courage from the enunciation of what seemed obviously the proper sentiment, and tried to shut Blake down by adding, "I ought to have been *told*."

"Pooh, pooh!" Blake said. "I only spoke to Miss Williams this morning—five minutes ago—for the first time." And as an amateur in love, who was so superbly professional in all other things, he found it necessary to add, "The recognition of each other's feelings—er—overwhelmed us."

"You infernal ass!" was the unspoken comment of my bubbling subconsciousness.

"I ought to have been told," was the stubborn repetition that my conventional self found appropriate.

And then Gladys came out from the shelter of Blake's importance. "Oh! Wilfred, how could I tell you when I didn't know myself?" she asked; and with an ungainly movement that reminded me of her tennis, she made a little bobbing run past me and left the game to her new lover.

"Now, be sensible," was his prompt opening, delivered apparently with the certainty of one who usually found that stroke unplayable.

I am glad that I stood up to him. I think some escape of gas from the secret ebullition that was going on within me helped to inspire the expression of my grievance. Whatever the cause, as soon as Blake and I were alone, I managed to find a statement, however boyish and impertinent.

"Oh! of course she changed her mind," I said. "You're rich and famous in a sort of way, I suppose."

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I don't blame *her*. But I think it was a dirty game of yours—coming in and—and outbidding me.”

“You'll be sorry for this, Hornby,” he threatened me; and his curly moustache bristled truculently in response to the snarl of his lip.

“Bosh!” I said. “I'm talking to you in the only language you understand. This is just another of your dirty tricks—the kind of trick you play in your business.”

He scowled furiously, but he had no real courage. His temper was of the kind that finds vent in breaking a not too precious piece of furniture. I had at least four inches the advantage of him in height; I was young and active, and he judged me to be deliriously angry. His scowl no more intimidated me than the bark of a French poodle attempting a dignified retreat.

“My good fellow——” he began.

“Yes, I hope I am,” I retorted, snatching at the suggestion, “and that's just what you're not. You don't play the game.” All my grievance had found vent in my contempt for him and his professional methods. “You're little better than a thief, as a matter of fact,” I went on. “You cheat people in business, and now you've cheated me by buying Gladys over my head. You needn't imagine that she's in love with *you* any more than she was in love with me. She doesn't know what love means any more than you do. . . .” I felt the anticlimax coming; I had been lured into a bad opening; and I concluded too boyishly and spoiled my effect.

“You're just that,” I shouted, “an infernal swindler!”

And then, as I turned quickly to make a passionate, door-slamming retreat, I nearly knocked over my uncle, who was coming quickly up the room behind me.

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"W-Wilfred!" he stammered furiously without an introductory cough, and nearly winked himself off his feet.

My long habit of respect for his authority checked me slightly, but I pushed past him. "He'll explain," I said, with a gesture of contempt towards Blake.

The collector had his head back, and was most unnecessarily curling his moustache as I got out of the room.

It was no kind of dramatic triumph for me, but I felt triumphant as I marched down Heath Street. My face was burning, and I felt as if my eyes flashed defiance of the whole world.

I had not completely recovered when I reached Keppel Street, and it was the last tumultuous intoxication of self-assertion that betrayed me when I unfortunately met my lady of the smile and her friend coming out of 73.

I raised my hat to them and grinned.

5

I have it on the best possible authority that my grin was one of the worst kind, ingratiating, oily, altogether contemptible; so I had better put the horror on record and leave it unmodified. I believe I have exaggerated the disgust of it in my own mind. I have writhed so often at the recollection, that my smile and my attitude at the critical moment have been crystallised into a vision of something obscene and revolting. But I must leave any mitigation of the general impression to those who can find for me an excuse that I will not proffer on my own behalf. For my part, I know that I deserved the snubbing I received.

It may be that that reply was chiefly responsible for

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the complete abasement I have confessed. Her look had pity mixed with its scorn. Her companion blushed and ducked her head in the common manner of the timid shop-girl; but she to whom my leer was addressed met my eyes with perfect self-possession. And something in her pitying disdain seemed to place me as a horrid little cad who ought to have known better. For one instant I became the thing she had seen. I wilted. I believe if I had had the power of speech I should have murmured "Beg pardon, I'm sure!"

My recovery a couple of minutes later touched the opposite extreme. I paced my sitting-room in a fury. I saw a million excuses for myself, but none for her. I found such description for her as "vain little fool"; I accused her of putting on airs; I hated her with all the vehemence I could muster.

I am not sure how long I managed to keep my resentment against her at that high defensive level. I know that I re-stimulated my anger until I could no longer respond to my determined consideration of her iniquity at first smiling at me and then "cocking her head in the air as though she had been insulted." But by tea-time (I had had no dinner) I had fallen into a mood of depression—all my worldly prospects were apparently wrecked beyond recovery. I had outraged my uncle's sense of propriety; the scheming, artificial Gladys had thrown me over for her own deliberate ends; and I had crowned the day by making an ass of myself. I had come to that admission by five o'clock.

I had a sort of high tea at the Vienna Café, but when I went up to the first floor afterwards, the atmosphere of the place revolted me. I went out and walked up and down Oxford Street for a time, but when, near the Circus, a woman smiled at me, I shuddered and took refuge in a 'bus.

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I was free, now, but that particular form of celebrating my liberty had lost all attraction for me, and I finally slunk back to Keppel Street, and tried to find distraction in literature.

Not until I was going to bed did the first gleam of consolation come to me; and then I reflected with faint glee that Blake had, for once in his life, been done.

I wonder if he has ever appreciated the irony of the fact that the show-piece of his collection is a fraud?

I saw them at a private view just before the war, and Gladys bowed and would probably have spoken to me if I had given her an opportunity. She had changed very little. I thought she looked thinner and a trifle sharper, that was all. She had her little boy with her—a peaky child, with the thinnest legs I've ever seen.

VI
THE NIGHT OF THE ROW

I

THE experiences of that Sunday had an immediate effect upon me, but at the time I was quite mistaken as to the nature of the change that was working underneath the appearance. All the week that followed was devoted to strenuous work. I understood that I was not one of Life's favourite children. I could count no longer either upon my uncle's influence or his financial assistance, and I wilfully decided that he had always disliked me. But while I set my teeth and began the effort of practical training by which I hoped to win the little race that appeared as the only goal of my youth, I made the immense mistake of beginning in a wrong spirit.

During that week I was full of resentment against the world. I felt that I had been thwarted and impeded. I worked savagely, obstinately; and my mind was cramped and stubborn. I did not answer the letter I received from Gladys on Monday evening, and I wasted considerable time in dodging back from the window whenever I heard anyone leaving the house. Gladys was comparatively negligible—if she had thrown me over on the ground of our incompatible temperaments, I should have been relieved and grateful—but against the girl who had so effectively snubbed me on the doorstep I entertained a definite rancour. Presently I meant to have my revenge, but in the meantime I did not want to see her or to let her see me.

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The odds were too heavily against me in any play between my room and the street. She could walk past my window with a contemptuous disregard of my presence, and I had no possible means of retaliation. I knew that she would not see me. I should never have the satisfaction of appearing too engrossed in my work to look up. But I believed that my absence from the window must be noticed. *She* might never look up, but her friend with the shy, mouse-coloured eyes would surely peep and report that I was not there. In time—I dwelt on that idea of long abstention, and in some moods I knew in a muddled way that I meant abstention, that I was denying myself the desire to look at her again—in time, I thought, I shall have recovered enough dignity to venture revenge; I shall find an opportunity to return her contempt. I never had a doubt that they would remember me. I was too important a person in that house. My brass plate shone in unchallenged splendour at the entrance; and my landlord, regarding it, I believe, as the patent of his respectability, polished my sign every day with his own hands. No one could enter 73 Keppel Street without the staring reminder that the house was primarily the residence of Wilfred Hornby, A.R.I.B.A., Architect and Surveyor. And I was equally sure that there could be no doubt of my identity.

I was right in most of my surmises. Indeed, in only one particular was I ridiculously, grotesquely wrong. Cherishing the thought of my own position, I believed that my absence from the window would finally establish my dignity, while the truth was that two young women were smiling at my humiliation. They thought that I was, very properly, ashamed of myself. . . .

I sometimes wonder, now, whether I should not have developed on the same lines, even if I had married

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Gladys and won to my old ambition of, say, a house standing in its own grounds, and the decent complement of servants that proclaims a man's position. The process might have been slower, but surely, I think, some influence must have worked upon me sooner or later, or some accident would have happened to crack the shell of my complacency.

But now that I have re-entered the life of that house in Keppel Street, and am imaginatively living again in the world of its stirring insistence, I feel that no other experience could ever have moved me. The shock and adventure might have come to me by another road, but not the demand to associate myself with the common interests of humanity. Even during that week of obstinate hostility to one member of the household, I was aware of something that was drawing me towards intercourse with my house-mates. I remember meeting the man whom I had mistaken for an artist, and being moved by a sudden desire to speak to him. I came in at the front door while he was peering at the letters on the hall-table, and he looked up with a smile as if he would thank me for the gift of light I had brought him. I bowed stiffly and went past him into my own room, but I wanted to speak to him. Inside me the chicken was pecking at a shell just too strong, as yet, to yield to those cramped struggles.

Then came the end of the week and the great affair of Saturday night.

2

Oddly enough Geddes was with me that evening, and Geddes remains, still, the most shell-bound of my acquaintances. His wife had been ill and had gone to stay with her mother in Hertfordshire, and he had been

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kept in town by a meeting at the Institute. He came in about half-past nine—"to talk a little shop," as he explained; but he never talked anything else.

It must have been after eleven when the row began. I had heard Miss Whiting come in a few minutes before, and it struck me, then, that she must be in a bad humour. She banged the door so furiously that even Geddes paused a moment in the middle of a disquisition on the advantages of a new fireproof partition material he had just discovered.

I was trying to concentrate my interest on his analysis when I heard the dim beginnings of the altercation upstairs. I knew, at once, that the merest echo of it was reaching me—"73" was a well-built house—and I strained my attention to hear more. That muffled shouting had the urgent quality that gives one a feeling of excited uneasiness.

Geddes saw that I was not listening to him, and mercifully cut off his string of technicalities.

"Saturday night row," he remarked. "Do you often have 'em?"

I shook my head. I wanted to hear what was going on. I got up and walked towards the door.

"Take my advice and keep out of it," Geddes said quietly.

"Why?" I asked sharply. Geddes harassed me. I was interested, excited and a little anxious. It seemed to me that the sound of those voices was, in some way, important.

"Never know what you may be let in for in a house like this," Geddes said, and his voice had an effect of being unnaturally audible. Upstairs there was turmoil, and in imagination I was straining to enter it. Geddes's calm enunciation was like a voice of disembodied warning urging me not to enter the world.

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Then came the thump of some heavy piece of furniture on the floor above.

Geddes stood up. "Don't be an ass, Hornby," he said, as I put my fingers on the door-handle.

I believe he went on urging me not to be an ass, but as I opened the door a crash of broken glass or china drowned his further remonstrance, and my consciousness of Geddes fell into the background. The whole house was suddenly vibrant with the shrill, hysterical voice of Miss Whiting and the persistent, monotonous shouting of my landlord.

"Be kvi-et, I say, you. Vll you be ker-vi-et, I say?" he repeated on an increasingly vindictive note of expostulation.

As I mounted the stairs I trembled with apprehension lest the rising anger of Pferdinger might culminate in some physical outrage. He seemed to be reaching the limit of his self-control. The high screaming of the woman was less terrifying; it suggested the shriek of steam from a safety-valve.

But Pferdinger had not the quality of a murderer, as I knew at once when he grasped at my intervention. He had been standing at the threshold of Miss Whiting's open door, and heard me as I bounded up the short flight of stairs to the landing.

"Ach! you speak to her," he shouted; "she ees mad."

Miss Whiting was partly undressed, and was still recklessly discarding her most intimate garments as I reached the door of her room. Something of her energy must have been exhausted by then, and she was obviously striving to keep the pressure of her fury at its highest point.

"Turn me out, would you?" she screamed. "Then you can damned well turn me out stark naked, you . . ."

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But I dare not report her speech. The epithet she found for Pferdminger made me wince, and she saw that I winced, and repeated her obscenity with greater distinctness and a new touch of venom.

"Be *kviet*, I say," came the sound of Pferdminger's voice from behind me.

"Yair!" was the derisive jeer of Miss Whiting, as nearly as I can render it; and she made the sound disgusting even without the emphasis of her gesture.

She held us intimidated and she knew it. Standing there in her chemise and stockings, confessed as a relatively fragile, weak creature, she dominated us by the recklessness of her passion. She had cast off all the restraints of conventional life, touched some absolute of self-expression that was too strong for our divided minds. We were afraid of her because we were afraid of ourselves and of the judgment of society. She was, at that moment, a single and powerful personality. We had to fight ourselves before we could fight her; and with the help of her allies she outnumbered us.

And as if she, too, clearly understood her advantage, she made a demonstration of her impunity. She snatched a small vase from the mantelpiece, held it poised for a moment, and then dashed it through the window.

The crash of breaking glass was followed almost at once by the furious ringing of the front-door bell and a clamorous knocking outside.

Little Pferdminger, utterly defeated, crept downstairs, calling upon God.

"Police," remarked Miss Whiting, in a perfectly level voice. "That dirty little —— has gone to let 'em in."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. They were the first words I had spoken. For me the tensivity of the

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situation was instantly relaxed. I felt as if I had awakened from some appalling nightmare. The thing I had mistaken for a figure of horror and disgust had taken the form I recognised as human. I was sorry for Miss Whiting. I wanted to advise and protect her. I believed that now she would be perfectly reasonable, tractable.

The heavy tramp of feet was coming upstairs, and we could hear the fretful plaint of Pferdinger's voice asserting his respectability.

"Hadn't you better get something on?" I said. I had not for one instant forgotten my status in civilisation, and I judged her, too, to be within reach of my acceptable standards.

But during that interval of tremendous quiet she had only been saving herself; and it may be that having experienced the exaltation of power, she desired to reach a still higher climax, in which she might dominate a stronger enemy. For even as I felt the touch of a rough grasp on my arm, and heard the familiar gruff "Now then, what's all this?" of the policeman's voice, Miss Whiting let herself go again with a horrible scream, and made a wild sweep of the ornaments that still remained on the mantelpiece.

I was beaten and knew it, but the two bluff men who had come in from the street had an experience and an authority that I lacked. They did not hesitate. They went straight for her with an intensity that equalled her own.

But the threat of their rush into the room was too much for me. I could not bear it. I shrank back on to the landing. I heard her scream, "Don't touch me!" and my feeble hands went up to my ears.

And then, in the middle of it all, came a queer little interlude that I cannot explain. I found myself con-

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fronted on the landing by a young man in evening dress with an opera hat cocked jauntily at the back of his head. I do not know if he spoke to me; and when I had dropped my hands he had reached the door of Miss Whiting's room.

"Oh! Good Lord!" he ejaculated, and turned away and ran downstairs and, I suppose, back into the street. I do not know where he came from, and I never saw him again. At the moment I accepted him as the phenomenon of a dream.

But his intrusion had snatched my attention from the drama of the open room, and when I half-fearfully returned to it, the scene was over. Miss Whiting's screaming defiance had changed to a whimper, and I heard a gruff, friendly voice saying: "For goodness' sake, put something on, my girl, or you'll catch your death o' cold with that broken winder."

I became aware of peace and at the same time of the stirring life of the rest of the house. Up above, a door closed quietly as if some listener had crept back, reassured.

I began slowly to descend the stairs. The two policemen and Pferdinger passed me in the hall, and the policemen touched their helmets to me. There was a brief conference in the passage. I inferred that Pferdinger was generous.

Geddes had gone.

Presently two of the Germans came in together, rather noisily. My door was open and they looked in as they passed, but they did not speak to me.

A few minutes later I heard the click of the latchkey again, and this time, after a short hesitation, I went out into the hall. I felt that I must talk to someone.

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3

I found the man whom I had guessed to be an artist turning over the letters that had come by the last post. The gas was still burning, a fact that marked some unusual happening in the house. The dark man looked at me as if he understood at once that I wanted to speak to him.

"What's happened to Pferdinger?" he asked, glancing up at the flickering bat's-wing gas-jet. He had a low, resonant voice that I found very pleasing.

"There's been no end of a shindy," I said, leaning against the door-frame of my room. "The police have been in." I tried to give my opening announcement a dramatic quality that would interest him. I was afraid of losing his attention.

My new friend whistled softly, a low, rich note that matched the tone of his voice. "Fishing?" he asked briefly.

I understood his allusion. "Not exactly," I told him. "She simply asked for it. She's been smashing up Pferdinger's property. Didn't you notice any glass on the pavement?"

He shook his head. "What began it?" he said.

"Care to come in for a minute or two?" I suggested; and as he nodded, we heard our landlord coming up from the basement.

A strong sense of excitement was still intoxicating me, and I welcomed Pferdinger almost eagerly. He had I had just come through peril and defeat together, and I felt a new sympathy for him.

"Come in and have a drink," I said.

For one moment Pferdinger's weak eyes had looked past me, but when he realised that my attitude

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was entirely sympathetic, the defect in his vision righted itself.

"She ees mad, that woman," he said, and then: "You haf toldt Mr. Eel?"

I inferred "Hill." "No, not yet," I said, "I was going to."

Pferdminger shrugged himself comprehensively. "She sink I die afraid of her," he remarked, "but eet ees not so. I tell her she go. Eet ees a great mistake she come here already."

"Tell us all about it," Hill put in, and we went into my room. Pferdminger accepted whisky with an air of ceremonious apology, but Hill would not drink anything.

And then we had the whole story very dramatically told, but with little suggestions of the truth peeping out between Pferdminger's inflated statement of his pure intentions. He sat by the table with a great effect of enjoying my entertainment. He reminded me of a Nonconformist minister paying a formal visit to a wealthy and important member of his congregation. And he told us with considerable fluency and much reaching out after idiom the full history of his relations with Miss Whiting over a period of three months.

The greater part of his story was quite manifestly untrue. His pretence of innocence concerning the nature of Miss Whiting's profession convinced us no more than his boast of bullying. He was undoubtedly getting an exorbitant price for his rooms, and Hill and I inferred that Miss Whiting had come to "73" as a refuge from more suspicious lodgings in which she had had difficulties. For, in effect, one of Pferdminger's boasts was nearly true. His house had been respectable, and now, with the assurance of my plate on the door,

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he had meant, if possible, to regain his honourable name.

"I believ her ven she pretend ze teeatre profession," he repeated many times, and at each repetition gave himself away by adding: "Viz two front floors not let at all how does one do ozzerwise?"

"Now," he concluded, "it is bad, eh? Ze police know—zey haf zeir eyes on me. And already to-night, before zey come, I haf said to zat damn woman, 'I haf you no more. You are too bad for me.' Andt you see yourself, Mr. Hornby, how she continue."

Hhe drank whisky with *éclat*, tilting it abruptly down his throat as if afraid that it might touch his palate.

"To-morrow she go out wiz her head in front," he announced, smacking his lips. "I put aside zree weeks of rent zat she owe, and for ze window and ze ozzer sings, I say nossing. But," he got to his feet, "we clear ze air of her, eh?" And then he clicked his heels together, bowed neatly to Hill and myself in turn, and made a very creditable departure.

Poor little Pferdinger, he was not at all a bad little man, but he was too greedy. It was his love of cash in hand that got him into trouble—that and his cowardice.

4

I did not want Hill to go, and I began to talk in order to keep him. I had touched, for the first time in my experience, the crude substance of life, and all my thought was still tingling with the excitement of that contact.

"She—this Whiting person, I mean—was rather magnificent in a way," I said. "Pferdinger and I couldn't do anything with her, you know."

"Swear much?" Hill asked.

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"Oh! all the time," I said; "badly, but it wasn't that." I tried to realise the nature of the power she had exercised, and failing, continued, "Of course, she threatened to undress—at least, she was pretty nearly stark, and every minute we expected the last rag to go. I don't know why that should have frightened us, but it did. It did me, anyhow."

Hill's smile was, I thought, a little sardonic. "You couldn't face the primitive," he suggested.

"No, I suppose not," I agreed. "She was most infernally primitive—savage, even."

Hill did not respond. He was lying back in my best armchair, apparently attentive, and yet unresponsive. His dark eyes watched me continually, but I could not be sure whether or not he was listening with any interest to what I said.

"Does all this bore you?" I said.

He shook his head, but did not rouse himself. "What about the girls upstairs?" he asked. "Were they there—or Mrs. Hargreave?"

The mention of the "girls upstairs" confused me. I was quite unprepared for it; indeed, the one girl in whom, alone, I was interested, had occupied such a remote, distinctive place in my mind that I had not once thought of her in relation to the row on the first floor.

"Mrs. Hargreave?" I said, instinctively grasping at a cover for my embarrassment. "Who's she?"

"Stoutish woman. Wears a fur coat," Hill explained.

"I know her by sight," I said.

"I wonder she didn't come down," Hill went on, "if only to defend Miss Whiting against the brutalities of you two men."

"Woman's rights sort of thing?" I asked.

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Hill smiled as if he were faintly amused at my ingenuousness. "You don't know any of the people in the house?" he remarked, and gave his sentence the tone of an assertion that required endorsement.

"No—not yet," I admitted.

"What made you come here?"

"Just accident."

"Any clients yet?"

"One that I brought with me," I said.

Hill nodded and yawned. "I must go," he said. "I've got a notice to write before I go to bed."

"Are you a dramatic critic?" I asked.

"Sometimes," he admitted carelessly.

I was at once thrilled and astonished. My picture of a dramatic critic had been very different from this.

"But why to-night?" I asked. "To-morrow's Sunday."

"I'm never much good in the morning," he said. "And I've got to get the stuff into the office by five o'clock to-morrow. They make up the paper earlier on Sunday."

He yawned again and got up; but I could not let him go before he had answered one more question.

"Who are the two girls upstairs?" I asked, with an elaborate air of being very casually interested. "Isn't this rather a doubtful house for them to be in?"

"They're trying to get on the stage," Hill replied. "They were in *The Furnace*, that spectacular affair at the Symposium; only ran a week, you know. What's the matter with this house?"

"Well, all those German fellows. . . ." I began.

"Oh! they can look after themselves all right," Hill said, and I knew that he referred to the two girls. "Besides," he added, with his rather grim smile, "they're

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on the top floor, next door to Mrs. Hargreave. She's a dragon."

"We shall be quite respectable again after the Whiting has gone," I remarked by way of concluding the conversation.

"You think Pferdy will turn her out?" Hill said.

"Rather. Don't you?" I returned.

"Not if she can find the money to pay up," Hill said. He nodded casually as he left the room.

5

I could not go to sleep after Hill had gone, and as I paced up and down the sitting-room, my emotions drew to a climax. My impressions were extraordinarily vivid. I saw pictures, all a little brighter and sharper than reality; pictures that flashed up and gave me a sensation of enjoyment, but had no kind of consequence or relation.

The person of Rose Whiting figured very prominently in that panorama, and I saw her both glorified and debased, alternately as a presentation of beauty and vice. The sight of her nakedness that I had feared so much, now came to me robbed of conventional suggestions. I saw her magnificent as a statue in alabaster. And then I would see her face above, framed in darkness, a face wreathed in symbols of terror and disgust, as if she fought weakly against her own damnation.

I made no effort, at first, to resist the coming of those visions, and for a time I found a keen pleasure in the magical brilliance of my effortless imaginings. But very soon I began to experience a kind of surfeit, my repugnance grew until I felt an actual physical sickness, and my visions took on that haunting quality which comes to one in fever.

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I struggled then as if I were fighting for the control of my reason. I was very much aware of my duality; and presently, as I began more successfully to defend myself against the invasion of the single image which had nearly obsessed me, my visions took another shape.

I remembered the night of my father's death and my walk home with the little deformed doctor through the moonlight; and more particularly I recalled the clearness of my recognition that there were two Wilfred Hornbys.

I wanted to pause and consider that curious phenomenon, but I was incapable of deliberate, consequent reflection. A new set of images had been evoked, and they carried me down a long stream of impressions which seemed to relate all those moments of ecstasy that had come to me in such queer forms. I experienced again the poised expectation that I had known when I saw the glory of the purple clematis, the cathedral of Medboro' half drowned in the mists, or the silver and ebony relief of the bright dawn in the Marylebone Road. And I tried desperately to remain poised. It seemed to me that now, at last, I should be able to peer over the edge of life and see once, clearly, the beauty that lay beyond.

I sat down in my armchair and pressed my hands to my eyes. I suppose I must have fallen asleep almost instantly.

6

The waking was a very dreary business. I was cold and cramped, and when I tried to get to my feet I collapsed into my chair again; my right foot was a senseless, useless lump of clay, and I had to endure the tantalizing pain of "pins and needles" before I could stand. The time was a quarter to five, and my

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bedroom and my bed felt cold and damp; but I was soon asleep again.

When I woke for the second time, Pferdminger was in my room. He often waited upon me himself, a mark, I believe, of his particular regard for the dignity I had conferred upon his house.

"You sleep a long time zis morning," he remarked as he struggled with the venetian blind.

"What time is it?" I asked. I had realised at once that my landlord and I were on a new footing, but I felt self-conscious and awkward. The incidents of the night before seemed a trifle garish and unreal in the light of morning.

He told me that it was half-past nine, and added that it was a fine day. He had brought me my hot water, and now pottered uncertainly about the room as if he had still some further service to offer.

I sat up in bed and tried to be decently friendly.

"How is Miss Whiting this morning?" I asked.

Pferdminger shook his head gravely. "Not vell at all," he said. "She was certainly mad last night. But zees morning eet ees all ozzervise. So! Sae have apologise and say she pay everysing. Eet ees perhaps unfortunate for some vays, but I cannot. . . ." He could not find a word sufficiently forcible to express the brutal ejection of Miss Whiting, and had recourse to a gesture which certainly suggested that considerable force would be required. "No, I cannot do so if she pay everysing," he concluded.

"You might give her notice," I put in.

"Ah! noteece! Vat is zat?" Pferdminger returned warmly. "She snaⁿ her hands at my noteece. And eet ees vinter already."

I guessed that his last remark referred less to the inhumanity of turning Miss Whiting out into the im-

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aginary cold (it was a particularly bright, clear morning at the end of October) than to the difficulty of replacing her at that time of year.

"Oh! well, as long as she behaves herself," I remarked cheerfully.

"Oh! she behave herself, now," Pferdminger replied with intense conviction. "No fear, now, zat she behave not herself. She fear ze police. Zey noteece her always after zis. She die afraid of zem, now."

I could see that he had supreme faith in that threat of police interference so far as the future safety of his own household goods was concerned.

"You're not afraid that the police will be down on you?" I asked.

Pferdminger's left eye suddenly became lost in abstraction.

"Zey know I have always the most respectable tenants," he said. "For last night? Zat was unlucky. It happen so to anyone. Eh?"

I wondered how Hill had known so well! that our landlord would change his mind. On the previous night he would, I am sure, gladly have seen Miss Whiting carried out on a stretcher. . . .

Not until I had had breakfast did I become aware that the events of the night had had some very strong effect upon me.

My first impression was that the lightness of my mood was due to the change of weather. It was one of those still, clear October days that come in late autumn and charm us with an enchanted parody of summer. The night's frost had cleansed and revived the London air; and the thin, sweet sunlight that played on the houses opposite seemed to bring the sharp scent of the country into my sitting-room. I could see the stubble fields still wet with frost and hear the gentle

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whisper of dead leaves that fell softly through the crisp foliage of the glowing beech woods. I heard the clamour of rooks and smelt the faint sharpness of the pinched hedges. I saw the trail of "old man's beard" still green in the shadows, and the brightness of the lingering sloes and blackberries. And surely there would still be a few late flies low over the river and the swirl of a chub feeding.

But when the keen suggestions of the country gave place to my recognition of town surroundings, the sense of pleasure and anticipation still remained with me. I remembered my new freedom. I need not go to church nor endure the stuffy ceremony of dinner at Ken Lodge. I should not be called upon to chafe through a long afternoon with Gladys.

And still my feeling of lightness and vitality was not accounted for, and I began to realise that a load of resentment and oppression had been lifted from my mind. I no longer nourished any animosity against the girl who had snubbed me on the doorstep. I was sure, now, that she would sooner or later forgive me for my stupidity.

I walked over to the window and looked out with a new ease. I was not afraid any more of my house-mates. I would have nodded gladly to the little white-haired German in his frock-coat and bowler.

Last night the slow process of my development had been wonderfully completed. I had come out of my shell. I had suddenly realised that it is easier and far more inspiring to love than to cherish a timid, shrinking animosity.

Yet I do not wish to convey the impression that there was anything miraculous in my apparent change of

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mind. The longing for some spiritual enlargement had always been with me, but all the forces of my training, all the models of my life had withheld me from any expression. I was, I still am, a plastic, adaptable creature, and I had sedulously modelled and enthroned the one ideal that had always been put before me. The profession of becoming a gentleman had been the idol I was taught to worship, and none had ever suggested to me that my idol lacked comprehensiveness. Good form, the esteem of my contemporaries—little fame and position, and the getting of as much money as I could honestly acquire, these were the sole objects of social life. Behind them lay the necessity of ensuring peace throughout eternity by the careful observation of certain ritual formalities. No one had ever gone deeper than that with me; no one had ever talked to me of a beauty that was not stereotyped.

My sudden enlargement had been brought about by intense nervous excitement and a new sight of life—life unrestrained, passionate, elemental. I had been ready, and the freedom of my loneliness had helped to release me.

But there was another factor which, however unrealised that Sunday morning, was, perhaps, the most potent of all.

For the first time in my life I was beautifully, wonderfully in love.

VII

MY INTRODUCTION TO THE HOUSE

I

I COULD not remain quietly in my rooms that morning. The most reasonable alternative would have been to take 'bus or train out into the country, to enjoy in fact what I had already tasted in imagination. But I was at the mercy of my new craving for life. The thought of a lonely day in the country was repugnant to me. I wanted to talk to a friend, and my first idea was that I would go over to West Kensington and see Geddes—I could tell him of the strange adventure of the night and of the effect it had had upon me. A little reflection, however, soon turned me from that project. Geddes would not be interested; he would cut short my narrative with his advice to have nothing to do with the other people in the house; and then complete his interrupted specification of that confounded fireproof partition. No, I did not want Geddes's companionship.

Nor did the contemplation of an afternoon with Horton-Smith appeal to me just then. He and I knew as much as we should ever know about each other. It was little enough, but I could not conceive of any deeper intimacy between us. If I told him of last night's adventure he would ask me ribald questions about Rose Whiting, questions that would not touch even the surface of my interest. He would understand me no better than my cousin Gladys would have done. Indeed, I could not understand myself.

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I felt a great impulse to talk to someone, but I could not imagine a conversation that would satisfy me, and I could not, at the moment, picture a possible companion. I was not at all certain that my craving was not a symptom of mere foolishness that ought to be drowned in work. Possibly the fact that it was Sunday morning had interfered between me and the resolution to work. I had never, then, worked on a Sunday; and I had a certain superstitious qualm about it that even now I have not entirely conquered.

And when, at last, I boldly conceived the notion of going upstairs to see Hill, I understood that while this was by far the most attractive plan I had yet made, it still lacked the air of promising a perfect satisfaction. Moreover, I was horribly shy of intruding my company upon him. If I had suffered some change of condition in the past twelve hours, the embryo had emerged, bearing the authentic stamp of the old Wilfred Hornbush. I had had the capacity for freer movement, but I was precisely the same chicken that had lain cramped in its shell for twenty-eight years.

Nevertheless, the desire to go up and see Hill had increased as I considered the possibility. I could not say why, but the idea of going upstairs had the quality of an adventure. The thought of it enticed me like a delicious temptation, and when Pferdinger came to clear away my breakfast I asked him boldly for the exact location of Hill's room.

Pferdminger was evidently suspicious of my intention, and flew his usual indication of nervousness. This could never have become a successful criminal without the weakness of the left eye; it betrayed him on the slightest occasion. He prevaricated, now, by pretending that Hill had gone out.

I contradicted that flatly. Opposition increased

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longing for Hill's company. But when I had bullied Pferdminger into giving me the required information, and was actually standing outside Hill's door, I should certainly have gone down again without knocking if he had not called out from within the room.

"Hal-lo!" he said, with a little drop in the second syllable. I thought his hail was touched with a note of exasperation.

"Oh! hallo!" he repeated in another tone when I had opened the door and showed myself. "It's you, is it? Come in. I thought it was Lippmann—the stout chap, you know."

I mentally placed Lippmann as one of the three Germans who turned eastwards every morning.

Hill's room was a litter of books. Most of them were untidily stacked round the walls; but there must have been nearly a hundred volumes, scattered about on the bed, the table, the two cane chairs and the chest of drawers.

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting you," I said, "but I thought—I wanted . . ." I found that I had no sort of reasonable excuse for coming.

"You're not," Hill said, looking at me with a rather whimsical smile. "Come in. Have you seen Pferdminger this morning?" He got up and offered me the wicker armchair, and when I refused that cleared one of the cane-seated chairs for me by transferring a pile of books to the already overweighted table.

"I've been sorting out a few books to sell," he explained. "They accumulate at an unholy rate, and it's too much bother to do 'em up."

"You certainly haven't much room for them here," I said. In my innocence I believed that he was sacrificing his treasures and attempting to conceal his poverty.

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He apparently understood the intention of my polite agreement.

"All review books—practically, you know," he said. "Muck, for the most part, not worth keeping. I get the bookseller to come up with a sack now and again."

I believe at the moment I was chiefly astounded by the thought that he could have read and reviewed so many works. The accumulation there in his room seemed to me a lion's undertaking.

I began to ask him ingenuous questions about the unknown business of reviewing. I had had some vague incurious notion that critics or reviewers—I appreciated no distinction between the two titles—were all literary men of considerable attainment, men who made the welfare of literature the chief concern of their lives. Hill exposed the foolishness of that idea in a sentence.

"There are over three thousand books published every year," he said, "and not a dozen of them worth serious attention; but most of them are reviewed."

"Why?" I asked.

"To keep the publishers' advertisements," Hill told me, but he had to enter into a fuller account of the commercial aspects of journalism before I could appreciate that simple explanation.

"It makes one see literature in rather a bad light," was my final comment. His statement does not seem to me to have had always thought it rather a wonderful thing to write a book.

"It's a trade," Hill said; "and it employs a lot of people."

"Reviewers?" I put in.

Hill smiled. "And the staff of about eighty publishers, and the printers and binders, and the circulating libraries, to say nothing of the papermakers and so on," he reminded me.

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"But who reads them all?" I asked.

"God knows," Hill said.

We were still on the subject of making books when someone tapped lightly at the door.

"Come in, Helen," Hill called out; and then, as the door opened, he got up and said: "I've elected a new member to the Sunday morning club—our prize loser."

"Who?" he asked Helen on a note of apprehension.

She stepped immediately inside the door and looked at me with a look of disapproval, her head ducked a little forward in something in her pose that suggested an animal. She was, indeed, blocking the entrance and knew perfectly well that "the other one" was outside. I had hardly realised until that moment how completely I had come to regard her as "the other one," in a class apart from all the rest of mankind.

"Look here, I'll go now," I said to Hill.

It may sound absurd, but I was very trembling indeed. I felt that I simply could not dare to meet the other one.

"Nonsense!" Hill returned, and then he turned to the girl by the door and said: "Come in, Helen. Isn't Judith there? I'll tell you all about that rotten play I did last night."

Helen came a little farther into the room, still brooding. "I don't suppose, Mr. Hornby," she began, and she no doubt finished her sentence, but I did not hear the rest of it, for Judith had followed her friend and had looked at me with, I thought, the faintest suggestion of a smile.

I remembered then with a flush of horrible abasement all my sulky projects for recrimination. The opportunity had come, now. I could throw up my head and

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return the snub she had given me a week ago. But never did any man feel more abject than I felt at that moment.

I dropped my eyes like a shy schoolgirl. All my being seemed to have suddenly run into a mould of the weakest humility.

2

Hill was laughing, not at me, but at the more brightly coloured young woman he addressed as Helen; and my embarrassment was by no means relieved when I discovered that he knew the whole story of my attempt to accost the two girls on the doorstep.

"Don't harbour resentment, Helen," he was saying. "Mr. Hornby was only wanting to be elected a member of our club."

Helen had sat down on the foot of the bed. Her head still drooped sulkily, and she did not answer at once. Then she glanced quickly at me with a look of sullen dislike.

"There are different ways of doing things," she muttered.

"Tell 'em your intentions were quite innocent, Hornby," Hill said, turning to me.

But I did not wish to make my excuses on those grounds. I should have liked to tell them the whole story of that Sunday morning. I held the mistaken conviction that if I could but explain myself fully and truthfully, everyone, even the moody Helen, would sympathise with me. No doubt your average criminal labours under the same delusion.

"Frightfully sorry," I mumbled. "Rotten mistake of mine, that was all." I dared not look at Judith, who was now sitting by her friend on the bed.

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"You don't mean to pretend you thought you knew us," Helen snapped.

"It wasn't that——" I began, as if I were going to explain exactly what it was.

"Well, then——" Helen prompted me remorselessly.

"Better make a clean breast of it and get it over," Hill added, smiling encouragement. "The way I had the story you seem to have broken the table of the commandments on the front steps. Miss Whiting's little affair last night was a trifle in comparison."

And then, as so often happens, the whole drift of our conversation was instantly directed into another channel.

"Oh! Mr. Hill, what did happen last night?" Judith asked eagerly. "We do so want to know. We came out on to the landing, but Mrs. Hargreave wouldn't let us come down."

"Better ask Hornby," Hill said. "He was there. It was all over when I came in."

"I thought I heard your voice," Helen put in with an accusing look at me, and I realised that I was, now, under suspicion of another offence not less heinous than the first. I felt that this time I must be very convincing.

"I didn't hear the beginning of it," I said. "I had a friend with me downstairs."

It was not a fortunate opening. I saw a clear indication of this woman Helen's suspicion of me when I mentioned the word friend. She had made up her mind that I was a professional philogynist, and she was as determined as a savage hen, fully prepared to defend the precious chicken she had adopted.

"I—I wanted him to come up, too," I went on, addressing Hill, "but he's one of those fellows who is frightened to death of a row. He's always afraid he'll get implicated in some way."

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The sound of my own voice gave me confidence, and I was glad to be able to talk directly to Hill. I wanted some such opportunity as this to give me a chance to—there is no other phrase that gives quite the same effect—to “show off.” All male animals do it. Small boys of seven will become boisterous and foolish when a little girl comes into their game.

“Architect, too?” Hill asked, with a friendly wish to help my explanation.

I nodded. “We were in the same office together in Lincoln’s Inn,” I said. “Well, we heard some kind of row going on, and I went up to see if—if I could help. Pferdminger sounded absolutely murderous.”

I glanced at Helen, and saw the signal of her incredulity in the lift of her thick eyebrows—she had queer eyebrows, with strong, untidy brown hairs that grew irregularly. It was a surprise to see her dull, mouse-coloured eyes peering out from under that thatch.

Her obstinate suspicions confused me. I found it very difficult to be convincing while every word I said was weighed with such a jealous distrust.

“His property was getting smashed, you see,” I said, staring my defiance of her.

“Well, what happened?” she asked, and her friend helped me by adding:

“We heard the smashing going on.”

“The whole street heard it,” I said. “That was what fetched the police in. She chucked a vase through the window.”

“Why didn’t Mr. Pferdminger stop her?” asked Helen, pronouncing our landlord’s name in the English way with a thick “er” sound and a soft “g.”

“Pferdminger,” I repeated, correcting the pronunciation, “oh! he was afraid of her.”

“Were you afraid, too?” she retorted.

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Her remark suggested a change of attitude, but her new attack was more difficult to repulse. I had already told Hill that I had been afraid, and I had a foolish disinclination, now, to report the chief reason of Rose Whiting's power to intimidate us.

"She was so—so primitive," I tried, snatching at the word I had used the night before.

"She swore dreadfully, didn't she?" Judith put in.

I dared to glance at her and saw that she was leaning forward, listening with a simple ardour to my halting, undramatic account of the highly dramatic incident.

"I'm telling it very badly," I apologised

Hill came to my rescue. "It seems that Miss Whiting had come down to a single garment," he explained, "and she was threatening them to drop that any moment. And you see, they were a trifle too civilised to risk it."

I believe I was the only one of the four who felt really uncomfortable, although Helen's air of indifference was rather too deliberate. She pursed her lips with an expression of contempt, and murmured something that might have been "poor thing," or possibly "poor things."

"It was jolly awkward, anyway," I mumbled, and I have been told since by one of the other listeners that I looked like "a rather nice old maid at a musical comedy." I can quite believe it. I knew that there was no reason for my embarrassment, but I could not appear at ease. Ken Lodge would have been outraged; Horton-Smith and his kind would have made some lewd joke; and these differing expressions of the same attitude were all the examples I was familiar with.

Hill evidently found my prudishness amusing.

"Our new friend Hornby is a model of respectability," he said; "and our ambitious landlord looks to him to bring salvation to 73 Keppel Street."

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I was glad that the conversation should take that turn; also, I was flattered by the kindly tone of Hill's chaff.

"The trouble is," I said, "that Pferdminger doesn't back me up."

The interrogative of Hill's eyebrows encouraged me to explain my remark. He was, undoubtedly, doing his best to help me. But before I could announce my little piece of news as to Miss Whiting's reinstatement, the door opened and the woman Hill had indicated as Mrs. Hargreave came in.

"I heard you all talking, so I didn't knock," she said, looking at me; and then went on: "You are Mr. Hornby, aren't you? I've seen you working at your window."

I bowed.

"There's still one chair left," Hill suggested. "Hornby has been telling us about the row last night."

Mrs. Hargreave sat down and leaned her elbows on the table. She was a handsome woman, but even on that first morning I was puzzled by something that blurred the intelligence of her face—I do not know whether it was that her eyes stared too fanatically, or if it were that her manner and general expression hinted at too great a worship of the autocratic ideal. She was wearing the familiar fur coat as a dressing-gown, and that, also, helped to produce the effect of a boasting idiosyncrasy.

"I've been talking to the unlucky girl this morning," she said, taking up Hill's last remark. "I heard how she was badgered and bullied first by Pferdminger and Mr. Hornby and then by the police; and I've advised her to resist any attempt at ejection."

I was too staggered by this version of the affair to do more than stare my amazement, but Hill chuckled

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as if he were quite prepared for new aspects from Mrs. Hargreave.

"I heard that Miss Whiting did all the bullying in the first instance," he said.

"How else could she protect herself?" Mrs. Hargreave returned.

"Against Pferdminger's modest request for rent?"

"Against his criminally extortionate charges," Mrs Hargreave corrected him. "It's simply blackmail," she went on; "he squeezes her for every penny he can. . . ."

She was fairly under way, sitting very upright, and her hard blue eyes stared defiance of an imaginary audience far larger than the small group of people collected in that little room. But Hill would not permit the argument to become a lecture.

"Oh! look at it another way," he put in quickly. "Pferdy has to take risks on the Whiting, and her extra rent is the premium she has to pay. When he gets a respectable lodger like Hornby he can afford to let him have the rooms cheap."

"But he wants her to go," I said.

"Not he," snapped Mrs. Hargreave. "When I offered to pay him this morning he simply grovelled."

"Are you really going to pay for her?" Helen asked with great intensity.

"As a protest against persecution," Mrs. Hargreave said.

At the moment I did not believe her. Her circumstances, no less than the peculiarity of her present attire, suggested that whatever her position had once been, she was not, now, in a position to pay the £20 which I had mentally figured as the probable amount of Miss Whiting's debt to Pferdminger by his calculation; he would certainly not underestimate the value of the cheap German porcelain she had smashed. Moreover,

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I had been distinctly offended by Mrs. Hargreave's first remarks.

"I should have thought it would be better to let her go," I said.

"Why?" Mrs. Hargreave asked threateningly.

"Oh! well," I said, and shrugged my shoulders. I felt that my reasons could not be discussed in that company.

"Oh! well," Mrs. Hargreave repeated, with a smile and, as I thought, a surprising change of manner. Her imitation of me was, I must admit, quite reasonably successful. "It's always 'Oh! well,' isn't it?" she continued. "That is the comfortable English attitude to all these things; the old maid's attitude to everything that she knows nothing about, and is afraid to inquire into. There are so many old-maidish men of your type, Mr. Hornby. I wonder whether you are only ignorant, or really pig-headed."

I was on the verge of losing my temper when I suddenly became aware that "Judith" was looking at me with something very like pity in her face. And then I realised that I was behaving like a fool—that in many ways I had always behaved like a fool, wilfully shutting my eyes to one side of life and congratulating myself on my blindness. The realisation came to me almost as my visions had come, as a piece of strange esotericknowledge bewilderingly true and real, or as if for one tiny instant something had opened and I had seen *through*.

3

"Only ignorant," I said on the impulse of the moment. "At least, I hope so."

Mrs. Hargreave looked at me with a hint of approval. "You seem to have a capacity for looking about you,

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at any rate," she said; and went on: "So you deny that you bullied Rose Whiting last night?"

"She bullied us," I returned.

"But you meant to bully her when . . . went upstairs," she insisted.

I looked back at my emotions of the night before, and found no trace of any impulse to domineer.

"No," I said; and as I spoke it came to me that in my experience the bullies had all been women. Gladys had nagged me; my aunt had kept Uncle David in subjection by the constant threat of her ill-health; Miss Whiting had delighted in her power to intimidate Pferdminger and myself; and this woman now cross-examining me was the very type of an autocrat.

"No," I repeated quickly, eager to hold the conversation. "I don't think I've got it in me even to *want* to bully a woman. I told you that I thought Pferdminger's voice sounded murderous. I was a fool, no doubt, but I went to Miss Whiting's rescue."

Mrs. Hargreave emitted a little hoot of impatience, but I would not give way to her. "It's the women who bully," I said in the warmth of my new conviction, and I heard Hill give a grunt of approval. "Why, you've been trying to bully me ever since you came into the room."

She ought to have been flabbergasted, but the fault I had accused in her was one that she could never admit.

"Oh! that goes so beautifully with your 'Oh! well,' Mr. Hornby," she said. "That's always the ingenuous masculine way. You're all so gentle and kind as long as you can do just what you like; but directly a woman objects to being treated like a slave, you open your eyes in astonishment and say that she's bullying you."

"What about the case in point?" Hill began, but he was unable to stop the flood I had released. Mrs.

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Hargreave flowed over him with a furious stream of words. She was fluent with all those earlier arguments for feminism that were just becoming vocal at that time, all the foolish, clogging stuff that hindered the free expansion of the movement, and remained in many narrow, bigoted minds to the exclusion of much that was more rationally to follow.

The effect of that morning's lecture upon me was unfortunate, inasmuch as it prejudiced me for many years against the whole cause of feminism. I had a little sealed compartment in my mind, enclosing that first instinctive reaction against what was once freely discussed as the "sex-war." And the facts I learnt later about Mrs. Hargreave's personal history only served to confirm my unhappy prejudice against the biased views she so volubly and so unconvincingly—as far as I was concerned—expressed, on the occasion of our first meeting.

But it may be that I am only seeking excuses for myself—that I am still struggling with the impossible task of explanation in the hope of anticipating criticism. For what presently followed does, I admit, seem to indicate that I was still fast within that old shell of mine.

Mrs. Hargreave, with a histrionic sense for effect, finished on a high note, looked round her audience with slightly dilated eyes, and vacated the platform before the first threat of anti-climax was remotely possible. Her doctrine was too absolute to admit discussion. She could affirm brilliantly, but she could not contain her impatience to argue about this one fixed, sacred dogma of hers.

Hill drew a long breath of relief as she went out, and when the door had closed behind her he said: "She's a clever woman, Hornby, but she's got an obsession.

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I'll tell you about it some time. We try to keep her off it, if we can, but there are occasions—well, she was just primed for it this morning by the Whiting episode."

I was glad that he should bother to explain to me, and I should certainly have taken much less notice of Mrs. Hargreave's outburst if Helen had not found it necessary to take up the cudgels on her behalf.

"Oh! well, Mr. Hill; I'm not sure . . ." she began in her hesitating, muffled way; "I *do* agree with her, really, you know. It's so true that women have been kept down and—and sat upon—absolutely true." And then, feeling that her own inarticulate rendering of Mrs. Hargreave was a very inefficient expression of all that she wanted to say, she concluded: "I agree with her—absolutely." Her drab eyes were glowering a timid defiance at me.

I had endured Mrs. Hargreave, but I was roused to desperation by the pin-pricks of this mouse-coloured, elderly young woman.

"Well, I think it's the most frightful rot," I said. I knew in some way that these two women were standing between me and that other quiet girl, sitting on the bed.

"Of course," sneered Helen, "naturally, you would."

"Why 'naturally'?" I said rudely.

"Well, we know that *you* don't like to see women standing up for themselves," she returned, still with that same air of furtive boldness.

"I haven't the least idea what you mean," I said. I was quite as petulant as she was, and as inarticulate.

Then she played a card which she must have known instinctively would finally defeat me. She turned to Judith and put her arms round her shoulders. "Aren't you coming out this morning, darling?" she asked.

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"It's perfectly lovely out, and I don't think we shall gain much by staying now Mrs. Hargreave has gone."

Judith nodded affectionately, and got up at once. She smiled at Hill as they went out, but she did not look at me.

4

"I'm interrupting you," I said to Hill.

My speech sounded polite, and was accepted as a conventional insincerity; but I honestly wanted to get away. I think my intention was to go downstairs and commit suicide.

"You're not," Hill said. "I shan't work this morning—nor this afternoon either for that matter."

"Did you finish your notice of the play last night?" I asked. One side of my mind was attending automatically to my companion, the remainder boiled with criticism of myself.

"Yes, oh yes," Hill was saying; "and I never told the girls about it, after all. You and Mrs. H. were so enthralling. We clean forgot it."

"Do they always come to see you on Sunday morning?" I said. The two sides of my mind had come together again in response to his last remark. I was pricked with suspicion at his casual mention of "the girls."

"It's a general reception," Hill said. "Usually Lippmann and Herz come, too."

I hated the thought that those two Germans had full liberty to stare, and bow, and smirk there every Sunday morning; and I answered with a little gust of impatience. "Oh! well," I said, "I think I'd better be going now."

"Just as you like," Hill returned; and then I wanted to stay. His room seemed rich with possibilities.

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"They" might look in again on their way out. Or failing that, Hill might be induced to talk about them. Downstairs was an arid desert. Nothing interesting could ever happen in that confounded prison I had so idiotically fortified by my little pretensions of dignity.

I was standing up in front of the fireplace, and I remained there by sheer inertia.

"Queer woman, that Mrs. Hargreave," I said. I was not particularly interested in her, but I wanted to talk about one of the three women who had just gone, and instinctively I chose the one who was most remote from my thoughts.

"Shove a bit of coal on, there's a good chap," Hill said, and then began to talk about Mrs. Hargreave.

I listened with the idea of diverting the conversation to the vital topic as soon as I found an opportunity.

"She's interesting," Hill said, and I mumbled some encouragement while I dug into the coal-scuttle with the inefficient scoop.

"You'll find your fingers quicker," Hill interpolated. "She's been married for twenty years, and now she has chucked everything, position, children, husband, everything one usually postulates as making up a woman's life, in order to go on the stage."

"The stage!" I ejaculated scornfully, wiping my fingers on the hearthrug. "Why, she must be forty!"

"Thirty-nine," Hill said; "and her eldest daughter is eighteen."

"But surely she has no earthly," I remonstrated.

"Not much, I'm afraid," Hill said. "But she's got tremendous perseverance; what the journalists call an indomitable spirit, you know."

"Has she got any money?" I asked.

"Some, apparently," Hill said. "A lump sum, I

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fancy, and she's living on the capital. I'm not sure. She'll talk all night about her revolt from family life, but she doesn't offer confidences about her financial position."

I was interested now. "But I don't understand *why* she chucked everything," I said. "Is she stage-struck, or a bit off her head?"

"She makes out a fairly good case for herself," Hill said. "Her point is that she wants independence. Lots of girls are saying the same thing just now—our little friend Judith, for instance—but Mrs. Hargreave's case is different, because she's really sacrificing something—a good deal, in fact, as one generally counts things. There isn't any adventure, of the usual kind, for her; it seems to be largely a matter of principle when you hear her talk. She's certainly gone the whole hog. You can't help admiring that, anyway."

"No, I suppose not," I put in mechanically. I was trying desperately to phrase a comment that would bring him back to that parenthesis about "our little friend."
"But these other girls you talk about. . . ." I began.

"That's so much more comprehensible," Hill said. "They're out for all sorts of adventure, but the Hargreave revolt can't bring anything but a kind of intellectual satisfaction the way I see it."

"I don't understand," I began again, meaning to open out another channel; but Hill did not wait to hear what I was going to say.

"I'll admit it's difficult," he went on; "but it's worth puzzling over. I know another case a little like it—a woman over fifty, but she was a widow, which made some difference. The impulse seems to be the longing for individual expression."

"Couldn't she have found that at home?" I suggested. "With children and all?"

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"But she really believes she can act you know," Hill returned.

"Pretty piffing thing to do, anyway," I said. I had very recently decided that the stage was a rotten vocation for women.

"It is an Art, of a kind, all the same," Hill affirmed. "There really is a technique of acting." He paused and looked up at me—I was still standing in front of the mantelpiece—as if he were afraid that he might be diverting our talk to a boring subject.

"I don't know much about it," I said. "I'm only the ordinary amateur playgoer; the 'know-what-I-like' sort of ass." I hesitated for a moment, and then, as Hill did not reply, I went on: "But I've got a sort of prejudice against the stage as a profession for—for women. There's a kind of suggestion in calling a woman an actress that somehow doesn't fit with my idea of. . . ." I found that I could not complete the sentence I had begun.

"Of Mrs. Ingleton?" Hill supplied innocently.

I had been so near my object that this threat of still another digression irritated me. "Oh! a woman who would go off and leave her children like that would do anything," I said.

"She tried to take them with her," Hill put in.

"And they had the good sense to refuse?"

"Well, the eldest girl seems to have been bitten with her mother's idea. She comes here sometimes. She wants to go on the stage, too, I believe."

I sighed impatiently. "What's the husband like?" I asked.

"Well-meaning sort of chap, I imagine," Hill said. "Bit on the pious side, and he's got on her nerves, evidently." He paused thoughtfully for a few seconds before he continued. "You can say what you like,

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Hornby; it is a problem. A woman like Mrs. Hargrave wants an outlet, and it's very difficult to see how she could have found it at home. This feminist movement isn't going to stop where it is. There's real force and reason behind it."

But I could not follow him, then. I had a sense of some stubborn, tiresome impediment that came between me and my ideal of womanhood; and while I felt that the opposition was foolish and untrue, I had not the patience to meet it fairly. It seemed to me too silly to need serious attention. I knew it was wrong, and I wanted to push it away with one careless effort. I was like a man trying to think a pig out of his cabbages, and when I took up a stone to throw, I threw it passionately and altogether wide of the mark.

"Seems to me like damned selfishness," I said. "What about the unfortunate husband, anyway? Hasn't he got any sort of claim to consideration?"

"That's only a particular case, you know," Hill said; "but even so, there's a good deal to be said for her. I gather that Hargrave was a sensualist. . . ."

"Do you mean that he was unfaithful to her?" I interrupted.

"No, I don't," Hill said. "I believe she'd have excused that."

"I don't like her," I said, with an air of having delivered an unalterable opinion.

Hill was smiling. "Perhaps not," he returned; "but it's no use sticking at that like a jibbing mule. You won't stop her by merely saying 'Don't be silly.' She has got an argument. The movement has got an argument, and if they overstate it, it's only for the sake of emphasis."

I mentally consigned the movement and Mrs. Har-

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grave to perdition; and then, at last, dared what I had been longing to say for half an hour.

"But these two girls," I began resolutely; "I don't know their names . . .?"

"Helen and Judith," Hill suggested.

"Haven't they got surnames?" I asked.

"Oh! Helen Binstead and Judith Carrington—at least, 'Carrington' is her stage name; her real name is Lillie, but she had to suppress that."

"Why?"

"Ran away from her guardian aunts. They still don't know where she is. You were going to say——?"

"Oh! nothing particular. Are they looking for her?"

"The aunts? Yes, rather."

"But why did she run away?"

Hill was watching me with that bantering smile of his. "She had a pretty bad time with them," he said. "They were Early Victorian and pious, tremendously didactic, I take it. They were so almighty sure, you know, that their manners and methods were the only possible ones for all eternity. And Judith didn't go to them until she was fifteen, when her mother died; her father had been dead a long time. So all the restraints of Victorianism came a bit hard on her. However, she endured them for five years."

"What made her run away in the end?" I asked; and tried to disguise as well as I could the craving of my interest.

"Helen, chiefly," Hill said. "Judith met her at the seaside, and they fell in love with one another in the way girls do sometimes. They arranged the scheme between them."

"How long ago was that?"

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"Only last August," Hill replied.

"Do you think the aunts are likely to find her?" I asked carelessly.

"Doesn't really make much difference if they do," Hill said. "They can't compel her to go back. It's very hard on them, of course."

"Hard on them?" I ejaculated. "You surely don't think a girl like—like Miss Carrington ought to be shut up in that awful old-maidish atmosphere. You don't know what it's like, my dear chap. I've suffered from it all my life, and I've only just begun to realise it."

"Then you don't think it merely looks like 'damned selfishness' in Judith's case?" Hill put in slyly.

"Oh! surely, this is absolutely different from the Hargreave case," I expostulated.

"Possibly. In some ways," Hill said. "But if there's something to be said for Hargreave, there are points for the aunts, too."

I was sure he was wrong, but my argument was not a very sound one. "You're too good for me at dialectic," I said at last.

"You've got no case," Hill replied. "I don't want to confound you, you know. I want to convince you."

I frowned over that for a few seconds before I said, "That woman annoys me. She seems to have been so unforgivably selfish."

"But the same thing applies to Judith," Hill submitted.

"I haven't heard her case yet—not properly," I said. "She may have had all sorts of reasons. . . ."

"So may Mrs. Hargreave. . . ."

"*She* looks an egotist," I retorted crossly. "And a fanatic."

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"Sheer prejudice," Hill returned. "Also, I find virtues in her fanaticism."

5

I was annoyed, but not with Hill. There was a sincerity about him that appealed to me. Moreover, I admired him aesthetically. His poise was right, in some natural, graceful way—even the slight stoop of his head fell into the composition and gratified my sense of appropriateness.

And yet the composure of his attitude expressed potentiality rather than inertia. He was alive. I could picture him moved by a tremendous enthusiasm. His dark eyes glowed with an earnestness very different from the thin, cold flame of Mrs. Hargreave's fanaticism.

I drew him when I went back to my own room. I am better at caricature than portraits, but that effort was a success. I did it in soft pencil on "hot-pressed" paper and, as happens sometimes, the thing just came of itself. I could see every pencil mark on the paper before I put it in.

Afterwards I tried another portrait, a lamentable failure that made me furious with myself for the criminality of the libel. Nothing was right except the delicious curve of the hair over the left ear. And when I had burnt the abomination with a sort of desperate spite, as if I were trying to inflict a really effective punishment on myself, I found that my memory was as faulty as my draughtsmanship. The beautiful line of that one ripple of hair was all that I could visualise. I could remember a host of individual details—and particularly a look of half-timid eagerness as if she shrank a little from pushing her inquiry too far—but the details would not blend into a single picture.

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I tried again after lunch, and then went out for a walk down Oxford Street and across the Park into Kensington Gardens. The afternoon was as clear and crisp as the morning had been—my father used to call that spell of fine weather we so often get in October, "St. Luke's summer"—but the gardens did not fulfil my morning's anticipations of the country. There was a worn and jaded air even in the less frequented depths between the Round Pond and the Serpentine (near the place where Watts's "Physical Energy" now makes one quite sure that Art should never be didactic); a feeling of dust and smoke and tired humanity. Indeed, the last was very much in evidence, and the women especially seemed to me clumsy and tawdry; they were none of them *right*, and I had a personal grudge against them all for their lamentable failure to conform to my ideal of what they ought to have been—an ideal that I could not formulate in words any better than I could draw it on paper.

I was restless and unsatisfied, and quite unable, still, to picture any single thing that *would* satisfy me. I went back to my lodging after tea. I hated the thought of sitting alone there, with nothing to do, but I could not stay away. Keppel Street had an irresistible attraction for me. I felt that every minute I stayed away from it I might be losing some opportunity—for what, I had no idea.

I had not been in more than ten minutes when I heard two people coming downstairs. I knew instantly that they were Miss Binstead and the girl she had persuaded to join her in that doubtful place. And when they paused at the foot of the stairs I suffered an agony of nervousness, fearing that they might knock at my door. My revulsion of feeling when I heard them go out gave me courage to go over to the window, and I

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saw them go by in the dusk; a little hurriedly, I thought, as if they were conscious that they might be watched.

I was very sure of one thing that evening, namely, that I hated Miss Helen Binstead. I knew that she was my enemy, and I loathed the thought that she would be continually construing every action and word of mine to my disadvantage. If I showed my face at the window she would report that I leered.

VIII PROGRESS

I

ABSORPTION by a single subject is bad for the mind. I do not know if other people's experience is the same as mine in this particular, but I have found that if I study a problem too earnestly the problem presently takes the upper hand. It begins as a detached thing that I can regard from the outside, and ends by enveloping me. Fortunately I always retain the ability to escape; the small unanalysable capacity that separates the sane from the obsessed.

The trouble that began to dominate me during the fortnight that followed my Sunday morning in Hill's room was my suspicion of Miss Binstead. I was right about her up to a point, but I allowed my suspicion to grow beyond all reasonable bounds. I started, sanely enough, by believing that she disliked me, and that she meant, if possible, to prevent any intimacy between me and the girl whom she had, in a sense, adopted. But I soon reached the absurd position of regarding her as a kind of female devil, the incarnation of malignancy.

I admit that my mental processes were all a trifle abnormal about that time. For one thing, I could not work, and that irritated me. Until then I had always been able to find relief in occupation. When I was most depressed at the prospect of married life with my cousin, my work had afforded me an outlet at the moment, and in my thoughts it had seemed to be the

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one thing to which I could still look forward in the future I so gloomily pictured.

Now, my capacity for concentration had apparently deserted me. The task of finishing the drawings I was making to illustrate the article on "The £1,000 House" I was submitting to *The Studio*, had lost all interest for me. I could not lose myself in the detail of design. It was as if some other thought continually besieged me, seeking an entrance into my consciousness; some thought that I could not define.

For while I knew, and admitted to myself, that the personality of Judith Carrington had some peculiar and unprecedented attraction for me, I had not reached the stage of understanding that I was finally and irretrievably in love with her. That supposition had an air of being somewhat ridiculous in the circumstances. If I had been consciously prepared to worship some woman, had deliberately sought to involve myself in some romantic entanglement, I should have nursed those first symptoms of mine, and should soon have persuaded myself that I was the victim of a grand and probably hopeless passion.

But so far from having sought love, I had first seen Judith when I was chafing at the bonds of my engagement to Gladys, when the thought uppermost in my mind had been the thought of cutting myself free from feminine control. During all that time the word "release" had seemed the most blessed in the English language. And, no doubt, something of that attitude still persisted. I should certainly have been alarmed at the thought of pledging my freedom to any woman just then.

The explanation of my uneasiness that I took out and exhibited to myself with a certain plausibility, was the necessity for vindicating my character. I had been

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accused by Miss Binstead of being a woman-hunter. Neither Mrs. Hargreave—who had called me an old maid—nor Hill was the least influenced by that story of my attempt to accost the two women on the doorstep. I was fairly sure that Miss Binstead herself attached little importance to it. But I believed that she was maintaining the fiction of my loose life for her own purposes, and although only one person was likely to remain under any misconception by reason of that slander, I told myself that I detested the thought that *any* woman should have such a false opinion of me. If the thing had stopped at the initial charge, I argued, there would have been no reason for my disturbance of mind—I could have lived it down. But—and it was here that I was most convincing—the horrid suspicion of me was being added to, day by day. Whatever I did could be used as evidence against me. If I took no more notice of Miss Binstead and her friend, it was proof that I was ashamed of myself; if I attempted to explain myself, I should be persisting—according to that confounded woman—in my original beastliness.

All this may sound very foolish, but it was uncommonly real to me at the time. The problem of outwitting Miss Binstead began to envelop me. And, as I have said, it interfered with my work.

2

During the first week of this growing obsession I looked forward to the next Sunday morning and the rendezvous in Hill's room. I hoped that I might at least have an opportunity, then, to exhibit myself in my natural character. I pictured myself as being very earnest about my profession, making a little dissertation on the future of town architecture, perhaps; and

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particularly as being extremely interesting and at the same time almost ostentatiously free from any desire that did not tend towards the benefit of humanity. I worked up a few figures about slum property that had recently attracted my attention.

But Miss Binstead and her friend did not attend the meeting of the "Sunday morning club" that day. They had not gone out. Mrs. Hargreave came down with a message to say that Helen had a headache and was not coming; and Judith was presumably helping her friend to nurse this chimerical ailment. Personally I had no doubt whatever that Miss Binstead was deliberately avoiding the possibility of meeting me; and Hill was, I think, also of my opinion. He looked up at me when Mrs. Hargreave delivered the message, as if he were about to make some comment; and then one of the two Germans—both Lippmann and Herz were there—interposed a remark and diverted the conversation.

The talk that morning was all on the subject of music; even Mrs. Hargreave found no opening, and left after she had been there twenty minutes or so. The stout Lippmann was, it appeared, a very creditable performer on the 'cello, and Herz (I found that he was the stumpy, grey-haired young man who wore a bowler with his frock-coat), although he did not play any instrument, was evidently a keen musician.

I was interested for a time, despite the acute disappointment and annoyance I was suffering. They were talking of Wagner and of the gradual supersession of the importance of Bayreuth by the Munich performances. But soon they began to discuss technicalities that I could not follow, and when Lippmann went to fetch his 'cello in order to illustrate an argument about some particular passage, I made an excuse of work and went downstairs.

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Little Herz made an apology to me. "You are, perhaps, not interested in music," he said.

I assured him that I was, and, as a matter of fact, I should certainly have stayed on if I had not wanted to be alone so that I might consider Miss Binstead's new rebuff and a possible reply to it.

Herz was not a bad little chap, and I admired him and Lippmann for their knowledge of and interest in music; but directly the keenness of my attention was diverted from their talk, I became restless and depressed; and the loudness of their voices—they argued the simplest point with tremendous heat—distracted and hurt me.

Nevertheless, when I was alone in my sitting-room I could almost have welcomed the diversion of their eager argument. I felt so powerless. What could I do to break down the influence of that mouse-coloured Helen? I devised wild plans to enlist Hill's assistance, and then shrank from the idea of showing him that I cared.

I think that I came for the first time that morning to the very verge of asking myself why I cared so much. The apparent emptiness of Hill's crowded room was hardly to be accounted for by a mere impatience to justify myself to the absent Helen Binstead. I still tried diligently to lay all accounts to that score, but I found the system increasingly difficult. It would not convincingly explain the sudden blankness which had come to me when Mrs. Hargreave brought her message; nor the horrible restlessness that possessed me. I could not think of my work, I could not contemplate any possible or impossible occupation that would afford me the least relief or satisfaction.

Just for one moment, however, I had a glimpse of some surcease from this torment of unquiet in the

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thought of paying a surprise visit to Rose Whiting. I pictured her as protesting, antagonistic, even violent, and as setting myself the task of overcoming her resistance by appealing to her sympathy. The picture had some dream quality inasmuch as I saw myself immune from ultimate reproach. She was what she was, and however unwilling to entertain me, she had no drastic resort that could bring me to shame. I should have, as it were, the escape of being able to wake myself at any minute. It was not the contemplation of any sensual satisfaction that drew me, but the longing for some intense struggle of the spirit with a woman. I craved for the expression of brutality. I wanted to hurt Rose Whiting; and it was my understanding of that desire no less than the fear of my visit's being reported on the third floor, that really saved me from putting my mad scheme into practice. A dreadful image of Rose Whiting smiting, avariciously complacent, set me wondering what awful outlet I might seek for the satisfaction of my brute lust. If her body were nothing to her, she would, at least, defend her life.

I jammed on my hat, and was half-way down the street before I realised that it was raining heavily. I hesitated, and decided to go back for my umbrella. I could find pleasure in the thought of outrage, but I could not face the suspicion of being eccentric, nor the small inconvenience of a wetting. Civilisation lays such odd little snares for us.

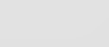
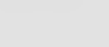
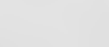
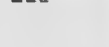
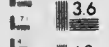
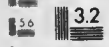
I returned to the house for my overcoat and umbrella. But when I had them and could face the criticism of returning churchgoers without a qualm, I could think of nowhere to go to. London on a Sunday—and a wet Sunday at that!—offers no temptation to the adventurous.

The memory of the Germans and their talk of music



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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House-Mates

brought me my first real relief. I had some lunch in Soho, and walked all the way to the Carmelite Church at Kensington. In the evening I went to Farm Street.

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I had succeeded in finding distraction for one day, but the sense of being thwarted returned on Monday morning and grew steadily worse during the week. All my resentment focused on Helen Binstead. She figured in my thoughts as a subtly powerful and malignant enemy, but I must insist that I was not a normal human being for those few days. In my relations with the people I met and spoke to I was sane and ordinary enough. I do not suppose that anyone I saw at that time noticed the least difference in me. I went down to Copsfield, for example, on the Wednesday to measure up some of the work on Parkinson's house and give the builder his certificate; and while I was occupied on that job, I could attend to it with my usual capacity. But as soon as I was alone, in my rooms, I returned to the contemplation of my grievance, which was coming to be the chief essential of the associations that surrounded me in Keppel Street.

I had a weak, forlorn hope that I might see Helen Binstead and her friend on the following Sunday—they never went past my window, now, always turning east when they came out—and I went up to Hill's room about twelve o'clock. I tried to postpone my visit to an even later hour. I had some foolish idea that if by any chance "they" did go, it would be a point in my favour that I should be very late in putting in an appearance. My one idea of diplomacy, now, was to pretend to be oblivious of their existence. And then, after a cold, nervous morning spent in trying to fritter

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away the time, I was suddenly panic-stricken by the thought that "they" might leave before I arrived.

I found Hill alone.

"No meeting this morning?" I asked.

"Herz came in for half an hour," Hill said. "No one else." He had been reading when I came in, but he shut up his book and threw it on to the table, and I knew by the serious, questioning look he turned upon me that he was ready to talk to me about the one subject I wished most to discuss.

"I'm afraid I'm the Jonah," I said, as carelessly as I could. "You'd better send a notice round to say that I've been blackballed by the president."

Hill looked, I thought, a little uneasy. "It's only Helen, you know," he said. "Just a chance the others didn't come in this morning. Mrs. Hargreave is away, and Lippmann has gone to see some musical friends at Sydenham. . . ." His inflexion left the sentence open for my return to his first statement.

"Yes, she's taken a fierce dislike to me for some reason," I said, and made a foolish, neighing sort of sound that was meant for a laugh.

Hill frowned. "It's quite natural that you . . ." he began, but I interrupted him with a wilful misunderstanding.

"Perfectly natural that she should loathe the sight of me," I said, and only just succeeded in cutting off a repetition of that tittering laugh. "I'm quite ready to admit it. I only came up to tender my resignation. I waited until I thought they'd be all gone."

Hill knew that that was a lie, but he evidently found an excuse for me.

"You seem to have been rather badly hit," he said.

I really misunderstood him that time. "Oh, no!" I said, trying to get an effect of contempt into my voice.

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"It's—it's rather riling, that's all. All this fuss, I mean, about nothing. I don't care a curse what Miss Binstead thinks of me—I wish you would tell her so—but I can't help feeling that she's making a ridiculous" I could find nothing better than my original "fuss about nothing."

Hill shook his head. "Don't be an ass, Hornby," he said. "You must surely know that that isn't the point at all."

"I don't," was all the answer I found. "Really, I don't," I repeated in a cooler tone. Something in his voice had stimulated my curiosity.

"You must have known that Helen is not that kind of woman," he said, and then added, as it seemed quite a long time afterwards, "normally."

"Is she ever normal?" I asked.

"It's this amazing friendship—passion—that has made such a difference to her," Hill explained.

"What passion?" I put in.

"For Judith," he said.

"I didn't know," I remarked lamely. I had no idea what he meant.

"It happens fairly often," Hill went on. "At girls' schools it's common enough to be used by novelists as a certain hit; but they're a bit shy of things like this Helen-Judith affair. I don't know why they should be."

I was still at sea, and must have showed it in my face, for Hill laughed and said: "Perhaps your evident failure to grasp the idea is sufficient explanation of the novelists' omission. You're typical, perhaps, of the ordinary reader—the reader who pays. It never does to puzzle him. The thing he—no, *she*, I fancy—can't recognise at sight isn't true for the purposes of fiction."

"But—but what is it?" I asked, in the tone of one cautiously and distantly observing some unpleasant in-

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sect. I had an idea that there was a mystery behind all this suggestion of Hill's. He had used the word "passion," and I found it horribly repulsive in this connection.

Hill smiled. "You needn't be upset about it," he said. "It's quite clean; respectable even. You see, Helen is not the type of woman who attracts a man. She's very clever; if she'd been better-looking or a great deal uglier, she'd have made a success as an actress. In fact, she did make some kind of a hit, three years ago, in that thing of Markley's—*The Further Side*; I don't know if you saw it. Well, anyway, she isn't the sort of girl a man falls in love with, and she has been *starved*, if you know what I mean, on that side. And she appealed to Judith. Judith did fall in love with her in one sense. Helen was new to her in every way; new ideas, and so on. And then there was the inevitable glamour of the stage. Judith might have taken to Mrs. Hargreave in much the same way if she'd happened to turn up just then instead of Helen. And, of course, all this devotion and admiration was the purest balm to Helen—you can understand that. . . ."

I was beginning to understand well enough to ask a further question.

"Yes. That's all right," I said. "But for the life of me I can't see how it explains Miss Binstead's loathing for myself."

"Jealous, my dear chap," Hill said.

"What?" I gasped. "Jealous? Of me?" Surely, the devotion she had inspired had brought Helen Binstead no such balm as that suggestion brought to me just then. I realised the absurdity of Hill's statement, but it was enough for the moment that he should have made it.

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"Of you or any man," he hedged.

"Does she loathe you too, then?" I asked, finding new inspiration in his amendment.

"No, no. She's clever enough to—to make distinctions," he said.

"On what grounds?" I pressed him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, she saw from the beginning that you were going to fall in love with Judith," he said.

"Oh, bosh!" I ejaculated. "I mean I didn't. I haven't. I—I'm not likely to."

"Well, she thought you were," Hill returned. "And that's the important point."

I wavered between a desire to repeat my disavowal and an inclination to attack Miss Binstead's premature conclusions, before I gave expression almost instinctively to the thought that was now pressing into the foreground of my consciousness.

"But it's so absurd," I said. "I mean that she—Miss Carrington—has never given her any grounds for—supposing that—"

Hill waited for me to finish, and when I resolutely shut my mouth and refused to commit myself any further, he looked at me with that hint of banter in his face he had shown once or twice previously.

"How do *you* know?" he asked.

I sniffed my claims to recognition out of existence.

"Why *should* she?" I returned.

"Tall, well-set-up young man, with a touch of the aristocratic manner—rather appealing blue eyes—" Hill was continuing his inventory when I cut him short by asking him not to be an infernal ass.

"We rather liked the look of you at first," he went on, "in spite of your brass plate and your haughty air of aloofness."

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"Rot!" I said. "I was confoundedly shy."

"We hoped it might be that, until the incident on the front steps," Hill replied.

I was getting a very unexpected picture of Wilfred Hornby. I had never attempted to see myself on broad lines in relation to the other occupants of the house. I had been interested in watching them through my window; but it had never occurred to me that they were not only watching but also discussing me. And I could not avoid the feeling that what Hill had said had been in some way flattering. I took up that, rather than his reference to my disastrous mistake when I replied,

"It really was nervousness. I wanted tremendously to know you. I used to watch you going by. I thought you were an artist." That was not quite a true statement, but I made it in all sincerity. I had temporarily forgotten my first resolution to have nothing to do with my fellow-lodgers. I did not realise how amazingly I had already entered into the life of the house.

Hill's smile was delightfully frank. "I boasted that I should have you up here before long," he said.

"And now you're sorry?" I put in.

"Oh! we must get over this misunderstanding," he said.

"Pretty difficult," I remarked thoughtfully. "The way you see the thing, it isn't a question of getting over an initial prejudice, so far as Miss Binstead is concerned, so much as—as——"

"Challenging her right to the supreme possession of Judith," Hill suggested.

"But I don't want——" I began.

"No, so you said," he returned. "We'll take that for granted. But there is a way——"

"Which is——?" I prompted him.

"Get hold of Judith."

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I knew a dozen reasons why that was impossible; but Hill would not listen to them.

"She's quite an independent-minded young woman," he interrupted. "She's quiet, but you needn't imagine that she just sits still and lets Helen order her about."

"She probably hates me, though," I insisted.

"She doesn't," Hill said.

"How do you know?" I begged him.

"She and I were talking about you at the theatre last night; Helen wasn't there."

"And what did she say?"

"Only that it was a pity Helen had taken such a dislike to you. As a matter of fact, I believe Helen has made the mistake of overdoing it rather, and put Judith's back up."

Everything was taking a new shape for me—the house and its inhabitants; and more particularly the personality of Helen Binstead. I saw her no longer as an all-powerful, malignant spirit, but—with a faint twinge of pity—as a rather desolate, desperate woman.

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Hill did not suggest any means of putting his advice into practice, and I shrank from framing a direct question. I felt that I could not ask him how it would be possible for me to meet Judith without Helen. But when I went downstairs I went with a light heart. The prospect had been opened for me; it was no longer hidden by the enormous obstacle of my obsession. The figure of Helen Binstead had shrunk to life size. Moreover, she no longer confronted me, as I had fearfully imagined, with all the forces arrayed on her side. Hill was certainly with me; and he had given me a delicious hope that Judith was, at least, not fighting against me.

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I was more or less content to leave my analysis at that point. I would not frankly admit, as yet, that I had any motive beyond the clearing of my character. That motive was quite insufficient to explain my recent emotions or my resolutions for the future, but for a little while longer I persuaded myself that I was a free man.

As to resolutions, however, I had nothing that could be called a plan. I left the future to Fate; and Fate rewarded my confidence in her roundabout, unexpected way by sending me a mysterious visitor who seemed to have no sort of connection with my affairs.

He came about four o'clock that same afternoon. Mr. Pferdinger opened the door and showed him straight into my room with the announcement: "A gentleman to see you, Mr. Hornby."

He was a well-dressed, professional-looking man; and even as I stood up, I tried to soften that "what-the-devil?" air which I was so apt to put on with strangers. I had a wild, impulsive hope that this might be an unexpected client.

"Mr. Hornby?" the stranger asked. He was obviously nervous. I recognised his type at once; I had seen his likeness in one of our churchwardens at Hampstead.

"Yes, my name is Hornby," I said, trying not to be too stiff. "Won't you sit down?"

He thanked me, fumbled for a moment with his top hat and gloves, and then took a chair by the table.

I think I had begun to have my suspicions of him even then. His manner was not that of a man who had come to offer his patronage. And I had a queer prejudice against some effect of his clothes. I cannot say quite what it was; perhaps the stiff straightness of his striped trousers, or the pearl buttons on the cloth uppers of his patent leather boots.

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"You want to see me?" I prompted him. "I don't think I remember you——"

"No, no; I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you before," he began bravely, supported by the obvious correctitude of the opening. "The fact is—I'm afraid this is a rather unconventional call. You must forgive me—I——" He dropped his voice and mumbled something of which I only caught the word "distressing."

I did not help him, and he evidently found the task of explaining his call an exceedingly embarrassing one. He looked down, frowned, and tapped with his fingers on the table. He kept his gaze fixed on his finger exercises as he continued: "The fact is—I don't know if you've been long in this house—perhaps you don't know any of the other—residents?"

He waited, without looking up, for my reply.

"Some of them," I said.

"You may have met a Mrs. Hargreave?" he suggested, still staring at the tablecloth.

"Yes," I agreed tepidly.

And then the colour of his rather ruddy face deepened to purple; he threw himself on my mercy.

"I am her husband!" he said, and I think if he had looked at me honestly I might have been sorry for him. I had certainly championed his cause in that talk with Hill; but he looked so prosperous, and yet so furtive, that I could not, now, bring myself to pity him.

"I know Mrs. Hargreave very slightly," I said.

"Oh! precisely, I quite understand that," he returned. "And I don't suppose for a moment that you know anything about her history?"

"I know something," I said.

"You know that she deserted me and our children?" he said in a low, solemn voice.

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My annoyance with the man was steadily growing. "A friend of mine told me something of the kind," I admitted, "but really I don't know what it has got to do with me."

"I suppose she has a great many friends in the house?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Are the other people here mostly women?"

I believe I had some vague idea of defending the character of the house when I replied: "Oh dear no! Mostly men."

Hargreave nodded thoughtfully. "Keppel Street, of course, has a bad name," he said, "but it doesn't follow that every house in it. . . ."

He obviously meant me to help him out of that, but I preferred to keep silence.

He waited a moment or two before he went on. "I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Hornby; I know how unconventional all this must seem to you. I am truly sorry to be disturbing you like this. But would you mind answering one question? Would you mind telling me if Mrs. Hargreave receives many visitors here—in the evening, for instance? I don't mean to imply that you would know such a thing—I admit it is impertinent to ask you at all—except for the fact of your—your position—in the house, I mean—your window—so near the front door and so on."

I thought his trouble had slightly turned his brain, but I was still unable to summon up the least feeling of sympathy with his distress. My only wish was to be rid of him. I stood up.

"I'm sorry I can't help you," I said. "When I am at the window I am always working, and I don't keep any sort of watch on the front door."

He got to his feet also, and began to collect his

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belongings. "Then you've no idea?" he said, as he began his retreat to the hall.

"Absolutely none," I said, and showed him out.

On reflection I decided that the man was jealous; and that was the explanation I put forward when I told the story to Hill, whom I caught in the hall a few minutes after Hargreave had gone.

Hill was in a hurry. He was going down to Fleet Street with his notice of the first performance he had attended the night before, and he agreed without consideration. "I'll tell Mrs. H. when she comes back," he said as he went out.

I had a reaction that evening after tea.

I liked Hill, and we had made, I thought, a great advance towards friendship that morning, but I blamed him for being too casual. I began to think over that reported fragment of conversation at the theatre, and wondered why it should have been so inconclusive. If they were agreed that Miss Binstead was being silly about me, why had not Miss Carrington come down to Hill's room? Why had not Hill urged her to come? As far as I could see, the present state of affairs might go on indefinitely.

Also, for some reason that I did not care to examine, I was a little uneasy concerning Miss Carrington's friendship with Hill. He seemed to be very much in her confidence. Helen Binstead was not jealous of him, but certainly *her* judgments were not infallible. It was absurd that she should be jealous of me. If she were jealous? After all, it was quite probable that my original judgment was correct, that she had taken a violent dislike to me, and deliberately encouraged her hatred by continually misreading my actions and what she judged to be my intentions.

As to the Hargreaves, I was inclined to dismiss them

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from my thoughts. I had decided, like Alice, that "they were both very unpleasant characters."

I was back in my shell again that evening.

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I had new lights on the Hargreave case two days later. Mrs. Hargreave came down to my room after tea. I was working, but she made no apology for interrupting me, although I sat by my drawing-board, pencil in hand, waiting for her to explain the object of her visit.

"I hear that my husband has been to see you," she began, and sat down with a confidence that entirely ignored my occupation.

"Yes, he came on Sunday," I replied snappishly.

"To ask questions about me?"

"Yes," I said, and by way of usefully filling the time I sharpened my pencil.

"Is your work very important, Mr. Hornby?" was her next question.

I made a little doubtful noise that might have meant anything.

"Or were your sympathies engaged by my husband's grievances?" she went on with a faint air of chaffing me.

"They most certainly were not," I replied with emphasis.

"You didn't like him?" she asked, pretending surprise.

"No," I said.

"But you think *I* ought to?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I can *not* see what your matrimonial troubles have to do with me," I said.

She smiled. "You don't believe in helping other people?" she remarked, and something in her tone re-

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mind me that I had recently been blaming Hill for not helping me in the Binstead affair.

"Oh! well, no; it isn't that exactly," I said.

"But . . ." she helped me.

I was not sure, but it seemed safe to suggest that hers was not a case in which I cared to take one side or the other.

"I may take it that you didn't answer my husband's questions, then?" she said.

"I did not," I returned. "I was distinctly rude to him."

"Yes, I can believe that," she commented thoughtfully.

"I don't think I'm usually rude to people," I asserted, but she took no notice of that.

"Did you snub him out of existence at once," she went on, "or did you get any idea of what he wanted to know about me?"

"I inferred that he was jealous," I said. "He asked me if you had many visitors—in the evening, and that sort of thing; and I told him I had no idea. He seemed to think that I spend my time watching the front door."

"He wants to divorce me, you see," Mrs. Hargreave explained.

I was startled into a new interest. "Well, you wouldn't be sorry if he did, would you?" I asked.

"How very unconventional of you!" she said with a laugh.

I had not thought of that. "But you want to be free, don't you?" I asked.

"Not on those terms," she told me, and then continued: "But as you've said, it has nothing to do with you."

"I'm interested, nevertheless," I said.

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"You're an odd mixture, Mr. Hornby," she returned; "a cross between a live human being and the bundles of convention that generally try to pass themselves off as live people. Do you think you've a chance of being born soon, or are you trying to shut yourself tighter into your coffin or whatever you call it?"

I found that question worth a moment's consideration. I had not adopted my metaphor at that time, but I was dimly aware of some change that was taking place in me.

"I think I've altered a good deal since I came to this house," I said.

Mrs. Hargreave nodded encouragingly. "It's a queer little world, this house," she agreed. "Queerer than I thought if it's bringing you out of your shell," she added.

I came back to a contemplation of that remark afterwards, but at the time I was too anxious to divert the conversation from this criticism of myself to take any notice.

"I don't see why you object to Mr. Hargreave wanting to . . ." I began, and hesitated. Any frank statement seemed, I thought, too brutal.

"To divorce me?" she put in calmly.

I nodded. "You want your freedom, don't you?" I said.

She had been so sane and quiet up to this point that I had completely forgotten her tirade upstairs after the Whiting business.

"I suppose men of your sort will never understand our position," she said in a new tone, and before I could cut her off she began again on the admittedly hopeless task of enlightening me.

I can understand her now, but sane and reasonable as her "principle" now appears to me, she was, I must

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admit, a very unconvincing pleader. She was so dogmatic and so restricted when she mounted that platform. She would not permit the hint of any alternative to her doctrine. She belonged to the older woman's-rights school, and was one of those who carried over their fanaticism into the "Militant Suffragette" movement.

Her "right," as she put it to me that evening, was the right of occupation and self-expression. She had done with child-bearing, and she did not ask for sexual love, or for sexual admiration. She demanded possibilities for the freeing of her individuality, but she would not accept them at the cost of admitting herself in the wrong. That, indeed, was her "principle."

"My husband can only imagine one reason for my leaving him," she said; "the only reason that would appeal to him." (Incidentally I believed that.) "So now he wants to make things easy for himself—he wants to marry again, of course,—by divorcing me. And why should I confess to a weakness of that kind? I would acknowledge it in a moment if I had it, but I'm not going to put myself in the wrong just to satisfy his sexual cravings."

She had no sort of sympathy with her husband, and I still think that she was wrong in that exclusion. She was so fanatic when it came to any attack on that tremendous "right" of hers. She clenched her mind, as it were, in a final resolution never to give one least advantage to all that immense mass of opinion which was embodied for her in the person of Hargreave. She was of the stuff that makes martyrs, but some martyrs are merely pig-headed.

The effect of her argument upon me was to put my back up. Women were putting men's backs up even then, some years before they made a regular profession

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of it. And I should probably have attempted some perfectly useless defence, if we had not been interrupted by a tap at the door.

Mrs. Hargreave did not hear it, and it is possible that my "Come in" was also inaudible above the steady eloquence of her exposition, but she stopped when the door opened. I think it must have been the change of expression in my face and attitude that startled her.

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I received a smile that I counted as my first—the other was not meant for me—and then she turned to Mrs. Hargreave, who was now looking round over her shoulder, and said: "I suppose you've completely forgotten that you're taking me to the theatre to-night?"

Mrs. Hargreave got up at once. "My dear, is it so late?" she said. "Mr. Hornby and I have been arguing." (I had not said a word since she had opened her pet subject.) "Wait for me while I just go upstairs. It will do if I change my blouse, I suppose? Where's Helen?"

"She's up there," Judith said. "We've been quarrelling, rather."

I had an instant's hope that I was the subject of it. And here was my longed-for opportunity; Mrs. Hargreave had gone, and I was alone with Judith and free to make any explanation I wished. And I had not a word to say. I had not an idea how to begin the most formal conversation.

"She is rather splendid, isn't she?" Judith said. The door was still open, and she sat down near it in a desolate, unfriendly chair, that had been left alone to furnish that bleak corner.

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"Mrs. Hargreave? Oh yes, rather," I said.

"She is so tremendously in earnest."

I repeated my former remark.

After that came a silence that began to grow embarrassing. I was standing up by my drawing-board and the whole length of the room separated us, but I was afraid to move.

"I'm interrupting you," she said after a tense interval. "Do go on working."

"Oh no! I'm not," I said eagerly. "I wasn't working when you came in, I mean."

She was almost invisible in the shadow of her corner by the door, and I wished that I could get over to the hearthrug, but I felt unequal to that undertaking. I found some small consolation in the reflection that it was her turn to speak.

"We're going to see *Zaza*," she said. "Do you know it?"

"No, I don't," I replied. "I've heard it's rather good."

"Mrs. Hargreave has only got two seats. That's why Miss Binstead isn't coming," she explained inconsequently.

I made my first sane comment then by saying: "Your quarrel wasn't serious?"

She laughed. "Oh *no*," she assured me.

It was an opening. I had only to say that I was afraid Miss Binstead didn't like me, and the thing was practically done. Instead of that I said:

"You go to the theatre pretty often, I suppose?"

"Whenever I can," she replied.

And the precious remainder of that solemn ten minutes was spent in bandying the stupid clichés of a suburban tea-party.

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I was not alone with her again for six weeks, and I have a strong inclination to jump that interval. I am hampered again by my characteristic distaste for speaking or writing of things that touch some tender pride of my inner life.

I could not discuss my brief religious ecstasy with my mother. I was afraid of exposing it to the least criticism, even though that criticism took the form of mistaken praise. I knew that my mother would translate my emotions into the terms of her own worship, and I was as sensitive as any artist who dreads that the meaning of his work will be misinterpreted. I was so keenly aware of the beauty of my own emotions that I dared not express them.

My disinclination to speak of my engagement to Gladys in the presence of Geddes, or Kempley, or Horton-Smith, was another symptom of the same weakness. I knew that the strained exaggeration of the stereotyped phrases we use to describe beauty would not produce a true impression upon their minds. It was not that I was afraid to do Gladys any injustice; my feeling was still personal, egotistical perhaps. Her beauty was the thing *I* saw. In a sense I had created it by my vision of her. If Geddes, for example, had met and admired her, he would still have failed to appreciate the work of art I treasured in my own mind. Gladys, however, herself destroyed that illusion and set me free to describe her. As my image had been broken, I saw her with even more critical eyes than Geddes would have brought to his appraisal. In the same way, when my religious ecstasy faded I could smile—a little tenderly, nevertheless—at my exhausted emotion of worship. But, now, I have a treasure of

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beauty that fills my whole life, and I dread to belittle it by the weakness of my artistry.

Indeed, I am not a true artist. I have the power of conception, but not of creation. In my drawing, as in my writing, I present but the pale, weak model of my desire.

And in this thing that I am now stumbling at, there is, in fact, no medium which would portray my thought of Judith clear and whole. I can at the best only suggest an outline which will take shape in the reader's mind as the figure or index of a type. It is so futile to write that the colour of her eyes was a live, clear grey; that her hair was brown with a kind of petulant twist which asserted its individuality against the most patient endeavour of any hairdresser; that her nose was straight and rather long; or that her teeth were white as the sudden foam on a dark sea.

Such a foolish catalogue as this, however prolonged, gives no effect of the particular quality her beauty had for me. Another woman might have her features and colouring and fail completely to attract my notice—I might even criticise such a woman; say that she was plain. Perhaps Judith may be plain. If there is some idealised absolute of feminine beauty, I can very well understand that she would fail to pass the test such an ideal would impose. Men do not turn to look after her in the street.

But to me, from the moment she turned and unknowingly smiled up at my window, she was the perfect woman. And I knew it without any further possible shadow of doubt from the time she sat on that lonely chair by the door, and the two of us, nervous and trembling, approached the knowledge that this was a meeting beyond any remembered experience. We talked nonsense, and I am glad, now, to remember how foolish

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I was. I had come all unprepared into the presence of something that was wonderful and eternal, something out of space and time; and I feel that it was appropriate that I should have blushed and stammered and confessed my ineptitude.

And most certainly I could neither have drawn her that evening, nor have told the colour of her eyes, nor whether her nose was long or short.

What could it matter how she looked?

She was Judith.

•IX

THE TWO AUSTRALIANS

I

THE general impression of those six weeks remains in my mind now with something like the effect of a train journey. My attention was continually being snatched by the incidents of everyday life, and some of them come back to me with the vividness of a scene observed through a window. But the dominant effect is of my longing to get to the journey's end. I was travelling towards some goal that I could not visualise, but that was undoubtedly a resting-place; and until I reached it all else was nothing but a momentary distraction.

I cannot, however, fit my occasional sights of Judith into the metaphor. They constituted stopping-places that have no parallel in the tedious movement of a train journey. For it was, indeed, only during those short hours when I was no longer conscious of travel that I made any real progress—although there were times when those intervals seemed to indicate that I was flying horribly backwards.

I was groping, then, in the black darkness that surrounds the unintuitive young lover; or it may be, rather, that I was too intuitive and that my intuitions, springing from a purely masculine psychology, were, now and then, grotesquely false. Certainly my deductions could not have been influenced by any sane logic. I was immensely encouraged or disheartened by the most

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trivial suggestions; and in some instances I completely overlooked indications that had a real significance.

Helen Binstead was the chief cause of my misinterpretations. I had, happily, lost my obsession concerning her omnipotence for evil, but I still recognised that she was my one important enemy—and in that inference, at least, I was not deceived. Where I made so important a mistake was in my failure to understand her relations with Judith.

Writing, now, with a more or less clear explanation of those once mysterious signs, I can smile at my own blindness; but as I enter again into the feelings I experienced during those six weeks, I know that it was impossible I should have interpreted what I took for evidence in any other way.

2

Judith and Helen Binstead were in Hill's room on the Sunday following our first *tête-à-tête*. I had seen Mrs. Hargreave again in the interval, but she was not there that morning. There were, however, three other people present besides Hill himself—namely, an actor and his wife, and little Herz. The actor—I have forgotten his name—was playing at a West-End theatre, and he had been invited to meet Judith, with the idea—as I soon learnt with a strange twinge of dismay—of helping her to obtain an engagement in a travelling company that was going out after Christmas with the piece that he was playing in, at, I think it was the *Criterion*.

The actor was a smallish man with a good deal of manner, and I wondered what influence he could possibly have in recommending Miss Carrington. He was quite unknown to me by name, and dropped out of the

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theatrical world years ago, but it appeared that he was a popular member of a club called the "Green Room" in Leicester Square, and that quite a lot of theatrical log-rolling was done from that centre.

His wife was a tall, elaborate-looking woman, with a collection of handsome features that did not harmonise well when they were seen at close quarters, but might have been effective on the stage. I do not remember that she added much to the conversation, but she went in for expressive gesture on suitable occasions, and had a habit of commenting on Hill's stories—he told several that morning apropos of stage life—by staring immensely into the circumambient and saying, "Isn't—that—Rich!" in a voice that was meant to exhibit the amazing depths of her appreciation.

I sat on a pile of books by the wall and said nothing. I was out of my element and knew it, but I was always dumb in Judith's presence after that first bright exception on the day of our introduction. What I longed to say was, that life in a provincial touring company was quite unsuitable for Miss Carrington, but I had not the courage for that. So I kept silence and watched her when I dared.

Curiously enough, my chief source of encouragement was at the same time a cause of uneasiness on another score. Judith herself responded with very little warmth to the actor's bustling assurance that he could certainly get her the part. He pretended a kind of examination, at first, and I loathed the way he looked at her, but he cut that piece of acting very quickly, and came to the part he found more sympathetic; to the playing of the patron and man of influence. (I can see his spruce little figure now; he was dressed in a grey suit that had an appearance of being sharp at the edges, with a little black-and-white check bow that perked neatly out of his

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double collar; and lavender suède gloves that he kept in his hand and used to gesticulate with. And his boots were quite the richest brown I have ever seen.)

I was delighted that his boast of patronage produced so little effect upon Miss Carrington, but I wished that her rather cool reception of his assurances had been due to another cause. For after she had thanked him, she made it plain that she would not accept the part unless there were a place for Helen in the same company.

I wish I could describe the way she spoke. Her voice and manner contrasted so delightfully with the glib insincerity of the actor and his wife—and Helen Binstead, too, had caught something of that theatrical intensity which can give a false value to the simplest expression. But Judith, even then, had an earnestness that showed through her girlish embarrassment. She blushed when she answered the man, and she did not use words like "awfully" or "frightfully." Her speech had been pruned by those two old Puritans with whom she had lived for five years; and if her zest for life had been strong enough to revolt against confinement within those little spaces to which they would have restricted her, something of their influence, perhaps of their timidity, still remained with her.

The actor pursed his mouth and thoughtfully smacked his left hand with his gloves.

"If we could find a part for Miss Binstead?" he repeated. "There isn't one at present, but I might get hold of the author and ask him to write one in for her."

Helen's eyes glowed at him not less than her speech, but I saw Hill's smile and knew by that how grotesque had been the little man's boast.

"Get him to write a play for them while you're about it," Hill put in.

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"I happen to know him very well, you know," the actor went on quite unruffled. "In fact, in a way I discovered him. Gave him his first chance, and he hasn't forgotten it. And besides that, I've helped him with his stage technique. He's a clever chap, but simply knew nothing about the stage when he began to write."

(He mentioned the author's name at least four times during that speech, but I prefer not to repeat it.)

"If you could find a part for Miss Binstead?" Judith put in when she found a chance. "Even an understudy. . . ."

"Ah!" the little actor man interrupted. "An understudy! What do you think, Delia?"

"For Mrs. Henniker?" his wife answered, as if she were debating a plan to save the nation.

"For Mrs. Henniker!" he repeated, with an air of sudden conviction. "You've hit it, Delia. We'll put Miss Binstead in to understudy Muriel Gordon."

Judith was warmer in her expression of gratitude this time, but I was not afraid. I had been watching Hill, and guessed that these two engagements would never be made.

He confirmed my supposition as soon as the actor and his wife had gone.

"I'm sorry," he said, addressing Helen and Judith; "but I never thought it was much use."

I expected Helen to resent that. She had glowed again at the little actor, after he had definitely booked her to understudy Miss Muriel Gordon; but she took it quite quietly.

"Of course they wouldn't take out a special understudy on a tour like that," she said. "Judith would understudy Miss Gordon if she played 'Jenny.'"

I leant back against the wall in pure amazement. I am not sure that my mouth was not open.

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Hill grinned. "Friend Hornby isn't used to our stage currency," he said. "That's the way we go on, you know. It's a kind of Eastern diplomacy without the dignity."

I found a voice at last. "He offers you something he knows isn't possible," I said, "and you know it isn't possible. . . ."

"Yes, and he knows that you know it isn't possible," Hill concluded.

"And all the same . . . ?" I said.

"We part with a very fine opinion of ourselves and of each other," Hill said. "But, mark one stipulation, all of us here, except Helen, are amateurs. There is a big gallery."

"Deliver me!" I remarked elliptically, and looked up to find that Judith was watching me with, I thought, a distinct frown of disapproval.

"Don't you——" I began timidly, but Miss Binstead cut me short.

"Of course, you're not used to it," she said, glowering at me. "I suppose you think I was very insincere to say what I did."

I was honest enough to shrug my shoulders, and then little Herz came between us by saying:

"It is the same with artists and with musicians. I have seen it. To keep up the appearance makes so much with them."

"And don't you think he meant it about my part either?" Judith asked, looking at Hill.

"He meant it all right," Hill replied. "But I don't think he really has much influence. Still, he might work that."

"I shan't take it," Judith said, standing up; and she put an affectionate arm round Miss Binstead's shoulders.

I went downstairs, very depressed. I could not

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understand that friendship, nor the attraction of the stage. Neither accorded with my worshipping of Judith, and yet I worshipped her none the less. I felt that if only I could talk to her she would make it all clear to me. Also, I wondered why my criticism of the little actor's insincerity and swagger had offended her. For, woven deep into the fabric of my subconsciousness was the certainty that in some way she and I knew each other quite intimately.

3

I believe that Basil Meares and his wife must have joined our community just about this time. They took the place of two of the Germans who had shared a bedroom and a sitting-room on the second floor, and who had held no communication with the rest of us, not even with their own countrymen.

Meares was a tall, dark, handsome man with a black beard trimmed to a neat point that gave him the look of a naval captain. His wife was a bright little brown-eyed creature, with all too evident false teeth. Hill made their acquaintance before they had been in the house ten days, and I met them in his room for the first time one Sunday—I think it must have been about the second week in November.

They came from Australia, and both of them had Australian accents. Meares had a mining property—or an option on one—somewhere up country, and had come over to London to form a company to develop it. He was a grave, quiet chap, who seemed content to listen to our conversation, and only spoke when he was directly addressed. His wife, however, had an eager flow of chatter; and I remember being struck by her longing to see snow. She often expressed the hope that it was

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going to be a hard winter. She had lived in New South Wales all her life and had never, as she explained, seen snow *falling*, although she had once or twice seen it, from a distance, lying on the upper slopes of Mount Townsend.

I thought the Meares a very uninteresting couple at first, but Hill did not agree with me.

"If only they would tell us something about Australia," I said to him one day, "they might amuse us a little."

"If they would tell us something about their past lives," he amended.

"Nothing to tell," I suggested.

"People aren't usually so careful to hide nothing," he said.

"Oh! well, do they?" I asked. "They simply don't talk about anything."

"*She* does," Hill returned, "and so does he, about his business, when you get him alone—try it and see. But neither of them has a word to say about what they have been doing for the last ten years. We don't even know what boat they came over in."

"Don't delude yourself into finding a mystery about the Meares," I said. "They are as ordinary as I am."

And presently Mrs. Meares became a kind of ally of mine.

I did not encourage her at first. I was too shy of anything approaching a confidence to take her advice, but there was for a time an unspoken understanding between us.

She began it by coming down to my room one morning to ask if I could lend her a sheet of notepaper. Mr. Hill was out, she explained, and she did not care to bother the "young ladies" upstairs. I believe the

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reason for her intrusion was perfectly genuine. She had a Colonial freedom from the conventional hesitations that would have stopped me in such a case. And then, having introduced the subject of the "young ladies," she rattled on without further excuse.

"Miss Binstead's rather one of the stand-off sort, isn't she?" Mrs. Meares said confidentially. "She scares me. She looks at you as if you were trying to rob her of something. I don't mean 'you' particularly, of course—just anyone, unless it's Mr. Hill. But then he's so nice with everyone. You English people are a bit stiff, aren't you? Not that I'm not English, too, but we're different, somehow, in Australia. . . ." She elaborated that a little before she came back to what was the chief intention of her speech by saying: "But you do agree with me about Miss Binstead, don't you, Mr. Hornby?"

"Really, I hardly know her at all," I said, trying not to conform too nearly to the type of "stiff" Englishman she had indicated.

"But Miss Carrington is quite different, isn't she?" the little woman ran on. "I do think she's so good-looking, don't you? That's the type I admire, and I'm sure you must, too; as an artist, now, Mr. Hornby? I don't say she's the type that takes most men's fancy; but there's something so *steady* about her, if you know what I mean."

I was horribly confused and a little annoyed; but at the same time I was glad to have a woman ally. Mrs. Hargreave was not actively against me as an individual, but I was a representative of what was to her the general enemy; and it was very unlikely that she would do anything to help me in making the nearer acquaintance of the two girls she had accepted in a vague way as disciples.

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I suppose I mumbled some qualified agreement with Mrs. Meares's enthusiasm.

She hesitated a moment as if doubtful whether she could not risk a franker statement, and then apparently decided to keep on the safe ground of generalities.

I did not help her. Mixed with my other feelings was dismay at the thought that my devotion had been so evident. I wondered whether everyone in the house knew? I remembered that on one or two occasions I had tried to beseech Judith with my eyes; and I blushed to find that Mrs. Meares, certainly, and perhaps her husband or Herz had been watching me and had understood.

My instinctive desire to cover my tracks took the usual form of an attempt to display sangfroid. Mrs. Meares had drifted on into talk about the stage, and I cut in by saying that I thought it a very silly profession. I meant to make it quite plain, at least, that the stage had no glamour for me.

"I know what you mean, Mr. Hornby," Mrs. Meares said with a look that was meant to establish a confidence. "If I'd had a daughter I should never have thought of letting her be an actress. But it's just a fancy that takes girls for a time."

"Oh! I dare say Miss Binstead and her friend may do very well on the stage," I said, and immediately reproached myself for having been disloyal. Yet as I spoke I had been proud of being able to throw a slight on Judith's choice of a profession.

Mrs. Meares screwed up her bright little brown eyes into a smile that indulged my boyishness.

"I dare say they may—if they go on with it," she said, and then began to apologise for interrupting my work. She had, however, a further advance to make

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before she left me. It came in the middle of her farewell speech.

“. . . Meares is very interested in architecture," was the sentence that made the connection, and from that she came to the fact of her husband's reserve being "nothing but shyness. He'd never have come down interrupting you like this," she went on, "but he'd be right down glad to have a talk with you any time, Mr. Hornby, if you cared to come up in the evening.

"I don't see why Mr. Hill should have it all his own way," she concluded gaily. "*We're* going to have a club, too."

I thought over that proposition for the rest of the morning. When a woman draws an inference she accepts it as an ultimate and unchallengeable fact. A man continues to examine his inference at leisure, and usually finds good cause for doubting it. I had been sure at the time that the little Australian was suggesting that I might meet Judith in the Meares' apartment; but by lunch-time I was persuaded that she had meant nothing of the kind.

4

Nevertheless, when two days later I received an invitation from the second floor, I had no hesitation about the answer I returned. Mrs. Meares had sent me one of her visiting cards. She had added "Mr. and" before the engraved "Mrs. Basil Meares," and below it: "At Home, this evening—9 p.m. to 11 p.m. Conversation and good company." I acknowledged the joke by sending up a formal note of acceptance.

But after I had thus committed myself, I suffered a period of uneasiness and apprehension. I had no confidence in the tact of my ally. My first fear was that

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she might have sent a duplicate of that card up to the third floor; and when I had dismissed that on the ground that such an invitation would certainly have been refused by Miss Binstead, and that Mrs. Meares must have been sure of her entertainment before she enticed me with the promise of "good company," I had a horrible misgiving that she would do something even more foolish in the course of the evening.

I pictured her making obvious plans to give me an opportunity for talking alone with Judith; or, worse still, she might drop some terrible hint to Judith herself! And behind those misgivings I had, no doubt, a reluctance to class myself with the Meares or to accept any help from them. I was still too fresh from Hampstead and Lincoln's Inn to stand on my own legs, and I was afraid that I might go down in Judith's opinion if I appeared on such confidential terms with the Meares as the demonstration of a mutual understanding would suggest—an understanding on that subject above all others!

My apprehensions were increased when, after I had gone upstairs to find Mrs. Meares and her husband alone, she gave me a smile that was an unmistakable acknowledgment of some agreement between us and said, "We're sorry neither Mr. Hill nor Miss Binstead can come, after all; they've gone to a first night together, so there'll only be the four of us!"

I was on the verge of making some excuse to get out of the room when Judith came in; and for the first half-hour or so afterwards, I suffered an agony of nervousness. I am sure my manner was insufferably stilted, and whenever I looked at Mrs. Meares my eyes, I have been told since, were "as hard as steel." I certainly remember that the one thought in my mind was to intimidate her into silence on one particular topic.

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Perhaps my evident nervousness had some effect on her. Her behaviour that evening was certainly above reproach. I still think, however, that my apprehensions were justified. I am sure she was quite capable of making the mistake I had dreaded, but she was extraordinarily quick in her intuitions, and her little brown eyes took note of everything.

We were all four a trifle embarrassed during that first half-hour, but afterwards we succeeded in making the Meares talk about Australia. She had quite a lot of interesting information, and a fund of little anecdotes about the life inland. Her husband came in now and again with a grave footnote of corroboration.

I helped them with intelligent questions as well as I could, and tried not to watch Judith too openly. We sat in a semicircle round the fire, and she faced me across the width of the hearthrug, so that unless I pointedly fixed my attention on Mr. or Mrs. Meares, I was conscious of a difficulty in avoiding Judith's glance.

I tried staring into the fire, until I saw that she was doing that too, and I became afraid that our unanimity might appear concerted. When I happened to meet her eyes, I tried to make my face blankly inexpressive.

But despite my immense preoccupation with the consciousness of Judith's presence, I noticed one odd little piece of confusion on the part of Mrs. Meares.

She used the word "hinterland" instead of "up-country," and I should certainly not have remarked the change of language if she had not underlined it by a most unnecessary explanation. She pulled herself up in the middle of the sentence, and her false teeth came together with a queer little click. "I got that from my brother-in-law; he was in the Boer War," she said the

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next moment. Meares said nothing; he was filling his pipe and kept his head down.

She went on briskly with her story after that interruption, and I thought nothing of it at the time; but later it came to me that she had, for some inexplicable reason, been afraid.

Presently we were offered biscuits and the choice of cocoa or whisky. Meares was the only one of us who took whisky; and then Mrs. Meares said that she had been "doing all the talking," and suggested that Judith and I should contribute a little autobiography. She nailed me by way of making a beginning. It was like being asked to sing or recite at a party.

"Nothing of the least interest has ever happened to me," I protested; and looking back, now, I feel that the statement was particularly well justified at that time.

"Oh! come now," Mrs. Meares responded. "I'm sure you've had your adventures."

"Absolutely none," I insisted. "Home, school, office, and now an attempt within the last two months to set up in private practice; that's the whole of my adventures up to the present time."

"People alive?" Meares asked unexpectedly in his deep, melancholy voice.

"My father died years ago," I said, "and my mother last September. . . ."

"Basil! you shouldn't have asked that," Mrs. Meares put in quickly; and then she turned to me and said, "I *am* sorry, Mr. Hornby; but of course we couldn't know, could we?"

"Of course not," I said, and hurried on to cover my embarrassment by saying, "Certainly I was engaged once; if you call that an adventure."

"Well!" remarked Mrs. Meares on a note of genuine surprise.

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"But it was the most conventional affair you ever heard of," I went on. I had no intention of leaving my announcement unexplained. "She was my cousin, and my uncle and aunt are rather well off. We weren't either of us the least in love with one another; but we were somehow expected to get engaged, and so we did."

I stopped abruptly, with a sudden twinge of regret. I remembered that scene on the Heath when I had proposed to Gladys, and the thought of her came back to me as the memory of something that had once been a very essential part of my life. I had undoubtedly been very fond of her, once.

"And who broke it off?" asked Mrs. Meares.

"Oh! well, I dare say I wasn't altogether satisfactory," I said, trying to cover Gladys's act of treason. "No prospects and so on, you understand. She's engaged to a man called Morrison Blake, now—perhaps you've heard of him?"

"I have. He's an expert in antiques," Meares put in solidly.

"That's the chap," I said cheerfully.

"And you weren't heartbroken?" Mrs. Meares asked, with the excellent intention of reinstating my eligibility, I suppose.

"Oh! good heavens, no!" I said. "I admire my cousin very much, but—but nothing more than that."

Mrs. Meares nodded. "Just as well you didn't go on with it," she said, and I was afraid that she was going to make some gauche remark; but whether because she noticed my nervousness or realised instinctively the necessity for finer tact, she abruptly changed the subject by turning to Judith and saying:

"Well, now, really it's your turn, Miss Carrington."

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Judith leaned a little forward and clasped her hands together.

"I think my story is rather like Mr. Hornby's," she said. "All—all—oh! I don't know how to say it—all inside, if you know what I mean." She looked at me despairingly for help, and I got in front of Mrs. Meares by saying:

"That night of the Whiting row began lots of things with me." I looked for some response to that, but found only an appearance of perplexity. "I met Hill that night for the first time," I explained.

"Meeting Helen made a tremendous difference to me," Judith said, and I felt as if I had been snubbed.

"Why?" I asked.

She recognised the note of antagonism in my voice.

"She was so splendid," she said, challenging me.

"But you don't say *why*," I returned.

"Don't *you* think Helen is splendid?" Judith said, turning to Mrs. Meares.

"Well, I hardly know her, you see," Mrs. Meares said tactfully.

"You know her quite as well as Mr. Hornby does," Judith returned quietly.

"I don't know that I've expressed any opinion one way or the other," I put in.

"But you *don't* like her, do you?" Judith asked.

"Well, she doesn't like me," I retorted.

I wish Mrs. Meares had not cut across the conversation at that point. Judith and I were almost quarrelling, but we were really speaking to one another for the first time. We had both admitted so certainly that the animosity of Helen Binstead was an obstacle, and I was hoping to hear some suggestion for surmounting it when Mrs. Meares disconnected us by saying:

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"Well, to me it seems an adventure, Miss Carrington, that you should be living in a house like this. One can see you weren't brought up to it, if you'll excuse me saying so."

"Yes, oh! yes, that's true; I ran away," Judith said, smiling. "I was educated by two aunts, my father's sisters, and we lived at Cheltenham, and went to Barmouth every August for exactly four weeks. It was at Barmouth that I met Helen."

"Don't your aunts know where you are now?" I asked.

She looked at me, rather wistfully I thought. "Not actually," she said. "They know I'm in London and all right; but they don't know my address. I'm so afraid . . . I *am* sorry for them . . . but I couldn't go back. You don't know how terrible it was to be shut in like that." She paused a moment, and then, ostensibly addressing Mrs. Meares, she went on, "Do you think I *ought* to go back?"

"Why, no! of *course* not," Mrs. Meares replied without a moment's hesitation. "Why should you?"

"It must have hurt them dreadfully," Judith said. "Their letters are so formal, but I can see that they are—distressed, very distressed."

"But they'd no right to bottle you up like that, now, had they, Miss Carrington?" asked Mrs. Meares.

"I don't know," Judith said. "They thought they were right."

She looked so little like an insurgent. She had the appearance of being so calm and, as Mrs. Meares had put it, steady. And the same thought must have been in that little woman's mind at the same moment, for she avoided the impossible ethical problem that had been set us, and said:

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"Well, if you ran away, Miss Carrington, I'm sure you must have had some very good reason."

Judith shook her head. "I'm not sure," she said. "I was excited and silly." And then she closed the conversation by saying that she must go.

The Meares made the usual expostulations, but she slipped out of the room with a little smile while they were still protesting.

"*She'd* get her own way with whoever it was," Meares said solemnly.

5

I hoped that entertainment of the Meares' might be repeated. I had spoken to Judith for the first time, and I was not dissatisfied with our brief interchange of remarks about Helen Binstead. I repeated to myself Judith's "But you don't like her, do you?" and found a significance in the sentence that had probably never been intended. I deluded myself into thinking that her regret (I had distinctly recognised regret in her voice) was due to the fact, so unduly prominent in my own mind, that Miss Binstead was an obstacle. It was impossible for me to realise, then, that she could be an object of worship.

My depression was all the greater for that imagined encouragement when day after day went by and I had no further sight of Judith, save the brief glimpses of her that I snatched as she went down the front steps with Helen Binstead. They had apparently given up going to Hill's room on Sunday mornings (I endured Mrs. Hargreave with growing impatience on two occasions), and, more ominous still, they refused Mrs. Meares's second invitation to spend an evening in "good company."

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"I don't know if you would care to come all the same, Mr. Hornby," Mrs. Meares said to me. "Mr. Hill is coming, and he's always amusing, isn't he?"

Of course, I had to pretend with redundant assurances that I should, in any case, be delighted to spend an evening with her and her husband.

We had a very dull evening, but I should have been dull anywhere at that time. Meares and Hill talked politics, discussing the critical election that was to come in January. Meares was a staunch Conservative, and was not to be convinced that a Liberal Government under the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman had any chance of success. I had never taken the least interest in politics, but I was a Conservative by force of habit, supported Meares, and lost my temper with Hill for being so cocksure that the Liberals would come in with a thumping majority. I had always been led to believe that a strong Radical Government meant the downfall of England.

Hill only laughed, which annoyed me still more, and when we left the room together he seemed to have forgotten our disagreement.

"Meares said anything to you yet about his business?" he asked as we were parting on the landing.

"No, he has never mentioned it. Why should he?" I said.

Hill did not answer my questions directly. "He doesn't seem to be doing very well with it," he remarked, hesitated, as if he were going to make some further explanation, and then nodded and went upstairs.

I remembered that little colloquy a few days later. I came in from the street and found Meares in the hall with his hat and overcoat on.

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"Going out?" I remarked cheerfully, and left the front door open.

"No, just come in," he said, and I wondered what he had been doing in the hall for the last minute or two. I had not seen him enter the house as I came up Keppel Street, and "73" was about half-way down from Tottenham Court Road.

"Miserable weather," was his next opening. He showed no sort of inclination to go on upstairs.

I agreed and waited; I could not shut my door in his face, and at last, although I did not want him, I asked him to come in and have tea.

He accepted gloomily, but after a time he cheered up and began to talk about Australia. He was not an articulate creature, but he interested me up to a point, and I was not, after all, particularly anxious to be alone with my thoughts.

And then he gradually drifted away from his unilluminating disquisitions on Australian scenery and people, into a more technical and far more graphic account of the country's mineral resources. He had been a miner all his life, he said, not only looking for gold, but also working for copper and tin in New South Wales and Queensland.

"I'm an expert, you see," he explained. "I was offered a job to go out and report on a property only a few days ago."

In my innocence I thought that ought to have cheered him up, and I asked him why he had not accepted it.

"I may still," he said. "It's hard luck on me, but I expect it'll come to that."

I suppose I looked my perplexity, for he threw his head back with the nearest approach to excitement I ever saw him exhibit, and said, "A man doesn't want to take

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on a job of that sort when he's got a property like I've got, spoiling to be developed."

"Oh! yes, I'd forgotten," I said. "I remember, now, Hill told me you had a mine of your own; but why . . ." I knew even less of mining properties than I did of politics.

Meares scratched his beard and looked at me with just a shade of amusement in his handsome brown eyes.

"It's not so easy for an Australian like me to raise money over here, Mr. Hornby," he said. "You see, I haven't got the gift of the gab, and I'm not used to the ways of these City sharks." He paused, shook his head solemnly and went on: "But it isn't only that, in this case. You see where it is, is that my scheme don't interest 'em overmuch. They're all on the gamble, the ones I've met, anyway. They want to float a company and sell my rights to the shareholders at a five hundred per cent. profit, and I'm not on for that kind of game."

"I'm afraid I'm very ignorant about things like this," I said. "Do explain it to me." I was really interested now, not so much in the man's business as in the man himself.

"Well, it's like this, Mr. Hornby," Meares explained. "All I want is to raise ten thousand pounds to work this mine. It's an opencast, alluvial deposit, you know—and there's none of those expenses of hydraulic or crushing machinery that run away with so much money in lode mining. Well, I won't bother you with that; the point is that these company-promoting sharks aren't on to put out money at a modest ten per cent., which is all I care to guarantee out of my property. They want to form a syndicate, buy the mine, and begin working, and then sell to a company."

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"And you won't do that?" I encouraged him.

"It wouldn't be straight dealing, Mr. Hornby, not in my opinion," Meares said quietly. "I don't pretend that we could show a decent profit on a capital of a couple of hundred thousand. I know that sort of thing's done every day; but it isn't my line."

"Couldn't you find a man to provide the money as an investment?" I asked.

"They want finding, Mr. Hornby," Meares said sadly. "I haven't got the right kind of introductions for that job."

I wanted to help him. I was entirely convinced of his sincerity. But I only knew one person in the world who had ten thousand pounds to invest, and even if I had been on speaking terms with my uncle, I should have hesitated to approach him on such an errand, however sure I might have been of Meares's good faith.

I was still puzzling over the problem, when someone tapped at the door and Mrs. Meares looked in.

"Oh! so you're there, are you?" she said, playfully reproving her husband. "I thought I saw you in the street, but when you didn't come upstairs, I supposed I must have been mistaken. And there have I been keepin' your tea waiting for over an hour."

"I met Mr. Hornby in the hall," Meares explained.

"Oh dear! Now I hope he hasn't been bothering you by talking about his business, Mr. Hornby," Mrs. Meares ran on, addressing me.

"I've been tremendously interested," I protested.

"Well, there's one thing he's never told you about it, I'm sure," Mrs. Meares said.

Meares rose to his feet with a slightly impatient frown. "Come now, Minnie," he expostulated.

"I *thought* not," she exclaimed triumphantly.

House-Mates

"Well, then, I'll tell you the truth about it, Mr. Hornby, and it's this—he's just nothing more nor less than a child over his old mine. He could sell his option to-morrow, if he liked; but no, he wants to work it himself, and nothing else 'll please him. Like a child with a toy, I tell him."

Meares was smiling apologetically.

"Oh! come now, Minnie," he repeated.

She tossed her head with a pretence of despair as she followed him out of the room.

I had quite a different feeling for the Meares after that incident. I could appreciate his personal interest in the mine, and I saw how that almost childish desire to own a mine and run it himself had lain underneath his bitterness against the "sharks," who only wanted to explôit the property, and cared nothing what became of it, after they had secured their profit. For him, the word "shark" had, I think, far more meaning than we commonly attach to it. His wife had told us the story of a horrible termination to a boat accident just outside Sydney harbour, and to both of them the shark was the personification of all that is greedy, brutal, inhuman. It was very evident that Meares had no intention of having his beloved mine bolted whole by one of that species.

And I admired also her tenderness for what some women in her position would have regarded as an almost criminal weakness. She was not ready to sacrifice him for the sake of a competence, and I liked her for that. She might make a joke of his foible, but I was sure that they were devoted to one another.

The Two Australians

6

I gave Hill my impressions the next evening. He came in about half-past nine, and I waylaid him in the hall, and brought him into my room.

He listened attentively to all I had to say, and then asked, "Did he invite you to put any money in his mine?"

"Lord no! Never suggested it," I said. "You don't suppose I've got ten thousand pounds to invest, do you?"

"No, I don't," Hill said; "but you might have five hundred."

"Not even that," I admitted. "But if I had, what would be the good of it?"

"I think Meares has some idea of making up a syndicate of small investors," Hill said.

I pondered that for a moment, and then asked Hill if he thought that I should not be well advised to trust Meares with, say, two hundred and fifty.

He looked, I fancied, rather uncomfortable. "How can I say?" he asked.

"You seemed inclined to warn me the other night," I reminded him.

"The point is," Hill said, suddenly warming to the discussion, "whether this property of his is any good. He believes it is; I don't doubt that, but he may be quite mistaken. . . . I've promised him a little, myself, but—well, I'm quite prepared never to see it again. And I advise you to go in in the same spirit, if you do go in. There's something about them makes me doubtful." He paused and looked at me with a frown. "You believe in them?" he asked.

"I like them," I returned.

"So do I," Hill said.

House-Mates

I meant to have told him then about Mrs. Meares's confusion after using the word "hinterland," but something put it out of my head at the moment, and I did not think of it again until the mystery had been explained by an agency that we certainly had never anticipated. Indeed, I temporarily forgot the Meares' existence when that period of six weeks, I indicated, was so wonderfully ended the next day.

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JUDITH

I

I HAVE never pretended that I was a bold lover. I do not, as a matter of fact, admire that type as I have observed it in my own experience. In fiction your bold lover is an unconvincing survival of such romantics as young Lochinvar; but in life I have only found him among the men with marked polygamistic tendencies—and I am a monogamist by instinct.

I can smile at myself now for boasting that I eventually met Judith half-way, but at the time I had to make a great effort to do a thing which seems ridiculously easy when I come to put it down.

I saw Judith and Miss Binstead go out together about eleven o'clock on the morning after my talk with Meares. They turned to the right, as they nearly always did now, and I only just caught sight of Judith's profile as she went down the steps.

I was a little more discouraged than usual by their careful avoidance of me, and I had great difficulty afterwards in concentrating my attention on the competition drawing I was engaged upon. Everything, even my chances of winning that competition, appeared so absolutely hopeless.

And then a little before twelve, Judith came back alone; and she came past my window. I was staring moodily out at the dull, grey street; but when I saw her

House-Mates

it was as if a curtain had been lifted. The aspect of everything was changed. The familiar houses opposite, the lamp-post that came into my view on the left, the dark, greasy surface of the asphalt roadway, fell suddenly into a pleasing composition; were sharpened up into an effective and beautiful background for the central figure of my picture.

And she looked up at me as she passed, not with a smile, but with a steady, rather anxious glance that held, I thought, a hint of pleading.

I felt that her expression was an invitation, and yet I hesitated to respond. Every detail of my first miserable mistake came up before me, recent and vivid as a bitter dream. And if I met her in the hall now, would she not find new cause to despise me? This might be a trap deliberately set by my enemy, Helen Binstead. I could imagine her dull, threatening voice saying, "He's only waiting for a chance to find you alone. Try it, dear. Give him the least encouragement and see if he won't insult you again."

I heard the click of the latchkey in the front door, but it was my thought of Helen Binstead rather than the desperate clutching at a late opportunity, that sent me across the room, with my pencil still in my hand. I was determined to lay the ghost of that old suspicion once and for all; to vindicate myself against the sinister suggestions of my enemy.

Even then I hesitated with my hand on the door, and when I opened it my despairing courage had evaporated, and I stood there, shamefaced and timid.

Judith was standing by the hall table, and I was instantly conscious of her again as the central figure of a picture. For the first time, the fading haze of blue that fell on the yellow varnished paper near the fanlight appeared to me as being quite a beautiful effect.

Judith

She looked at me bravely and yet, as it were, a little breathlessly.

"May I come in for a minute?" she asked; and the conventional disguise that I hastily assumed in moments of timidity instantly smothered me.

"Oh yes, please do!" I said.

She came in and stood by the table, with her back to the door that I had, almost ostentatiously, left open. And I further underlined my apology for that one gross boldness of mine by standing on the hearthrug, so that the table was between us and the way of escape clear behind her. If this were, indeed, a trap of Miss Binstead's, she should get no satisfaction out of it.

I could think of nothing to say. Her request to come into my room had startled me, and put our interview on some kind of formal footing. I was desperately considering topics for conversation, but all the polite openings seemed foolishly out of place. The weather, the theatre, Hill, the Meares, the approach of Christmas, were all so terrifyingly vacuous.

And Judith was looking down at her hands resting on the tablecloth, as if she, too, were quite unable to venture an orthodox politeness.

I was on the verge of asking her if she were going away for Christmas, when she spoke. She did not look up, and her voice was so low that I hardly heard her.

"I wanted to explain," she said.

I must have realised, then, that this was the opening for which I had been waiting, and that if I were ever to escape from the awful conventional reserve which hid me from her, I must seize my opportunity.

"There's nothing for *you* to explain," I said.

She looked up with a faint smile as if I had suddenly relieved her embarrassment.

"Oh, *that!*" she said, with a touch of contempt.

House-Mates

"Yes, but it was just that," I protested.

"Was it?" she asked.

"Well, what else could it have been?"

She shook her head and looked down again.

"I mean that that was what put Miss Binstead so much against me, in the first place," I went on. "I can't blame her, in a way. But if you know how I . . . I've kicked myself since. . . ."

"Of course, I know," she said. "I knew at once."

"Perhaps *you* did," I said. "But she has used it against me. I'm sure she has."

"Only quite at first," Judith said.

"But why? . . . Lately?" I asked. "Well, you never come down to Hill's room on Sunday mornings now, for one thing."

"That was what I wanted to explain," she said.

It seemed as if we had shared an understanding for months and were at last able to meet and explain ourselves. After that first terrible hesitation, we had leaped instantly into an immense confidence. We were talking with the easy elisions that indicate a tried intimacy. We had amazingly and instantly assumed that we had wanted to meet and had been kept apart.

"I wish you could," I said.

"Only it's so difficult—here," she almost whispered, and glanced quickly at my open door.

"Perhaps if we went for a walk," I suggested.

She seemed to weigh that proposition very doubtfully before she answered, and I waited, already thrilled by the sheer delight of anticipation.

"Where could we go?" she asked at last.

"Hampstead! The Heath, you know!" I replied.

"Oh yes," she agreed eagerly. "I have never been to Hampstead Heath."

Judith

2

We took the yellow 'bus from Tottenham Court Road to Pond Street, and I believe that during the slow ride our conversation dealt exclusively with means of transport. This was the route with which I was most familiar, and I found matter for all kinds of chatter concerning it. The various destinations of these outwardly similar, mustard-coloured 'buses figured quite entertainingly as a beginning. I hinted at the mysterious qualities of such unexplored places as "The Brecknock" and "Gospel Oak." I became informative about the means of distinguishing one "Camden Town" 'bus from another, and pointed out the plates with initials in the little forward windows below the driver's seat. "H. & V" was ours. "There's one coming now," I explained, "Hampstead and Victoria, and that one, 'K T & V.' is Kentish Town and Victoria. They all go to Victoria, except one, that's 'A T & P,' Adelaide Tavern and Pimlico."

That topic went very well for a time, and then we discussed the future of the motor-omnibus. I had actually seen one, not running, it is true, but looking very imposing, laid up against the kerb at Hyde Park Corner in a backwater near the Triumphal Arch, waiting for something to take it home. We were not optimistic about the future of motor-'buses.

My third string, the new Tube that was building from Charing Cross to Golders Green—a place that needed explaining to Judith—completed the journey for us, and after that I had to play cicerone as we explored the Heath. We went up the esplanade, by the ponds, and then along the cycle track over the bridge, cutting across at the back of the untidy Vale of Health into the Spaniards Road.

House-Mates

And always we talked superficialities; postponing that promised "explanation" as if it were something that we were afraid to approach.

We sat down, finally, on that comparatively retired bench under the firs, looking out over the fall in the ground towards the Heath Extension and what was presently to be the new Garden Suburb.

It was a dull, threatening day, muggy and still, and we had the place to ourselves.

I had dropped my stream of chatter, and although a very obvious silence fell upon us after we sat down, I made no attempt to break it. I was content to sit there for a time and then return with Judith to Keppel Street. I had been forgiven; I had, indeed, been granted a wonderful mark of favour; and all I desired at the moment was to prove that I had no intention of encroaching upon the privileges I had been offered. I had temporarily lost all my jealousy of Helen Binstead. I believed that she was no longer an obstacle.

Judith's first words brought me back to realities with an unpleasant jerk.

"Of course, you don't understand Helen a bit," she remarked thoughtfully.

The reaction jolted me out of my pose of demure humility.

"Oh, bother Helen!" I said.

"Aren't you going to let me explain?" she asked, staring out over the path-threaded maze of gorse and furze below us. In any other place we should surely have found some colour in the prospect, but here the whole landscape was done in greys, like a very faintly warmed study in lamp-black.

"Is it all about Miss Binstead?" I commented, rather bitterly.

Judith

"Why do you dislike her so much?" Judith asked.
"I want to know."

"I suppose it's because she dislikes me so much," I said. "She always has. Don't you remember how she went for me that first Sunday up in Hill's room?"

"It's all so silly," Judith said gravely.

"I dare say," was my moody response.

"And you can't give any other reason for disliking her?"

"I'll give you a reason if you can explain her aversion from me," I hazarded.

A just perceptible warmth crept into her face; it was as if she faced and reflected the pink stain of sunset.

"Of course, she's just as silly," she said.

"But why?" I insisted. I saw that I could hold a splendid advantage by pressing that question.

She very slightly shrugged her shoulders and then began to take off her little brown kid gloves—a purely nervous action that satisfied her craving for some meticulous occupation. She scrupulously tweaked the fingers of the left hand in turn until the glove slid away, then she laid it in her lap and repeated the operation with the other hand.

"She's jealous of you," she said gravely, bending over her intriguing operation. "It sounds ridiculous, I know; but then she and I aren't friends in quite the ordinary way. It's something bigger than that. You see, she came into my life like—oh! like the sun coming out of a fog. You can't guess what life with my aunts was like. All the restraints . . . about the way one Sat and Looked and Walked! And I felt it more at Barmouth than at home, because there were other people there who were just jolly and ordinary. In Cheltenham we only knew the people who thought exactly as my aunts did about everything."

House-Mates

She had forgotten her gloves for a moment, and she looked at me for the first time since we had sat down, as she went on with a little perplexed frown :

"I suppose it's hardly possible for you to realise the sort of life I led there?"

"Oh, I can," I said with conviction. "You see, my father was in the Church, and my mother was very pious . . . in that particular way."

She shook her head. "But it must have been quite, quite different for you," she returned. "You went to school and to your office. You could get away sometimes. I couldn't—never for a moment."

Mrs. Mearés's comment occurred to me. "And yet you don't look like a rebel," I said.

She smiled. "What does a rebel look like?" she asked.

"Well, more impetuous," I suggested.

"But I'm a very serious rebel," she said, and her earnest grey eyes were full of light and colour. "That's the worst kind, isn't it?" she added, still smiling.

I had no idea. I was thinking that her face was so absolutely "right." I cannot find another word. It is the word that we always used in the office as the conclusive mark of approval. When a thing was "right" it was beyond criticism. And from the first moment I had seen Judith, that was the only satisfying term I had found for her.

I suppose she guessed something of what was in my mind, for she looked away and returned to the business of her gloves. I watched her hands with the same sense of satisfaction that I had had in the contemplation of her eyes. Her hands were "right," too; not very small, and certainly not dimpled, but white and firm and steady.

Judith

"If I weren't a rebel I shouldn't be here," she remarked after a pause.

I misunderstood that. "But I'm not blaming you," I began.

"I mean here, now, on this bench, this morning," she interrupted me, and patted the bench as if to make her ultimate meaning quite plain to my dull intelligence.

"Do you mean that you've rebelled against Miss Binstead, too?" I asked too eagerly.

"Oh, *not* like that," she said impatiently.

I frowned at the furze bushes like a snubbed schoolboy.

"Can't you understand how fond I am of Helen?" she asked.

"No," I said sulkily; and in my thought I framed all my indictment of Miss Binstead's character and appearance.

Judith sighed. "Then we might just as well go home," she said, and began to put on her gloves.

I gave way at once. My fear of losing her far outweighed my inclination to make a martyr of myself by sulking.

"You said that you'd explain," I said, "and you haven't. You might at all events give me the chance of understanding."

"I can't explain *that*," she returned. "One isn't fond of a person because they're—well, good-looking or clever—at least sometimes one is, perhaps, but there are *other* reasons . . . reasons you can't quite understand yourself."

I accepted the evasion with a passing wonder if it were possible that Miss Binstead looked "right" to Judith. "What was it about then, your explanation?" I asked.

House-Mates

"I want you and Helen to try being nice to each other," she said.

"Did she know that you were going to speak to me?" I asked.

"Yes! We had a sort of quarrel about it this morning," Judith said, and came at last, I think, to the real essential of her long deferred explanation. "You see," she went on, "I'm not . . . I don't want to exchange one sort of slavery for another. I didn't run away for that. And I can't allow even Helen to dictate to me about who I'm to know." She paused and faced me suddenly as if she meant to anticipate my too hopeful inference.

"It's not particularly because it's *you*," she said. "It might be anybody."

"I quite understand that," I said solemnly. "But even if I were willing to be 'nice' to Miss Binstead, would she . . . ?"

"She'll have to," Judith said, and gave me a satisfying glimpse of the different methods her diplomacy was taking.

"Well, I'll certainly try," I agreed.

That compact seemed to terminate a period of confidence. Behind all Judith's girlishness and the queer timidities that were the result of her five years in Cheltenham, she showed, even in those days, the strong, firm mould of her own natural character. And that steadiness which I instinctively worshipped in her now put and held me at the level of a friend. Her manner gave me clearly to understand that our acquaintance would, in future, go in the key of her acquaintance with Hill, or Herz, or Mrs. Meares. I had been peculiarly favoured inasmuch as she had made this deliberate approach in face of Helen's violent disapproval, but now that I had been given to understand in one drastic

Judith

sentence that it was not because it was *me*, that it might have been anybody, she could feel at ease again.

We talked of the Heath for a minute or two, and then the rain that had been threatening so long materialised in a misty drizzle, and we made our way back by the Whitestone Pond into Heath Street and had lunch together at the Express Dairy.

I looked up at Ken Lodge as we passed, but I saw no one at the windows, and I did not say anything to Judith of my association with the place.

After lunch we walked back despite the drizzle, down Rosslyn Hill and Haverstock Hill to the corner of Adelaide Road. Our journey ended as it had begun with a discussion of London's communications. The hoarding at the corner of Adelaide Road marked, a policeman told us, the site of one of the borings for the new Tube Railway; and as I had recently read an article in the *Builder* dealing with the method of driving the tubes, I expounded the theory to Judith. She appeared to listen with a highly intelligent interest, but some corner of her mind must have been engaged in debating her own problems, for as we turned into Keppel Street, she stopped me in the middle of a sentence and said without the least relevance:

"Will you ask us to come and have tea with you on Friday? Helen and me and, perhaps, Mrs. Hargreave or the Meares?"

"Better not Mrs. Hargreave or the Meares," I said. "If there is to be any chance of a better understanding between Miss Binstead and me, we are more likely to get to it if we are alone."

"Perhaps you're right," she agreed; and then, as we reached the door of "73," she looked up at me with a friendly smile and said, "You're very quick at taking things in."

House-Mates

That was the only praise I had had from her, but found it very stimulating. Something in her voice and smile had definitely approved me, and I was pleased as a child that has been praised by its mother.

"I'll send a note up by the maid," I said as we parted in the hall.

3

Helen Binstead surprised me considerably at the little entertainment of mine. I had not realised that I had previously seen her always under the influence of a particular mood; and I had allowed nothing for her ability as an actress. I had anticipated a gloomy, resentful attitude, a grudging admission that she and I were temporarily compelled by circumstances to tolerate one another's unpleasant company; and I was quite unprepared for her greeting.

She came into the room with her head up, and the general appearance of being willing to make amends for that completely deceived me.

"Judith has decided that you and I are to be friends, Mr. Hornby," she said, holding out her hand.

"I don't know why we shouldn't be," I replied, and shook hands with her willingly enough.

I was so relieved that I had almost entirely forgot how much I had disliked her. I had seen so many difficulties and had wondered whether I could bring myself to pretend friendliness for her in the face of the snubbing I had thought was certainly in store for me. And now that I found her prepared to meet me half-way, I rated myself as having been suspicious and evil-minded.

"I'm sure it was all a mistake," she said.

I did not defend myself. "Quite a natural mistake on your part," I returned.

Judith

I felt a sudden glow of liking for her; and found for the first time that I might be able to understand her. Until now a possible misconstruction of her every action had leaped to my mind whenever I thought of her, and no sympathy had been possible; but the curious feeling of warmth that came with the relief of my reaction brought me a consciousness of release. I was glad that I had been wrong.

I have often thanked Heaven since then for my ingenuousness on that occasion. I could never have assumed that air of friendliness which now was the natural expression of my feeling, and the only weapon that I could have effectively used to defeat Helen's elaborate scheme of defence of the precious thing she would not share with me or with anyone. Judith knew that I was honest in my attempt at reciprocity, and it mattered nothing that Helen still believed me a fraud. She was as prejudiced as I had been, and she could find no excuse for me and no sign of any virtue. Hate is always blind; often to its own destruction.

But certainly she assumed an admirable air of letting bygones be bygones. And if I noticed, now and again, something a little theatrical, a little overdone in her protestations, I attributed it to self-consciousness. She must, I thought, be feeling, as I was, ashamed of her past suspicions.

Over the tea-table we found a tolerable subject in the discussion of the theatre. I was a neophyte, and she had a lot of information concerning the ways of stage life. I listened with real interest, and Judith was content to remain in the background.

Her attitude, indeed, was the only thing that puzzled me. I thought she would be delighted at the wonderful conciliation she had effected, but she seemed, I fancied, anxious and worried, and strangest of all, for

House-Mates

her, a trifle restless. And it was she who broke up the party much earlier than I judged to be necessary.

4

For three or four weeks after my tea-party the little community of 73 Keppel Street appeared to have achieved a perfectly happy relation in its social intercourse. We abandoned Hill's room as a Sunday morning meeting-place, and everyone came downstairs to my more spacious and convenient apartment. I remember that on one Sunday—a week before Christmas—Christmas Day fell on a Monday that year—we had a full assembly of all the lodgers, with the one exception of Miss Whiting.

She had not been excluded deliberately. Mrs. Hargreave had once definitely invited her to join us, but the invitation had been firmly refused. I believe, as a matter of fact, that Miss Whiting was in funds that winter. She was often away from the house for a week or more at a time, and when she stayed there her conduct was irreproachable. When she went out in the evening, she was home soon after eleven o'clock, and always alone. Mrs. Hargreave explained the refusal to join our community on Sunday mornings by attributing it to a fear of our attitude.

"She can't trust you to treat her as a human being," Mrs. Hargreave said.

Perhaps she was right in drawing that inference, but I think Miss Whiting had other reasons for declining to meet us on terms of friendship.

I look back on that quiet period now with some regret and a little wonder. I feel regret because it seems to me that, despite the innate tendencies which were presently to destroy us, we really achieved a happy

Judith

human relation to each other. My wonder is due to the reflection that I should have been able to find pleasure in such a relation at that time. Less than three months earlier I was a solitary, proud of my isolation. I would not look out of the window when Herz was passing because I feared the beginnings of social intercourse with the other lodgers in the house. Some very essential change must certainly have been worked in me during that first month in Keppel Street. Hill deserves some credit as the agent of the magician, but Hill was only an agent.

He was away for Christmas, as were also Mrs. Hargreave, Lippmann, and Herz—the two latter went home to Germany; but the Meares, Helen, Judith and I had a festival at Simpson's. The Meares chose the rendezvous; they insisted on a real English Christmas dinner.

I had anticipated some offer of reconciliation from Ken Lodge, but none came; and I decided that my uncle had been hopelessly offended by my quarrel with the curly Blake. I never expected Gladys to notice me again; she would think I despised her, and contempt was a thing she could not endure. But I had certainly looked forward to some offer of reconciliation from my uncle.

And the complete disregard of my existence evidenced by his omission of any Christmas greeting, was certainly a factor in my decision to invest in the Meares enterprise. I had been paid for Parkinson's job, but I had no other decently remunerative work in sight—my casual contributions to the technical journals were not well paid, and I looked upon them more as an advertisement than as a possible source of income. It is true that my competition drawings were nearly finished, and that there was always a Hope, but I

House-Mates

counsed very little on that. I knew now, when it was too late, that I had taken a bad line with my plan from the beginning. I had not been at my best when I began those drawings. So it chanced that the first serious doubts as to my financial future coincided with the temptation to plunge.

Meares was more cheerful about that time. By some means or another he had obtained promises of various sums that were now mounting up towards the desiderated £10,000 he had named as the lowest possible capital he required to work his mine; but, at the same time, he admitted, with a hint of chagrin, that he had been compelled to forsake his original plan.

"You see, it's like this, Mr. Hornby," he said one evening in my rooms about a week after Christmas, "you can't very well ask a man to invest four or five hundred pounds at ten per cent. It isn't worth his while."

"Then what's the idea now?" I asked.

"It amounts to forming a syndicate, Mr. Hornby," he said very seriously. "I propose to start the mines, and when we're turning out the stuff, sell the original shares to a bigger company with the condition that I remain in as general manager on the spot."

"And the difference is?" I suggested.

"Well, either the members of the syndicate get their money back in six months with a bonus of two hundred per cent., or they can take up shares in the new company to the extent of four times their original holding."

Perhaps he still saw some marks of perplexity on my face, for he dropped into the personal application that finally settled me.

"Well, for instance, Mr. Hornby, you put five hundred into this preliminary company," he went on

Judith

"you or anybody, of course; and when we form the larger company in six months' time, you have the option of selling your interest for fifteen hundred cash or taking up two thousand pound shares in the new company."

I had not five hundred pounds to spare, but I do not remember wincing when I wrote out a cheque for half that sum. Meares asked me to leave the actual payment over until all his promises were obtained and he could realise the full amount he wanted; but I preferred to complete the transaction on the spot. He gave me an elaborately formal receipt, and begged me not to regard myself as finally committed.

"We've been like friends here, if I may say so," he said with a touch of emotion, "and I'd like to treat this transaction as between friends. What I mean to say is, Mr. Hornby, if you change your mind any time between now and the registration of the syndicate, don't hesitate to say so. This money's ready for you any time you want it."

"Oh! that's all right, old chap," I said genially.

I believe I had a feeling that my two hundred and fifty pounds might begin to increase from the moment it was in Meares's hands, and I foresaw already that in six months' time that increase might be urgently needed.

Without giving the transaction reasonable consideration, I accepted Meares's optimistic mention of six months as a definite time limit, and mentally reckoned my resources no farther than the middle of July. But meanwhile I thought out material for two more technical articles, and entered for the next competition I saw advertised. I received the particulars before I had completed the set of drawings I was then engaged upon.

House-Mates

5

I must confess that I find it very difficult to give anything like a consecutive account of my life throughout that critical month of January, 1906. The general election that returned the Liberals to power with such a tremendous majority, appears now to be the most incidental affair. And yet it certainly affected me; even vitally.

I remember going down to the Embankment with Hill to see the results go up on a big screen, erected, I think, on or very near the offices of the *Daily Mail*; and I see myself there as a very perplexed Wilfred Hornby, a little dazed by his detachment from the emotion of the crowd.

But that election and the conversations I had with Hill broke my automatic acceptance of the Conservative tradition, although I never became a Liberal. When I escaped from my mechanical reservations concerning party government, I came directly out into the freedom of one who owes no allegiance to either side.

Yet at the time I did not realise that I was extending my liberty.

But all the outside influences of that January were coloured by my relations with Judith.

6

Our movement towards friendship was infinitely slow during the weeks that immediately followed our talk by the "Spaniards." We were never alone together, and when we met in the company of Helen, Judith always seemed to me to be nervous and constrained. She used to watch Helen with a look that I felt was in some way doubtful and uneasy, and she treated me on many

Judith

occasions with a definite coldness that I was sure was a mere assumption; adopted, perhaps, to modify Helen's marked air of comradeship.

And that, also, was a thing I could not understand. For the Helen I saw, after our reconciliation at my tea-party, was a new person altogether. She no longer scowled and brooded when I was with her; on the contrary, she singled me out for special attention. During our Sunday gatherings she would ask me questions about the architecture of London or about art in general; questions that appealed to my authority as a specialist and gave me control of the conversation. She flattered me, in fact, by "drawing me out," as she might have phrased it, by the interest of her attention to my opinion.

I accepted it all in good faith, and responded without effort to her overtures. I believed that she was trying to make amends for her former misjudgment of me, and I did my best to convey that I, too, had been at fault. I lost my mistrust of the quality of the relations between her and Judith; and came to believe that Helen might be made an ally.

I was not surprised when she came down alone to my sitting-room for the first time one morning, a few days after Christmas. I had been hoping to find some opportunity for a greater frankness than was possible in the presence of any third person, and when she knocked at my door and came in with the excuse of wanting to borrow a book, I jumped to the conclusion that she also had felt the necessity for an apology or, at least, an explanation.

Perhaps I was over-anxious to make a show of welcoming her on that occasion, for she was evidently nervous, selected a book hurriedly, thanked me with a queer little mincing smile, and retreated before I had

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time to begin any sort of general conversation. I thought that she had perhaps meant to make a full explanation of her old animosity, and that her courage had failed her when she found herself alone with me.

But two or three days later she came down again to exchange her book; and this time she stayed longer. After the new book had been chosen, she went over to my board and began to ask me about my work. I had the block plan of my new competition laid down, and as there were several separate buildings to be arranged on a rather awkward site, I had cut out the ground plans of my several blocks in stiff paper to try the effects of their various relations to each other, and the frontage and the fall of the ground.

“ Oh! what are all those funny little things? ” Helen asked. “ They look like little beetles. ”

I explained as well as I could, but she continually interrupted me with irrelevant questions about such things as the use of my set squares or spring-bow compasses; and she had an unnatural way of looking at me with a sort of archness that made me feel vaguely uncomfortable. It was impossible to approach any serious understanding while she looked at me like that. I attributed it all to nervousness, and wondered whether her earlier manner might not have been partly attributable to the same cause. If my own feelings were any test, that explanation was certainly the correct one. I found myself inexplicably uncomfortable and ill at ease when I was alone with her.

And it was this very uneasiness that precipitated the extraordinary situation which finally altered all our attitudes and cleared away the uncertainties if not the jealousies that so complicated any intercourse between Helen and myself. I was annoyed by my own ineptitude,

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and when she came down for the third time, I desperately attempted to achieve some confidence of manner.

I realised some change in her appearance when she entered the room and saw almost at once that she had dressed her hair in a new way. She had quite remarkable hair, but she usually dressed it so badly, screwing and plaiting it into a kind of tight helmet, that I had hardly noticed it until then. Now I saw it must be very abundant, if a little coarse in texture, and that there was much more colour in it than I had supposed; I found veins of deep red browns here and there, almost the tone of old mahogany.

I essayed a lighter note at once by commenting on the improvement.

"Why don't you always wear your hair like that?" I asked. "You've never done it justice before."

She had come into the room; then, and was leaning against the end of the table, her hands gripping the edge. She had a very passable figure, and she looked, I thought, almost handsome—only the dead slate-blue of her eyes and the untidy coarseness of her eyebrows still repelled me.

She showed a passing shade of emotion when I praised her. Something that might have been fear or disgust came into her expression for a moment, and then she appeared to rally herself and said, again with that detestable suggestion of archness:

"How quick you are to notice things!"

"It makes such a tremendous difference in you," I said, still struggling to achieve a light, easy touch.

"Does it?" she asked. "I'm glad you think it's an improvement."

I accepted that as a tribute to my supposed powers of artistic perception.

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"It seems such a pity," I said, "that women should not be as beautiful as they can."

She looked down, and a dark flush crept up under her rather sallow skin.

"I suppose," she said, "that a woman wants to—
have some object."

"Doesn't Miss Carrington prefer your hair done like that?" I asked.

"Oh! yes," she said, "but—but, well! Judging approval isn't everything, is it?"

I thought it was, but I was still trying to propitiate Helen in the vain hope of establishing some kind of sincerity between us.

"What other approval do you want?" I asked.
"The applause of the multitude?"

She shook her head, stammered something I could not hear, and then changed the conversation by saying

"You do work very hard, don't you?"

"It's that competition I showed you a few days ago," I said. "It means a lot of work."

"You sit up to all hours," she went on quietly, taking no notice of my explanation. "The lights are always a light in here when we come back from the theatre."

"I generally go to bed about twelve," I remarked.

"Do you work on the evening?" was her next question.

"Sometimes," I said.

She was embarrassing me again: looking at me with that expression which in other women I might have called coquettish. But no interpretation never occurred to me in connection with Helen; I only thought that she was still foolishly nervous. I wished she would return to her earlier treatment of me; that, at least, would give me a chance to speak frankly.

Judith

"Judith is going without me this evening," she said, and looked down again.

"Oh!" was all the comment I found to make on that statement.

"She's taking Mrs. Meares to the St. James'," she explained.

"Is she?" I said.

"So I shall be all alone," she went on.

I had no idea what she was trying to suggest, but I felt that I must say something. "Oh, well, so shall I," I returned, with an affectation of gaiety. "Grinding away at these infernal drawings, I suppose."

"—seems a pity—" she began, and stopped abruptly.

"Nothing else to do," I said, pretending disgust.

That dark flush had come back to her cheeks and she seemed to be struggling with some speech she could not bring herself to utter.

"Oh well," she broke out suddenly, "I'm interrupting you—*now*."

She went off quickly, without speaking again, and without taking the book she had presumably come to fetch.

7

The house seemed to me unusually quiet and empty that evening. Possibly a large proportion of its occupants chanced to be out, and my feeling may have been justified. But the true reason of my consciousness of a deserted dwelling was the knowledge that Judith was away.

She had never been down to my rooms after dinner and I had only once met her elsewhere in the house during the evening. But I loved to know that she was there, near to me. When I knew that she was away,

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felt as if the key of all life had suddenly dropped a third; as if the motive had changed from a brave challenging march to the weary steadiness of a persistent minor.

It was a little after ten when I heard a cautious step on the long, straight flight of stairs that led down to the hall. I was reading with my back to the table, by the light of a lamp I had brought from our house in the North End Road. I preferred an oil lamp for reading; the gas at "73" was very unsteady. I thought at first that the step must be that of Herz, who had a habit of going out to post letters at midnight; and even when I heard my door being quietly opened I still fancied that it might be the little German come to borrow note-paper or stamps.

I looked round with a touch of impatience, but the lamp was directly between me and the door, and all I could see was the shining of some pale drapery just over my horizon of the table's edge.

I jumped to my feet, already a trifle startled by that apparition, to find Helen in a long white dressing-gown, with her hair streaming over her shoulders and down to her waist.

She shut the door definitely behind her and stared at me.

"I've come," she said.

Even then I did not guess. I asked her to come in and sit down. I was finding excuses for her; telling myself that she had undressed before she found that she had nothing to read, and that she had hurried down to fetch the book she had forgotten in the morning; and, further, that her association with the stage must be allowed for—this visit of hers was no doubt typical of the freedoms that obtain in the theatrical profession. I could find plenty of excuses for her visit in that attire, but I could not persuade the stiff, formal mind of the old

Judith

Wilfred Hornby who still lived with me; and when she came and sat down opposite to me in the other arm-chair, my prevailing desire was to be rid of her as soon as possible.

"You've come for your book?" I said, and tried, perhaps with a grotesque distortion of my intention, to appear at ease.

"Oh yes, of course for my book," she echoed in a little hurrying voice. "That will do, won't it?"

I had been standing by the table since she entered the room, and I walked across to the bookcase. I knew that I could show a more convincing appearance of ease if I did not look at her.

"Let me see, what did you take last?" I asked, crouching down over the bookcase.

"Oh, does it matter? Anything!" she said.

"Anything?" I returned. "Well, Gwilt's 'Encyclopædia of Architecture,' for instance?"

"Anything that will do for an excuse," she said.

I must have been very near illumination then, for a sudden rigour of cold nervousness overtook me; but I was hunting explanations again, and evaded the truth a few moments longer.

I came back to my chair with the book still unfound.

"An excuse?" I repeated. "Wasn't it that you really wanted?"

She shook her head, and her mouth was set and her jaw rigid as if she were clenching her teeth. Then she turned her profile to me and stretched out her hands to the fire.

I had missed or misinterpreted a dozen clear indications, and it may seem strange that I should have leapt instantly to realisation at a sight that might so easily have borne another construction.

But when I saw that the hands she had stretched

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out were trembling, that her arms and her whole body were trembling, that if she had not so rigidly locked her teeth they would certainly have chattered, I knew beyond all further shadow of doubt that she had come to offer herself in order to save Judith.

I had reason enough for anger, but I felt none. I understood now not only how she had played and pretended with me, but also the flat insult of her estimate of my character. She had believed that I was a creature to be tempted by the prospect of any sensual emotion; that I was the indiscriminate woman-hunter she had judged me to be at our first meeting. And yet, my only feeling for her was one of great pity, of commiseration, of a desire to save her from committing herself.

"Don't you think you had better go now?" I asked clumsily.

Her trembling stopped at once, and she looked round at me with a quick suspicion in her dull eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

I was hardly less nervous than she was, and my excuse was heavily inept.

"I'm rather tired to-night," I said. "I have been swatting away at that bally competition until I can hardly keep my eyes open. In fact, I believe I was actually asleep when you came down. . . ."

I should have gone blundering on, but she cut me short by saying:

"Perhaps you don't understand?"

I saw, then, how desperate she was; how she had stiffened herself, and allowed this one mad idea to dominate her until its realisation seemed her only possible means of relief.

I do not know what sudden emotion prompted the reply that came to me, but I believe that no consideration could have bettered it.

Judith

"I understand how prejudiced you are, how unjust you are to me," I said, and I jumped out of my chair and began to pace the length of the room. "You're blind," I went on; "blind to everything but your jealousy. You're not fair, you're not the least reasonable. Yes! I *have* got a grievance. I've tried to be fair to you, and you've shut your eyes and clenched your teeth and determined with all your might to hate me whatever happened. You're not the only person who has a right to love Judith. . . ."

"*You've* no right, anyway," she interrupted me.

"Why not?" I asked angrily. "Why not? Why haven't I?"

"Everyone knows the sort of man *you* are," she said.

She was standing up now, facing me with a timid defiance. I could see that she was afraid of the sound of her own words, and yet she was braced to an immense effort.

"That's absolute rot!" I said boyishly.

She clutched the table and watched me with the desperate courage of the trapped animal putting out its last great effort.

"I know," she said. "I know about you and Miss Whiting. You were in her room before that row began. You're the sort of man who ought to be—exterminated."

I had begun to smile before she reached the end of that accusation, and I think my confidence unexpectedly broke her. She gulped and put her hand to her throat as she came to her weak ending; and before I had time to make any reply she burst into violent hysterics.

I stood there like a fool, fairly beaten now, afraid to touch her, afraid to speak; and she swayed and rocked and cried noisily with great hiccoughing gasps that made me feel physically sick. Something within me

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pitied her and yearned to console and reassure her, but the physical interposed between us. I felt unable to approach her. It was as if my spirit lamented but my body refused any kind of response. I tried to overcome and could not overcome, my awful repugnance at that dishevelled figure with its horrible retching, maniacal cries; even though I knew that her spirit also stood back, bewildered and grieved, from the clumsy instrument of the flesh.

I stood stock-still like a foolish automaton, and the struggle within myself reeled backwards and forwards and found no expression. . . .

But after an immeasurable period of time, it seemed as if the storm had swept through her. She dropped to her knees and crossing her arms on the table, hid her face in them. She was almost quiet, now, but ever and again a great sob heaved and broke like a renewed gush of water through an emptying conduit.

I had a sense of returning peace, even before she spoke.

"I was so . . . so," she gasped without moving her head, and then one of those great gulping sobs broke her sentence, and for a moment I hardly understood the whispered "afraid" that followed like the little voice of a distant priest down the remoteness of the abruptly silent nave.

"Afraid?" I said, and my voice sounded harsh and loud. "Surely you weren't afraid of Me?"

She looked up, and then dragged herself to her feet. All the emotion was drained out of her, but something of her original resolution still showed in her brooding eyes.

Her voice sounded flat and tired as she answered me.

"Yes, of you," she said. "If you're not that kind of man, why did you insult us at the beginning?"

Judith

I sighed, considering the hopelessness of any reasonable explanation.

"I didn't know," I said lamely.

She seemed to stare at that without understanding it, and then she said, in the same dull voice :

"Suppose it had been Judith to-night instead of me?"

I forgot my pity for her when she said that. There was something infinitely revolting to me in her suggestion.

"Good Lord! What a beast you must be!" I said. "Judith! Can't you see that she is the most sacred and most wonderful person in the world? Is that all your pretended love comes to?" My impetuosity choked me.

"I only wanted to save her," she said, with the first hint of personal defence. "I don't care how much *you* despise me. You can think anything you like about me." Her voice trailed out into the dreariness of sheer apathy, and she took a couple of limping steps towards the door. I was sorry for her again, but I could find no convincing expression of my sympathy. I thought that she was going at last, but when she had reached the door she seemed to realise the threat of her failure, and turned round with, perhaps, a final wondering hope that everything was not absolutely lost.

"You're quite sure?" she asked simply.

"Oh, how can you be so silly?" I replied as gently as I could.

"And, of course, you'll tell Judith all about it?" she continued.

"I certainly shall not," I said.

"Why not? You'd better!" she returned. "She'd hate me for it, probably. She doesn't care for me now as much as she used to."

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"I shan't say a word to anybody," I said.

"Not even to clear your own character?" she persisted, returning to that stubborn suspicion of me which she was never able completely to conquer.

"That's merely silly," I said.

She sighed miserably as she went out. I heard her slow, dejected footsteps tediously climbing the stairs.

8

All that scene between Helen and myself had a strange air of unreality when I reflected on it next morning. I felt as if I had witnessed it from a distance, as if I had played no part in it myself. My thought of it had the same quality as my thought of the moonlight walk with the little doctor on the night of my father's death. On that occasion, also, the physical presentation of myself had been cut adrift from the emotional, and I had found no possibility of uniting them.

I had been so reserved, so detached, so inarticulate. The more I pondered my own part in the affair, the more clearly I realised that I had been acting, and that the actress Helen had been moved by genuine, spontaneous impulses. I had admired her effort even when I had been most repelled; but in the morning I found her attempted sacrifice perfectly heroic. She had dared so much, and her motive had been so disinterested.

For, thinking over the whole thing that morning, I could only come to the conclusion that she must have taken account of the possibility that if her mad plan succeeded she might lose Judith's friendship. She had certainly been prepared to risk that issue. "You'd better tell Judith," she had said; "she'll hate me for it, probably." And I could only infer that she would

Judith

have counted that loss as bearable if she could know at the same time that Judith had been saved-- from Me.

I began very seriously to doubt whether I were not some kind of horror that ought, as Helen had said, to be exterminated.

What would happen next I had no idea, but I was cheered by the certainty that some rearrangement must follow last night's drama. My general feeling was that Helen, having failed, would cease to stand between me and Judith. I imagined her dropping to a relative unimportance, and I was sincerely sorry for her. I made foolish plans in which Judith and I recompensed Helen for all the suffering she had brought upon herself by her wrongheaded estimate of me.

Two possibilities I never considered. The first was that Judith would be told of what Helen had attempted; the second was that Helen might misrepresent the facts. I trusted her honesty, with a really touching simplicity. . . .

Little Pferdinger popped in about twelve o'clock. I remembered afterwards that he had an unusual air of resolution in his bearing, but I scarcely noticed it at the time. I had settled down in dead earnest to my work after the distractions of the early morning, and I turned upon him, pettishly, with a curt "Well, what is it?"

His left eye immediately intimated that it intended to take no part in the interview, and then the little man himself also appeared willing to cancel the imperiousness of his entrance.

"You are occupied?" he said.

"Yes," I replied.

"So!" he said. "It vill vait," and went without another word.

I heard him go upstairs, wondered vaguely for a moment what he was up to, and then lost myself again

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in my work. I meant to make no mistake about my plan for this new competition.

I think it must have been nearly an hour later when Hill came in.

I glanced at him over my shoulder, and waved my hand towards the fireplace. "In one minute!" I said.

But he would not take that hint. He came over to my board and put his hand on my arm. "Look here, Hornby," he said, "what the devil have you been up to?"

I stared at him abstractedly, and saw in that instant the ideal arrangement of my plan I had so wilfully missed during the last two hours.

"Been up to?" I repeated automatically, and made a brief note of my inspiration on the side of my drawing.

"If you don't mean to tell me, say so!" Hill went on sternly. "Don't play the fool and pretend."

I came out of my preoccupation then and stared at him.

"I just wanted to get this thing right," I said. "What is it you want to know?"

"I want to know if there's any truth in the confounded row little Pferdinger has been making about you and Helen?" he demanded.

"What?" I said. I was completely staggered for the moment. If Hill had suddenly smacked my face I could not have been more disconcerted.

Hill frowned. "I can't believe . . ." he began.

"Well, of course not," I said. "But tell me what he has been saying, anyhow, and to whom?"

"To Helen and Judith in the first instance," Hill said. "He was foaming and bullying up there until Judith, apparently, turned him out; and then he came down to me full of virtue and tremendously injured."

"And his story is?" I interposed.

Judith

"That Helen came to you here last night between ten and eleven in her nightdress and with her hair down, stayed with you an hour, and—well, he added some very distressing details of his observations on your conduct. He could not see anything, he admits, but he heard—unusual sounds; and his description of Helen's return to her own room was graphic beyond the powers of *his* imagination."

"Oh, Hell!" was my only comment; I could think of nothing else to say.

"You don't mean to say that it's true, Hornby?" Hill said, with a note of something like grief in his voice.

"The facts are; not the interpretation," I said.

I am glad to remember that Hill believed me without the necessity for any further protestation on my part.

"You will have to find an interpretation to stop Pferdminger's talk," was all he said.

"Which won't-be so easy," I remarked.

I thought furiously for a few seconds, and then I went on: "Of course you know that Helen disliked me?"

Hill nodded. "She's jealous of you," he said. "I told you that months ago."

"Well, all that matters," I continued, "is that she came down last night to have it out with me. The nightdress was a dressing-gown, as a matter of fact. She came, I suppose, on the inspiration of the moment. And we had the very devil of a row, which ended in hysterics on her part. I'll admit that she made some very queer noises about that time."

"I understand," Hill said, "but Pferdminger won't."

"He must," I said, and rang the bell furiously.

Pferdminger answered it himself. He came in with a pretence of bluster, but flying his usual signal of nervousness.

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"Shut the door!" I snapped at him. I realised at once that I could do what I liked with him, and I felt in a mood to bully.

"You've come up here to apologise," I said, and stared fiercely at his attentive eye.

"Apologise? No!" he returned.

I gave him no opportunity to work up his indignation.

"You have come to apologise," I repeated, "or take the consequences. You've been spreading a grossly impertinent libel about me and Miss Binstead, and now you are going to confess that you are a meddling, eaves-dropping little liar. Do you understand?"

"I haf told no lies," he said. "I will not be called a liar."

"Hold your tongue!" I shouted at him. "If you dare to contradict me again . . ." I scowled at him, preferring to leave the unspoken menace as a choice between physical violence and the immediate loss of one or more tenants; both reprisals were obviously threatened. Then I dropped my voice and went on: "You see, my little man, you don't understand. You've put your own beastly construction on Miss Binstead's visit to me last night. I dare say you're only an ignorant fool and not malicious; but you've got to realise that you can't go on making that kind of mischief with impunity. This isn't Germany, and Miss Binstead is not the kind of woman you're accustomed to mix with."

I saw that he was puzzled as well as intimidated. I think the sincerity of my indignation had shaken him. He was rather a low little scoundrel, and I have no doubt that he had hoped to blackmail a few shillings' increase of rent out of us. He had probably calculated on finding us ashamed and humble.

Judith

"But . . ." he stammered, overlooking my long string of insults.

"But what?" I snapped.

"I did hear . . ." he began.

I made a sound expressive of disgust.

"You heard Miss Binstead crying," I said. "What of it?"

"But why does she come in her nightshirt?" he asked moodily.

"She didn't," I said. "She was wearing a dressing-gown."

"But . . ." he began again.

I cut him short. "Are you going to apologise?" I asked viciously.

He spread out his hands with a gesture of renunciation.

"Eef I make a mistake . . ." he began.

"You most certainly have made a mistake," I said.

"Vell, then, I apologise to it," he concluded.

"Then go and do it at once," I said. "Go now, this instant, and apologise to Miss Binstead."

I expected a further demur, but he made none. I opened the door for him and watched him as he went upstairs with a sort of righteous insouciance.

"Do you think he'll do it?" I asked Hill.

Hill was grinning. "Oh, he'll do it," he said. "But I say, Hornby, I never guessed that you could be such a commander of men."

"It's easy enough when you've got the bulge, and the men are like Pferdinger," I said.

"I don't know," Hill returned. "You were so splendidly absolute."

I knew what he meant, and wondered why I was never "absolute" except when I lost my temper. The

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last time had been on the occasion of my interview with Blake.

"It's a rotten thing to have happened," I mumbled, resuming my usual manner.

Hill made no reply.

I had left the door open, and a minute later we saw Pferdminger returning from his mission. He stopped at the threshold of my room and bowed.

"I haf apologise," he said. "I say no more at all to anyone. I am sorry to mistake the affair."

"That's good," I returned. "Shut the door after you."

"Can we trust him to hold his tongue?" I asked Hill, after a little pause.

"Yes," he said confidently. "He has taken his line. He has justified his respectability, and now he admits his mistake. Even if he doesn't believe you, he'll stick to that. I've no doubt he'll apologise to you every morning for a week to come."

By all of which statements Hill proved himself to be a true prophet. I had no more trouble with Pferdminger beyond the nuisance of his repeated explanations.

9

I thought that some communication with Judith or Helen must follow the events of the morning; and I waited, expecting one or both of them either to come down or send me a message.

I had a new sense of having been drawn into a close relation with them, of being happily entangled in a new and unavoidable relevancy with the deepest interests of their existence. We three shared now, I imagined, the secret of Helen's desperate scheme to separate Judith

Judith

and me, a secret that would surely constitute a wonderful bond between us. I pictured Helen's confession to Judith, and Judith's response. She would see, as I had seen, all the fineness of the offered sacrifice, and we could find a new source of sympathy in our common gentleness for Helen. I never doubted Judith. I knew that we were friends, temporarily separated by the force of circumstances. But I looked forward, now, to a great release. Helen's opposition had been dissipated; she could no longer have any influence. She had gambled recklessly and lost, and now she must throw up her hand.

Meanwhile I hardly knew how to control my impatience. I could not concentrate my attention on my work. I enlarged and established the note I had made of my new plan for the competition, but I could not begin the mechanical work of re-drawing it. Every sound in the house snatched my interest away from my board. I furiously desired to begin at once the new relationships with Judith that I imagined Helen's confession would involve.

And a little after three o'clock I heard footsteps on the stairs that I instantly recognised—after all the false hopes of the past two hours—as those for which I had waited. I sat quite still, and my powers of hearing seemed to be wonderfully intensified. And I heard Judith and Helen go along the hall without hesitation, heard them go out and close the front door gently behind them. They passed my window, but they did not look up.

For a moment I felt impelled to rush after them and demand an explanation. I was filled with horrible forebodings. All the radiance of my anticipations had been changed to the deepest gloom of doubt. I was sure that there had been some mistake; that some essential

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of my last night's scene with Helen had been either concealed or misrepresented.

Five minutes later I was cursing myself for my failure to follow Judith. I cannot say why I did not obey that immediate impulse. My thought followed her, but my body had not responded. Perhaps the perverse habit of reserve I had cultivated since my first blunder had grown too strong for me.

And now I was faced with the most wearing of all trials, a suspense that could not be terminated by my own effort. At first I decided to wait, at my window, until Judith returned, and then to waylay her boldly in the hall and ask her to tell me all that had happened. But I had not the continence to endure that waiting. I put on my hat and went out, not with any foolish intention of trying to find Judith in the wilderness of London, but to seek relief in action.

I had no hesitation as to my choice of direction. I made straight for the seat by the "Spaniards." When I am alone I walk fairly fast at any time, but I fancy that I must have raced on this occasion. I have a memory of seeing surprise on the faces of some of the people I met; and more distinctly of a small urchin of two or three, watching my approach with a look of stupefied awe. He stood in the middle of the pavement in High Street, Camden Town, and stared up at me as he might have stared at the threat of some rushing, unavoidable Juggernaut of a motor. I believe that I stepped over him. He was certainly prepared to imolate himself.

It was nearly dark when I reached the "Spaniards," and the consecrated seat was occupied by two engrossed lovers. I began to debate, then, the advisability of an instant return to Keppel Street, but while my mind occupied itself feverishly with that problem, my legs

Judith

had carried me on into Highgate Lane, and I continued my walk, still at top speed, down Highgate Village, down West Hill, and into Kentish Town.

I got back to Keppel Street soon after five, wet with perspiration, but immensely determined. I went straight up to the third floor. I had never been up there before, and had no idea which was Judith's room, but I knocked with authority at the first door I came to.

Mrs. Hargreave's voice answered me and I went in. She was sitting at the table in her fur coat, writing.

"Well?" she said, and without waiting for me to reply added: "You look warm enough."

The room felt stuffily cold. There was no fire, but a gas jet without a globe was flaming on the wall by the mantelpiece.

"I've been walking rather fast," I said, and was astonished to find myself rather breathless. "Can you tell me which is Miss Carrington's room?" I asked.

"She's out," Mrs. Hargreave returned coldly. "Can I give her any message?"

"Are you sure?" I persisted. "I want to see her."

"She and Helen went out a couple of hours ago," Mrs. Hargreave said. "I don't know where they were going."

I thanked her and backed out. Through the fury of my impatience I was aware of the suspicion that Mrs. Hargreave also had heard some imperfect or untrue report of my interview with Helen.

Pferdminger had attended to my fire while I was out, and the cheerful flicker of it made the room appear more than usually comfortable and inviting. I thought of Mrs. Hargreave, and wondered how far she was affected by the discomfort of her surroundings. Hill's room was little more cheerful than hers, except for the

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companionship of his books, and his fire was always, it seemed, on the verge of extinction—my picture of it was of a sullen oozing of yellow smoke through a profoundly mournful pile of slack. But Hill professed to be quite unaffected by the condition of his fire or his room.

I went over to my board and stared out of the window. I would not light the gas, or my lamp, as they would impair my sight of the street, and I meant to watch until Judith and Helen returned. My walk had calmed me. I felt that I could wait, now, with a measure of self-control. The consciousness of tension had relaxed as I had entered the comfort of my room.

10

I dare say that I had been standing there twenty minutes or half an hour when I saw Helen coming back alone. She was hurrying, and she looked up as she passed; I knew that she meant to come in and see me. My first feeling was one of bitter disappointment; but that was succeeded by something like relief. I should know now, I supposed, what had happened, and later I should surely see Judith.

I hurried to light the two gas jets by the window, but I left the blinds and curtains undrawn. If I were to see Helen alone again I meant to have a chaperon. I would take the street into my confidence.

Helen came in while I was still lighting the gas. She was panting, and after she had defiantly closed the door behind her, she stood just inside the room with her hand to her side.

"Well?" I said, echoing Mrs. Hargreave's reception of me upstairs.

"You've won!" she said bitterly. "I want to know

Judith

what you're going to do. Judith will be here directly. I—I gave her the slip."

"What did you tell her about last night?" I asked. "Pferdminger, of course . . . I suppose he came to you and apologised?"

She sat down on the chair at the end of the table, put her elbows on the cloth and propped her chin in her hands. She looked very weary; even the stimulus of her dislike for me seemed to have left her.

"You don't know," she said. I do not think she had heard my questions. "And I don't see why I should tell you. I don't want to tell you, but if I don't Judith will. It has been going on and on all day. Hopelessly. She tried to believe me and she couldn't. She kept coming back to it and asking things."

She bent her head and pushed her hair back from her forehead with a clumsy movement that made her hat jump with a grotesque effort of protest. The ineptitude of her attitude and gesture made me more sorry for her, and yet I could not help thinking that if she were on the stage the audience would inevitably have laughed at the bobbing of that apparently resentful hat.

"Tried to believe what?" I put in gently.

"I don't know," she murmured, still disregarding me. "I don't know what I could have done. Nothing, I suppose. I suppose it was hopeless from the first. I loathe men—all men—it isn't only you—all men are exactly the same. I wanted to save her, but she can't understand. She'll have to learn for herself. Perhaps she'll come back to me afterwards when she finds out." She stopped and looked at me, and the shadows round her eyes were ringed with stains that showed purple through a grimy black.

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"You can't believe anything good of me?" I asked, feeling that I had her attention at last.

"Oh! good!" she sneered. "I suppose you're good according to your lights; a man's way of being *good*; I dare say you've felt wonderfully *good* since you've been in love with Judith. But what does it come to? Nothing. Of course you want her—for a time. I was a silly fool to think that you'd look at me when you hoped to get her. I'm too plain. Your sort has no use for plain women."

She was not deliberately trying to annoy me, but that repetition of the damnable suggestion she had made last night roused me again. I could not bear that attempt to coarsen my adoration of Judith. It was an insult to her no less than to me.

"What's wrong with you?" I said. "Why do you look at everything from one point of view? You can't be quite sane on that subject."

She stared at me in her dull, unseeing way and thrust out her under lip in an ugly sneer. "I'm honest, that's all," she said.

"Rot!" I returned, "you're merely blind and stupid."

She gave a little hard laugh. "Merely ugly," she corrected me. "That's my real vice."

I had lost all sympathy for her at that moment. I hated that unreasoning repetition of her obsession. I felt that no one could ever make her understand. She had her one horrible measure of men, and it seemed to me that it was the measure of her own perverted mind. But what goaded me to desperation was my inability, anyone's inability, to open that viciously-locked chamber of her understanding. I had been willing to make a thousand excuses for her, to find fine qualities in her love for Judith; but she would not grant me the

Judith

smallest concession. If I had been a typical representative of the woman-hunter she had imagined me, surely there would still have been something in me worthy of respect.

I made a great effort of self-control as I said: "Well, I don't know what you're waiting for. It's quite obvious that you loathe the sight of me. Why stay in the same room with me?"

"I'm waiting for Judith," she said, and then, with an air of gaiety that was quite a despicable piece of acting she went on: "You see, I tried to make her believe that you, that I was . . . successful . . . last night."

I went suddenly cold with horror when she said that. "Good God!" I ejaculated. "You dared!"

She nodded furiously, and I saw that she was afraid, too afraid to speak.

"Oh, good God!" I repeated in complete disgust, and then: "Oh! please go! I—I feel as if I wanted to . . . to *murder* you!"

She stood up and came towards me. "Why don't you?" she asked in a strained voice.

"You're not worth it," I said.

"You'd be afraid to do that," she taunted me, coming nearer still.

Perhaps she hoped, judging me by the measure of her own hate, that I might lay violent hands on her. But as she came within my reach, all that was active in my loathing of her evaporated. I despised her weakness. I could no more have used violence to her than I could have physically ill-treated little Pferdminger.

I fell back on my cliché of the night before. "Don't be so silly," I said impatiently.

But she still tried to goad me. "I let her think I

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was successful," she said, and thrust her face quite close to mine.

"As if you could ever be successful in anything," I replied brutally.

She ought to have thrown herself upon me for that insult; but she had no blaze in her. She had patience and courage, and an amazing persistence, but she was incapable of absolute frenzy. I remember when I went with Judith to the police court a year or two later and tried to persuade Helen to let us pay her fine, that she refused with all her old dull obstinacy; and I have no doubt that she broke her windows and went through the hunger-strike with the same heavy resolution. She was not typical of the average woman rebel of that time.

And, now, my taunt did not rouse her to fury. It hurt her, I think, more than any other thing I could have said, but she accepted it with a brooding fatalism, and cherished it as another cause of hatred against me.

"Oh, *I* know, *I* know," she said. "I care too much about things to be successful."

I do not believe that that was true.

Nothing further would have happened between us if we had been left alone; we had used up our exasperation for the moment; and as she cowered a little away under the sting of my words, we heard the click of a latchkey in the front door.

II

I had a queer interval of uneasiness during the few seconds that elapsed between the sound of Judith's latch-key in the lock and her entry into the room. I was not sure what Helen would do. I was overcome by a sudden fear that she might make another attempt to inculcate me, that she might, perhaps, cling to me

Judith

and play the discarded mistress. And I realised that if she did that I should find it exceedingly difficult to refute her charge. She would be playing a part and I should be speaking the truth, but it seemed to me that her acting would be far more convincing than my innocence. Nothing of the kind happened; but I am sure that the idea presented itself to Helen and that I was in some way aware of her fugitive intention. I can very well imagine how the impulse sprang powerfully into her mind; it may have been inhibited because she, on her part, became conscious that I had read her thought.

My dread had passed before Judith came in, but both Helen and I were still braced and wary.

Judith halted at the door as if she were surprised and a shade uneasy. I think the first effect of the antagonism she saw, may have suggested confederacy. Helen and I were so tensely aware of each other. The rapport was shivered as Judith spoke, but it had lasted quite long enough for her to have felt it.

"I want to know the truth," Judith said, looking doubtfully at Helen.

I could not respond to that demand. In the first place, I knew that I must wait to hear what Helen would have to say; and, in the second, I realised that it would be impossible for me to give a true account of her pitiful attempt to compromise me.

In the interval of silence that followed, Judith closed the door and came up to the table. She stood there avoiding my eyes and staring with a rather cold imperiousness at her friend.

"Helen! aren't you going to answer me?" she said.

Helen shivered, and made an odd sound in her throat, that was intended, I think, for a laugh.

"Don't be so righteous, dear," she said nervously.

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Judith seemed to soften a little. "Will you come upstairs?" she asked.

I had to intervene then. I saw that if she had this opportunity, Helen would procrastinate a little longer, weep again, no doubt, and throw herself on Judith's pity, leaving me still to figure as the villain. I could not bear that.

"Oh, no!" I protested, "that isn't fair. If I'm going to be attacked, I must have a chance of defending myself."

Judith would not look at me, but she admitted my protest by saying: "That's only fair, is it, Helen?"

"To *him*," Helen said savagely. "You'd be fair to *him*; why can't you be fair to me?"

"I *am* being fair to you," Judith returned gently. "I'm only asking you to speak the truth. That can't be so very difficult."

"Yes, it is," Helen said. "It's impossible before *him*."

She was still maintaining her fiction by referring to me as "*him*." I might be all that was detestable, but she implied that I was no longer a stranger.

"Why?" I asked sharply.

"I suppose you think I've no self-respect left," she murmured. And, indeed, the abandon of her attitude, the limp relaxation of her shoulders, the sulky droop of her head, suggested that her self-respect was at a very low ebb.

For a moment a feeling of indignant impatience nearly mastered me. I wanted to shake the truth out of her; to shake her until she should reveal the whole shame of her present pose. For it was this present pose that angered me. I was ready to respect her for what she had attempted; but this futile pretending was contemptible.

Judith

The sight of Judith checked the irritable reply that I was about to make. I looked at her and knew that, however shaken the surface of her thought, she had never truly doubted me.

"Judith!" I said. I had never before addressed her or spoken of her by Christian name; I was as shy of it as a young wife of the word "husband"; and my very hesitation gave my utterance the quality of an endearment. I had caressed that name so often in my thought that I could not speak it without tenderness.

She flushed faintly, but she would not look at me. She wanted above all, just then, to be fair to Helen, but her desire was not whole-hearted enough to achieve the appearance.

Helen turned her back on us with a disgust that was certainly not assumed.

"Ah!" she ejaculated on a note of contempt, and then she dropped into the same chair in which she had sat trembling last night, and shut out the sight of us with her hard, thin hands.

"I only want to be fair," Judith repeated uneasily, maintaining her unspoken compact of outward aloofness from me, although Helen was no longer watching us.

Helen made no reply, and I could think of no appropriate way to break a silence that seemed likely to hold us interminably. The clatter of a heavy van passing up the street was a welcome distraction, but as the sound of it slowly merged into the murmur of the traffic in the Tottenham Court Road, the stillness of the room was disquietingly intensified.

Judith felt it no less than I did, and her apprehension was greater than mine inasmuch as she foresaw the outburst that was coming.

"Helen!" she said imperatively, challenging the expected storm.

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Helen dropped her hands, but she looked at neither of us as she said:

"Oh! what's the good? You'll never believe *me*."

"That's absurd," Judith replied coldly. "Haven't I always believed you?"

"Until *he* came," Helen said. And the high light of my two gas burners intensified the rusty shadows about her eyes so that they loomed like empty hollows.

Judith hardened herself. I suppose she knew that Helen had changed her tactics, that she had lost all hope, and meant, now, to wound bitterly if she were able.

"That's nonsense," Judith said.

"Is it?" Helen replied. "You've forgotten our first quarrel, of course—after he had insulted you on the doorstep? When you talked such a lot of nonsense about . . . Freedom." She spat out the last word as if it offended her.

"It wasn't the first time I had talked about Freedom," Judith returned without heat. "And you encouraged it as long as it meant agreeing with you."

"As long as it *meant* Freedom," Helen said. "There's a difference between freedom and *licence*."

The colour was mounting steadily in Judith's cheeks, until at last it burned as if she were facing the glow of a clear fire, but she did not raise her voice, nor give any other sign of her hurt.

"I said what I'd always said," she replied. "It was only when I really wanted independence that you turned round on me. But surely we needn't go into all that again." And the touch of weariness in her voice told me how long they had argued without daring to touch the vital application which Helen, at least, intended to avoid no longer.

"Oh no, we needn't," she said; "not all that, we

Judith

can speak out now. At all events I can. We can stop pretending about freedom. All it means is that I've served your purpose and now you want to be rid of me. We've both made a mistake. I thought you were different from other women, but you're not. You've got just the same kind of silly, romantic ideas about men that they all have. It's no use our playing at being friends any more. . . ."

"I don't think it is," Judith put in quietly.

"I shocked you, I suppose," Helen returned with a spurt of temper. "You think it was a horrible *unfeminine* thing to do what I did last night. Well, I don't. It wasn't done for my own gratification, you may be quite sure of that. I did it to save you, and you weren't worth it. Even if I'd succeeded, I dare say it wouldn't have made any difference to you." She stopped abruptly, suddenly aware, perhaps, that she had acknowledged her failure.

The flush had died from Judith's face and left it very white and cold. The horrible suggestion of Helen's last taunt had finally destroyed any chance of real forgiveness.

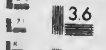
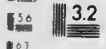
And there came to me a vivid recollection of the scene with Rose Whiting a few months earlier. I saw in Helen now the same abandonment, the same stripping off of a conventional disguise that I had shrunk from on that night when I first entered the life of the house. Helen, too, had touched some absolute, but it was no longer so repulsive to me. I saw her naked soul, and it seemed to me wounded and bitter and prejudiced; but she had loved with all her being, and only some misjudgment, some feeble narrowness of interest, had marred the quality of her devotion.

"Oh! why do you say these things?" I asked on the impulse of the moment.



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She turned her head towards me with a quick movement of surprise.

"Judith wanted to have the truth," she said.

"Of course you can't understand," Judith put in.

"Oh! I do; I *do*," Helen said, but all the spirit had gone out of her. She stood up and hesitated as she contemplated some final outburst that would leave her with the show of victory; and then, with a long sigh, walked across to the door and went out without another glance at either of us. But the artificial exaggeration of her feebleness, her clutch at the table as she passed, her gesture in seizing the door handle, disguised and spoiled the effect of her tragedy.

12

"I hate the stage," Judith said. She had sat down by the table, but she had not yet looked at me.

"Are you going to give it up?" I asked.

She nodded emphatically. "I've been thinking of going back to Cheltenham," she said, as if she were laying the plan before me for consideration.

"But could you bear that life again?" I asked.

"No, not the same life," she said definitely. "But it wouldn't be the same. I should go back—on different conditions. They would have to give me my freedom to a certain extent. I *am* independent of them financially. I haven't got very much, but it's enough to keep me."

I weighed that for a moment. I had formed a mental picture of her two aunts, and I saw Judith in relation to them, much as I see in imagination the complete buildings I design in two dimensions.

"Wouldn't it mean—constant friction?" I asked.

Judith

"They'd never alter their opinions, of course," she said.

"And you wouldn't alter yours?"

"I have altered them a good deal since I've been here."

"About them? About your aunts?"

"Yes. I'm sorry for them now. I used to be always criticising them; hating them for being so narrow. I thought all those Cheltenham people were just blind and stupid."

"Aren't they?" I asked.

She began a little nervous smoothing of the tablecloth with her hands. "They're so convinced that they are right," she said, "and so was I, and so is Helen and Mrs. Hargreave and pretty nearly everybody. I don't see why I should criticise them, my aunts I mean, and their friends, any more than I should criticise Helen."

"But you do criticise her now, don't you?" I suggested.

"Yes, I do," she agreed, "but I used not to. I thought she was almost perfect. So don't you see, I feel a little lost now, and it seems as if I might just as well go back as try to find someone else, and then come to—to criticise them, too."

I saw then the direction in which we were moving.

In all that conversation with Helen, the quality of Judith's feeling for me had been almost explicit. I had grasped what appeared to be the realisation of all that I had dared to hope. In a way I had never doubted Judith since we had made that journey to Hampstead. Moving in our temporarily parallel paths, we were so aware of each other that I was sure we must inevitably draw together. And when none of Helen's definite implications was denied, I had received what I took to be final, incontrovertible proof. We had declared our-

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selves through an intermediary none the less definitely because our admissions had all been tacit; and when we were left alone, I had felt as if our agreement were ratified and needed only the seal.

Now, she had terrified me with a new fear; the fear that she had come to doubt herself. I plunged desperately.

"Do you mean me?" I asked.

"I suppose so," she said, almost whispering.

"Do you—do you criticise me now?" I said.

She did not answer that directly. "I've been so—*shaken* by all this," she explained in the same low, confessional voice. "I feel that I can't be sure of anything again. I should so like . . . in a way . . . to be friends with everybody; and that doesn't seem possible. I'm afraid there must be something wrong with me."

I checked myself on the verge of beginning an absurdly rational argument, to prove that her fear was the result of a passing emotion. I was slipping into the old duality, standing aside and advising myself; and I made an effort to win my integrity.

"Judith!" I said, and the sound of my voice compelled her at last to look at me; so that I saw those depths in her eyes which she had tried so long to hide.

"It may be only another mistake," she said.

"You *know* it isn't," I answered with the confidence of my single mind.

I took a step towards her, but she held up her hands. "No, not yet," she protested. "I must wait. I must think. I want to go back to Cheltenham for a time—to think."

"Are you afraid of losing your freedom?" I asked.

"No, it isn't that," she said. "I know you wouldn't bully me and—and tie me in, as my aunts did and as Helen tried to do, too. You wouldn't, would you?"

Judith

The thought of bullying her or interfering with her freedom appeared so absurd to me that I could find no words to ridicule the suggestion.

"Oh, I know you wouldn't," she went on, "because I'm sure we—we think alike about so many things. About the stage, for instance. I knew you hated that, always, and now I hate it, too." She was a little breathless, as if she were hurrying eagerly on to make some important statement before she was interrupted; and yet, when I waited at her pause, she found nothing more to say.

"If you go back to Cheltenham," I began again after a short interval of silence, "you would let me write to you?"

"Oh yes," she said.

"And you would write to me?" She nodded.

"And we . . . there would be some kind of understanding that if . . ."

"I only want to be quite sure," she said. And then, as if she had found her statement, she continued more quickly. "This place has influenced me so. I feel as if I couldn't trust myself here; as if all that has happened here couldn't be quite true. It was such a change to me. Everything is so different. I used to be uncomfortable, at first, whenever I went to Mr. Hill's room with Helen. And I want to look back on it all—from Cheltenham before I . . . you see, you are so mixed up with it. The only time I've seen you away from this house was when we went to Hampstead. . . ."

"And then?" I put in.

She stood up and held out her hands to me. "I *do* know," she said, "but you must let me go back to Cheltenham for a time."

I drew her towards me, and she offered but the gentlest resistance.

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I wanted to hold her there, on and on, for ever. Her kiss had been such peace and gladness, the fulfilment of all my knowledge that she and I had loved one another from the beginning. But she recovered her consciousness of place and time while I was still lost to all sense of anything but her wonderful presence.

"All your curtains are open, and we are standing in the full light of the window," she reminded me.

"I had forgotten that there were other people in the world," I said.

13

She was to go to Cheltenham as soon as she had heard from her aunts.

She was not sure whether they would want her to come back to them.

Unhappily for me, they displayed no sign of hesitation. Judith showed me their letter, and through the genteel preciseness of their phraseology I could read an expression of relief that was not quite free from an undercurrent of triumph.

XI

POOR OLD MEARES

I

AFTER Judith had gone, I settled down to begin life.

She had maintained her resolution, but for one moment, on Paddington Station, her intention was nearly broken.

She had staked a claim to her seat in the train by the usual depositing of impedimenta, and we had walked to the far end of the platform, talking a little aimlessly as people do in these circumstances, when there is no time to begin and, in our case, a steady realisation that all life is a beginning.

We had come to a silence as we stood at the extreme of that slender peninsula which, ahead of us, now sloped swiftly down into the dangerous currents of sweeping tangled lines all leading out to the great west country that was yet quite unknown to me.

"I should love to take you to Wales," Judith said suddenly, answering my thought; "not Barmouth, but all that coast."

"I wonder why you are going alone?" I said.

"I must," she replied at once, as if we were continuing an old conversation; although I, at least, had never until then questioned the inevitability of her going.

"Why *are* you going, really?" I asked. "Why shouldn't we be married and go together?"

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And just for one moment her intuitive purpose was nearly broken by my rationalism.

But I pressed my advantage too logically. "Is there any sensible, valid reason why we shouldn't be married at once?" I went on. "If you can give me one, I'll be satisfied, but for the life of me I can't think of any."

"I dare say not. I don't know any *reason*," she said, underlining her last word, "but I must go, all the same."

"Isn't it only because you can't get rid of the idea that you *are* going?" I protested.

"I *want* to go," she said, and that assertion would have been final even if we had not been startled by what seemed like a distant firing of rapid consecutive shots.

"They're shutting the doors," Judith said with an air of positive alarm. "Oh, come; we must run."

And I ran with her as if the catching of that train was a matter of the last importance. . .

I remember speculating that same afternoon on the subject of fate; I did not figure Fate as the awful, threatening figure of Greek tragedy, but as the equally inscrutable influence that tweaks some unapprehended control at apparently trivial moments, and alters the whole circumstance of our lives. My instances were recalled from many examples I could trace in my own history; and then I looked forward with a recognisable shade of apprehension to the consequences that might follow the failure of my parting attempt to dissuade Judith from going to Cheltenham.

For I knew, then, vaguely that if I had held her, instead of attempting to reason with her, she would have stayed in London and married me. She would have done it despite her instinctive wish to return to Cheltenham, and I can see no reason to suppose that

Poor Old Meares

she would have regretted her decision later. But, no! at that critical instant my controls were tampered with. I cannot say why I took a bad line instead of a good one; the choice seems to have been purely haphazard; and yet Judith and I had to suffer six months' separation because of that accident. We may have a measure of free will, but I am sure that we are subject to the queerest kind of interference. . . .

Judith had intended to stay with her aunts for a month at longest, but the fate that had determined her going kept her there for half a year.

2

And she had left me to face, although I had no apprehension of its coming, the darkest, most despairing period of my life. It is true that I was subject during the first months of Judith's absence to fits of doubt and gloom, but they were all attributable to my loss of her, and not to any prescience of coming trouble.

Once or twice in February I seriously contemplated the thought of a trip to Cheltenham, and denied myself solely because I counted so surely on her return at the beginning of March. Later there were reasons why such an excursion was inadvisable. My feeling of desertion was not, I think, quite normal. I only realised when I was left alone how perpetually conscious I had been of Judith's presence in the house. I wrote to her every day.

My misfortunes began in the first week of March, with the announcement that the elder of Judith's two aunts had had a paralytic stroke and that Judith herself would certainly have to stay in Cheltenham for some weeks longer. I could not protest against that decision. We were in the power of the great Autocrat; and although

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Judith's services might be useless, she was bound to offer them. We had to pay the tribute of our youth towards maintaining the old.

On the same day that I received the depressing news contained in Judith's letter, I learnt that I had not been placed in the competition I had been working on all through the autumn. I was neither surprised nor, in a sense, disappointed; I had foreseen that probability, and my study of the winning plans reproduced in *The Building News*, a few days later, finally convinced me that my own were very inferior. Nevertheless, the knowledge that I had failed did not tend to raise my spirits.

I had begun to realise by then that the prospects of my professional career were not looking particularly bright, and that unless I achieved some success, either by winning a competition or getting work by private influence, I might be reduced very soon to seeking a job in an office at a salary which certainly would not exceed four pounds a week. I loathed the thought of that return to slavery, of the eternal, mechanical delineation of another man's designs; but I loathed even more the prospect of returning to Ken Lodge and attempting to conciliate my uncle. Perhaps I was a little prejudiced; too proud of my independence and my break with the respectable tradition of my youth; but my chief reason for dreading any approach to my uncle was the certainty I had that I should be rebuffed. I could only picture my uncle as I had last seen him, an irrevocably offended man.

It was somewhere about the middle of March, ten days or so after I had known that there was no hope of seeing Judith again for many weeks, that the next and most serious blow fell.

Poor Old Meares

3

I was working at my window about four o'clock, getting my next competition drawings into final shape, when I saw Mrs. Meares come back. She had gone out with her husband an hour or two earlier, and I had thought they looked very bright and cheerful. They had looked up at me and waved, and Mrs. Meares had called out something to the effect that I worked too hard. Now, she was the figure of despair. She was holding her handkerchief to her face and her head drooped as if she could not endure anyone to see her.

I had that instant sense of calamity which is so unmistakable. I had no thought that it might affect me save through my sympathies, but I felt a cold wave of apprehension creep through me like a physical fear. I went quickly out into the hall and opened the door for her. She was fumbling blindly with her latch-key.

I think she deliberately pretended not to recognise me at first, hoping, perhaps, that I should ask no questions and let her go up and hide herself in her own room. But my tact failed me.

"Has anything happened?" I asked. "An accident . . . ?"

"Can't tell you—now," and something that sounded like "thought we were so safe," was all I could understand of her reply, and the last word came with a tremendous gulp and a fresh burst of tears. She ran up to their rooms on the second floor, fairly whooping with misery.

I said nothing to anyone that evening. She had made it quite plain that she wanted to be left alone. But I will confess that through my sympathy for her trouble, whatever it might be, a distinctly apprehensive

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curiosity began to peer more and more forbiddingly. If anything serious had happened to Meares, my £250 might be in jeopardy. And I had reluctantly come to the conclusion a day or two before that I must take advantage of his offer, and ask him to return me my part, at least, of my over-rash investment.

I had to sleep with that curiosity still unsatisfied, and I remember that I did not accept as a good omen the very vivid dream I had that night of winning my competition. Meares was connected with it in some vague way. I fancy that he was, ridiculously, both the assessor and the building contractor.

I went up to Hill's room directly after breakfast, hoping that he would be able to relieve my suspense, but he had neither seen nor heard anything of either Meares or his wife. I was not sure, then, whether or not Meares himself had returned to Keppel Street; and I decided to make an early call on him with the ostensible purpose of asking whether he could conveniently return me any part of my £250. Hill's manner had done nothing to relieve my anxiety. He made no reference to his earlier doubt of the Meares, but he looked distressed and uneasy. I wondered if he, too, had purchased something in the Australian mine? I had never mentioned my own plunge to him, and said nothing then; partly because I was ashamed of my own ingenuousness, and partly because the admission would sound like a direct charge against Meares.

I received no answer to my knock on the Meares door, and after a little hesitation I opened the door and looked into the sitting-room. No one was there, but I heard Mrs. Meares's voice calling out an inquiry from the bedroom.

"Is Mr. Meares in?" I asked, and then had to repeat my question in a louder voice.

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"Is that Mr. Hornby?" was the answer I received, and the bedroom door was opened about an inch to facilitate our conversation.

"I've been lazy this morning," Mrs. Meares's voice continued, much in her ordinary tone. "Meares has gone to see some friends. I'll tell him you want to see him when he—comes in."

"Oh, thanks very much. It isn't important," said, and I was going out when Mrs. Meares called after me to ask if Hill was in.

"Yes, I've just seen him," I told her.

"I—I'd like to see him, too, before I go out," Mrs. Meares replied. "Could you tell him?"

"Now; at once?" I asked. "Down here?"

"In five minutes," she said. . . .

"All right," Hill replied briefly when I gave him the message.

"I'll see you afterwards," he added, as I still stood waiting in the doorway.

"Yes, I should like to know," I said, and perhaps the tone of my voice confirmed the suspicion he had already formed.

"Have you got any money in his scheme?" he asked.

"Oh, a bit," I returned.

"I see," commented Hill, thoughtfully. "I suppose that's why she'd prefer to see me?"

I went downstairs prepared for the worst. I had nearly lost every feeling of sympathy for Meares by that time. I concluded, very naturally, that he had absconded with all the money he had been able to collect, and had left his wife to face the music.

I heard two people coming downstairs about half an hour later, and then Hill came into my room, and I heard Mrs. Meares go out by the front door.

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Hill looked at me for a moment before he spoke and then he said :

"They've had the most infernally bad luck."

"They?" I remarked. "He hasn't done a business then?"

"Meares!" Hill said. "Good Lord, no! Surely you didn't think he was that kind of chap?" His tone rebuked me for my suspicion.

"Well, no, I didn't," I admitted; "but I thought he looked a bit fishy this morning."

"Oh, Lord, no!" Hill repeated, without noticing my reply. "Poor old Meares isn't that sort."

"What's the trouble, then?" I asked.

"I.D.B.'ing in Cape Town," Hill said.

I had not the remotest idea what he meant.

"Illicit Diamond Buying," he explained. "They've got a law out there to stop any private traffic in diamonds. It was passed to prevent stealing from the mines, of course. You may search a Kafir for a month without finding the diamond he's got on him. I'm sure they swallow them, and manage to effect a recovery later. In effect, you see, any unauthorised seller of diamonds is convicted of trying to dispose of stolen goods—but there are people like Meares who get let off with the very best intentions. When a perfectly decent fellow comes to you and offers you a diamond at about half what it's worth, you don't feel as if you were committing any awful crime by buying it. It's just a law."

"Well, what can they do to him?" I asked.

"He'll be up at Bow Street this morning," Hill said. "I gather it's a clear case, and, in fact, I don't think he'll put up any defence over here—waste of time and money."

"Over here?" I put in. "Then will they send him back to South Africa?"

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Hill nodded. "Yes, they'll try him over there," he said.

"Is he absolutely broke?" I asked.

"They're down to about thirty pounds, I believe," Hill said; and he looked at me rather keenly as he went on. "All this money he's been trying to raise has been promised, you know; none of it has been paid over."

I turned away to the window to hide the evidences of my indecision. I could not make up my mind whether to tell Hill about that two hundred and fifty pounds of mine or not. I inferred that he had misunderstood my admission of being committed; and it seemed fairly certain that my money had already been spent.

But Hill's next question showed that he suspected the cause of my earlier anxiety and my present embarrassment.

"I say, Hornby, you haven't been *lending* them money, have you?" he asked.

"In a way," I admitted.

"I fancied there was something," he remarked. "The little Meares woman seemed to be hiding something all the time."

"Oh, well," I said. "I suppose he'll get bail. I shall probably see him this evening."

But I never saw either of the Meares again.

4

I went to a theatre that evening; I was sick of my own company and wanted a little relaxation; and while I was out Mrs. Meares came back to Keppel Street, paid all Pferdinger's claims without demur, and took away her own and her husband's luggage in a cab.

I have often wondered since whether she would have made a clean breast of everything to me, if I had been

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in. She could not possibly have known that I should not be there, and I think she must have come prepared to throw herself on my mercy; and then, finding the way clear, succumbed to the temptation of taking what seemed to her no doubt the safer road of a silent disappearance.

The letter I received from her a month later, dated Southampton, and posted at Las Palmas, left much unaccounted for, but to my mind it completely absolved her.

"DEAR MR. HORNBY," she wrote,

"I suppose you have got to think the worst of us, so it is no use me trying to explain what I can't expect you will believe. All the same, I want you to know that Meares never used your money, and asked me to give it back to you when I saw him before the trial at Bow Street. Well, I did not, so you have got to blame me and not him. If I had not taken that we should have stepped off the boat at Cape Town without a penny in our pockets.

"Yours very truly,

"EVELINA MASON."

Mason was their right name, and perhaps her reference to their *alias* in the body of the letter slipped in by accident.

I was glad to have that letter, and if she had given me any address I should have written to her and wished them both good luck.

I believe, and so does Hill, that Meares was a honest man, according to his lights; and as for his valiant, faithful little wife, no one, I think, would blame her for what she did.

I am afraid that they failed to "make good" after

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he was released—I learnt from Hill that he received a sentence of twelve months' imprisonment. I feel sure that they would have repaid me that two hundred and fifty pounds, even after the lapse of years, if they had ever had any money to spare.

5

I told Judith nothing about my lost capital when I wrote to her. We had never discussed my affairs—indeed, we had never discussed anything, and yet our letters show how decisively we understood each other. My reserve in this particular was due to the sense I had of my inability to justify the Meares for keeping that confounded money of mine; and when that was explained, I did not want to reopen the subject. Judith was so distressed about them both; so fervent in her condemnation of the “stupid laws” that had made Meares an almost innocent victim. She agreed with me that his offence must have been peculiarly artless. And I decided to leave her loyalty undisturbed until I could explain everything to her in conversation.

Judith's letters were a great consolation to me during that spring and summer. They had that quality of “steadiness” which I have so often referred to in speaking of her. I did not tell her quite the worst of my news with regard to my circumstances, but she knew enough to help me by her expression of complete confidence in our future.

(I have kept all those letters of hers, but I cannot quote from them here. They were not in the strictest sense love-letters, but they convey a kind of intimacy which I shrink from displaying. And I know that all I have written about her is incomplete and unsatisfactory by reason of that hesitation of mine whenever

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I come to attempt any description of her real personality. I must admit that the thing does not seem to me possible. The touches that might present her, all seem to me to come too near some personal relation between us that is too sacred for this advertisement of writing. Even though I were sure that nobody except Judith and myself would ever see this account of us; even if I were to write for myself alone with the intention of immediately destroying my manuscript, I could not commit my knowledge of her to paper. The very act appears to me as a breach of trust. While I could confine myself to the objective account of our earlier relations, I was nothing more than a reporter of objective impressions. We have laughed together over my stiff, mechanical account of our meetings, and of the more or less invented conversations that I have put down; and on various occasions when I would have destroyed my manuscript in a fit of impatience with the hardness and unreality of my history, Judith has insisted that I should tear up nothing until the book was finished.

Indeed, this whole apology, which must seem a very inappropriate intrusion into my narrative, arose out of a dispute as to the advisability of quoting from the letters she wrote to me while she was at Cheltenham. She is all for frankness and realism. "What *does* it matter?" she has just said, "no one will know it's us." [How queer this faithful reporting looks!] But some instinct of mine revolts and will not permit me to be guided by her judgment. I suffer an actual physical nausea when I make the attempt; a feeling very similar in kind to that I experienced when I tried to re-design the destroyed Queen Anne gable of Parkinson's. And that instinct is the final arbiter, not because I concede it an artistic validity, but because I cannot write, as it were, against the grain.

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But this apology threatens to lead me into all kinds of discursions, and I must cut it short. I began it to explain why my picture of Judith bears as little likeness to the Judith I know, as did my attempted sketches of her after our first real meeting in Hill's room. Perhaps I have made that clear? If I have, there is no more to be said, except, possibly, to draw the inference that I am not a literary artist. If I were I should, no doubt, be ready to sacrifice any personal feeling of mine or Judith's in order to present a truth. I am very thankful that no such sacrifices are required by the profession of architecture !)

XII

ROSE WHITING

I

I SUFFERED the most horrible experience of my life in the May of that year, and yet it was an experience that has no real bearing on the development of my story. Nevertheless, I cannot omit some account of that tragedy. In the first place, anyone who remembers the incident would throw a doubt on my general veracity if it were omitted; and in the second place, although I was nothing more than a spectator, the experience had its effect upon my manner of thought—was an influence in determining the new relations with humanity that arose out of the intercourse with my house-mates at 73 Keppel Street. There were three new members of our community that spring; a doctor, his wife, and their little daughter of four and a half. They had taken the two rooms left vacant by the Meares. The room that had been occupied by Judith and Helen was still empty. The doctor was a qualified man, but he was one of those feckless, incompetent creatures who can never keep an appointment. He held some position at a dispensary while he was with us. His wife, who had been a nurse, was a big, handsome, heavy-eyed woman who boasted that she had had to work for her living before she married and had no intention of making any further effort. She stayed in bed most of the day, and allowed her little girl—a pert, rather pinched child—to stray

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about the streets. Her one explicit instruction was not to bother her mother. Mrs. Hargreave, Hill, and I used to entertain the child to the best of our ability. After the first week she had the free run of our rooms—if she had not had that privilege, her only resource on wet days would have been the shelter of an archway. The name of this family was Bast. They were not immediately concerned with the great tragedy, but Bast was the second person to know of it.

And apart from that necessity to introduce our new tenants, I cannot avoid this somewhat detailed mention of them. Bast used to come down to my rooms on Sunday morning, and had an admiration for Mrs. Hargreave that she certainly did not reciprocate. He was clever in his own way, but his controls were very feeble, and he seemed to lack absolutely any faculty for concentration. His wife was anathema to Hill, and has the distinction of being the only person for whom I have heard him express an active dislike. And, finally, the child, ineptly christened Aurora—which was transformed by Hill into Oracles, a name that still sticks to her—has very definitely entered into Judith's life and mine.

The Basts, however, had not broken through the circle that ringed the one aloof member of our household. Bast, I know, made overtures to Rose Whiting before he had been in the house a week, and she snubbed him so bitterly that he never forgave her. I can understand that. She knew no doubt that he desired a privilege she had neither the means nor the inclination to afford him.

2

Her period of prosperity must have ended, I think, about the middle of March. I am reasonably certain

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that some man had been keeping her throughout the winter, and I believe that she was faithful to him. I am almost sure that she brought no man into the house during that time, and I had a curious sense of disappointment when I observed the revival of the old traffic. I am not ashamed to admit that although I had never spoken to her since that very brief colloquy of ours on the night of the row, I had a distinct feeling of sympathy, even of liking, for her.

Hill shared that feeling, but I am not using the fact as a defence, for with the single exception of his dislike for Mrs. Bast, his attitude towards all humanity was one of singular gentleness. He and I discussed Rose Whiting's problem before she had it so tragically solved for her, but we could only arrive at the inevitable conclusion that there was nothing to be done. Her independent spirit would not have acknowledged the necessity for any reform of the Puritan order, or have accepted support for which she could offer no return. She might have preferred to remain a pariah so far as "73" was concerned, but she certainly did not regard herself as a "lost" woman.

I could be exceedingly accurate about the date of the event which so disturbed our household for a time, but it is sufficient to say that the thing happened one Saturday night in May. I heard two people come in about midnight, and guessed that it was probably Rose Whiting and a "friend," and I heard the man go out again about an hour later. I was just going to bed then. I had been working tremendously hard on my new competition, which was quite the most ambitious thing I had done, and I was keyed up, over-tired, and not in the least inclined to sleep. I looked out of my window and saw the shoulders of the man as he turned eastwards towards Russell Square, but the only fact

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could swear to, afterwards, was that he was wearing a bowler hat.

I suppose the instant sense of horror that assailed me when I saw that man might be put down to coincidence. I certainly found it very difficult to explain, in the light of my admission that the same kind of visitor had been seen by me many times before. And there is undeniably the suggestion of a chance concurrence of circumstances in the fact that on this one night of all others I should have been in that condition of nervous exhaustion which so often gives us the power to transcend our physical limitations. For in effect I did that. I shuddered when I had my brief vision of those hunched shoulders turning quickly up Keppel Street. I was afraid and full of a horrid apprehension. Possibly something of the man's own quick terror may have been communicated to me. I was, no doubt, an ideally receptive medium at the moment.

And I could not shake off the feeling when I had dropped the blind and returned to the rational light and comfort of my own room. I began the usual altercation with myself, but my domineering intellectual side found no adequate reply to the perpetual suggestion that I should go and see that everything was all right. And the queer thing is that the two sides of me shifted so absurdly that I finally went at the command of my practical intelligence. I went at last to demonstrate that my impulse was ridiculous.

I framed an apology as I reluctantly climbed the stairs. When I knocked at the door I was prepared with the excuse that I thought I had heard a cry for help. It was a strange excuse to offer, but it did not seem unusual to me at the time. Since then I have often wondered whether some cry had not reached my subconsciousness while I was working. I know the

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illusion of having heard a cry took such vivid shape in my mind that I had to pause before I answered, a few hours later, the inspector's question on that point. As yet, I had no real presentiment of disaster as I went upstairs.

I can be definite about this last point because I know the exact moment when all my apprehensions ceased to be aspersed as hallucinations by one side of my mind and took the form of terrifying certainty.

That moment came when I knocked at Rose Wainwright's door and received no answer. There were possible reasons for her silence; she might have been asleep, she might not have heard my nervous little tapping, she had been in the bedroom. But I knew then, suddenly and terribly, that something awful lay on the farther side of that door. There was a quality in the stillness that was like nothing I had ever known. It was the stillness of an immense effort that could find no release in movement; an effort that was silently clamoring for me to open the door.

3

An absurd impulse that was more nearly moderate than anything induced me to disguise the truth which I had at last roused Bast.

He came into his sitting-room in pyjamas, dishevelled, sleepy, and looking more unreliable than ever.

"Some kind of fit?" he repeated, and then he looked at me with a detestable leer and said: "I say, what have you been up to?"

I scowled at him. I was weak with impatience, but I was not afraid that I might be implicated in a charge of murder—that fear only gripped me once, very briefly, and was dispersed without effort. Nevertheless, I found

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that I could not pass his imputations without an explicit denial.

"Oh, good Lord! Don't be an ass," I said. "It's nothing of that sort. There was some man up there. I saw him go out. I believe she's dead."

Bast whistled, and looked more suspicious than ever. "Hadn't we better leave it alone?" he asked. "Nasty thing to be mixed up with."

I took hold of his arm. "Oh, come on!" I said fiercely. I was suffering the awful feeling of helplessness that comes in a dream; I felt as if it would take me years to convince him.

And he still continued to parry and evade my urgency. He wrenched his arm away. "I'll have to get some of my tools," he excused himself.

"For God's sake, make haste, then," I said. I repeated that "for God's sake" continually as we argued. I clung to the phrase as the single form of articulateness that was possible for me. An explanation was too long, but that adjuration gave me a little relief.

"All this looks damned suspicious, you know, Hornby," was Bast's last evasion. "How long had you been with her?"

And then his wife's voice called complainingly from the bedroom, and I suddenly gave up hope of getting Bast to come down. I walked over to the door with a new intention quite clearly in my mind.

"Where are you going?" Bast asked.

"Police station," I told him, with a new sense of relief; and then, with the bitterness of revenge rather than with any further hope of inducing him to come down, I added: "I suppose I may tell them that there was a qualified medical man in the house who refused to render assistance."

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"Oh, I'm coming, man!" Bast expostulated. "I only wanted to *know* what the trouble was. You're infernally confused."

I looked back and saw that his wife in her nightdress was standing at the door of communication between the two rooms. She began some shrill interrogation, but I did not wait to hear her scolding. Neither did Bast. He caught me up before I had reached the first floor landing. I believe he came as much to escape from his wife as from fear of my threat. He had not, after all, brought his instruments with him.

4

Rose Whiting was lying huddled by the sofa, white-skinned, stoutish woman up to her neck, and above that a thing of sheer horror. I had not been nearer to her than twelve feet or so, the width of the room, but I might have touched her without noticing the wire that had bitten into her throat, and was completely covered in front and at the sides by the pinched flesh of her neck.

Bast seemed to guess the cause of death without hesitation. He turned the body over, roughly, and then looked up at me with an odd, expressive droop of his mouth and pointed to the loose ends of the wire. They were twisted two or three times, and he unwound them without difficulty and drew the wire out of the wound. It had cut right into the flesh in three places but no blood was visible until he released the constriction.

It gave me a curious comfort to see the insouciance with which he handled the body. I had the layman's confidence in the expert and was glad to be relieved of responsibility.

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"What's to be done?" I asked.

"No use trying artificial respiration," he said carelessly. "She's been dead half an hour, at least. I suppose you'd better go to the police station. I'll tell Pferdy. Can't do any good here."

He appeared to have forgotten his suspicion of me.

I was glad to get out into the night, but I think I came very near to fainting as I went down Keppel Street.

I meant to go straight to the police station in Tottenham Court Road, but I met a constable before I reached it and stopped at once.

"There's been a murder at seventy-three," I announced breathlessly.

He thought I was drunk, and flashed his bull's-eye in my face.

"Seventy-three what?" he asked gruffly.

"Seventy-three, Keppel Street," I said. "I was on my way to the police station."

"What have you got to do with it?" he asked.

"I live in the same house," I explained. "I had lost my feeling of impatience, now, and at the least excuse I should have become garrulous. All the uncertainty was over, and, to me, much of the horror since Bast had made his examination. "There's a doctor with the body," I went on, "but I discovered it. The doctor's name is Bast. I fetched him down."

"Look here, you'd better be careful," the man warned me. "Don't you say too much till you see the inspector. I'll come that far," he concluded, indicating the lamp of the station, fifty yards down on the opposite side of the road.

Neither he nor the sergeant in charge at the police station displayed from first to last the least sign of perturbation. I inferred from their manner that they

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were cautiously aware of the possibility that I might be playing some grotesque practical joke upon them. They questioned me gruffly and as if I were giving them most unnecessary trouble.

5

Nothing was quite real to me that night. All my impressions were hard and thin, and had a peculiar brightness which, when I look back on the whole experience, presents it in terms of visibility rather than sensation. After Bast's examination of the body, my emotion seems to have been spent. I had a feeling of being immensely separated from the doings and sayings of the little figures who continually reached out to me with their distant questions and commands.

I suppose it must have been somewhere about ten o'clock when I returned with an inspector and two constables to "73"; but there was a little knot of people, a dozen, I dare say, clustered inquisitively about the door. One of them caught me by the sleeve as I passed him. "What's up?" he asked in an eager, excited voice. I took no kind of notice of him.

We heard Pferdinger's voice long before we opened the door. One of my blinds had been pulled up, the window was open, and my room still blazed with light. It struck me that the sight of my room thus displayed was like a hole torn in the decent curtain of the street and that it exposed the secret organs of life. That unveiled interior gave me an impression of depth, as if there were the beginning of an interminable vista that penetrated into the mechanical heart of existence.

Little Pferdinger was leaning against the table in the hall when we entered. He was extraordinarily excited and voluble; and for some inexplicable reason

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was wearing a soft felt hat. Bast, with a shabby dressing-gown over his pyjamas, was sitting on the stairs, listening to him with a grim, critical smile.

Pferdminger made a sort of rush at us as we entered, but the inspector stopped his flow of quite unintelligible explanations with a curt "Which floor?" and then gave me my first feeling of respect for his esoteric knowledge by saying: "Rose Whiting, isn't it?" I am sure that I had not mentioned her name. All the questions that had been put to me until then had been as to my own identity. The police might, I thought, have been expecting this murder, and now it had come their one real concern was to throw doubt on the integrity of the witnesses.

I stayed in my own room while the inspector and one of his subordinates (the other had been left outside on the doorstep) went upstairs. In my detached way I was aware of a considerable clamour beating upon the rigid walls that shut in my retired personality. I heard the heavy tread of the men upstairs, the dull murmur of the increasing crowd that mumbled mysteriously in the roadway; and of a clear-cut, monotonous voice that was apparently delivering a lecture somewhere away in the hidden depths of the house. But all this siege of activity failed to perturb me. I knew that it could not break through the fine defences that stood between me and feeling. My mind was working swiftly and accurately, like a precise little mechanism of some delicate vivid metal.

It responded at once when the voice that had been thrilling so steadily upstairs came into my room and dropped a full fifth to ask me a question. I saw, with a sense of pride in my faculty for seeing, that Mrs. Hargrave was standing in the doorway, dressed mainly in her eternal fur coat; and behind her hovered a little

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crowd: Herz, frightened and grey, Lippmann, rather portentous and looking grossly fat in an elaborate dressing-gown, and the dull, resigned figure of Mrs. Pferdminger, the only one of us, I think, besides myself, who was fully dressed. Little Oracles in a plaid shawl were clinging, pert and inquisitive, to the fur of Mrs. Hargreave's coat.

"Who did it, Mr. Hornby?" was the question that Mrs. Hargreave had put to me.

"A man in a bowler hat," I said.

"Then you saw him?" she continued.

"Only that much. I saw him go out," I told her.

She appeared to be taking the inquiry in hand on behalf of her select followers, but she was interrupted by the return of the inspector, who had now dropped the second of his supernumeraries upstairs.

"What's all this?" he began, by way of a preface, opening, and proceeded to take the names, including 'Little Oracles', of everyone present. Mrs. Hargreave wanted to argue with him, but he ignored her. He had lifted Pferdminger in tow, and referred to him every now and then again for verification.

"Is this all the people in the house?" he asked her when he had written down the names of the group in his book.

"Viz zose you already haf, yes," Pferdminger replied sullenly.

"Better get out of the way, then," the inspector said, and with a gesture he warned them all, including Pferdminger, out of the room and shut the door on them.

I dare say that he was very conscious of his importance just then. His manner was very different from that of the policemen who had come in on the night when poor Rose Whiting defied the whole world of convention.

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"I shall be coming with another officer to-morrow morning to take your deposition," he said, looking at me. "Until then I should advise you to answer no questions, and generally, well, keep your mouth shut."

I nodded.

"This is a very serious business," he added.

"Very," I said.

"I must ask you not to leave the house until I have seen you in the morning," he went on sternly.

"All right," I agreed.

And then he suddenly dropped his official manner, and, stroking his fine moustache, said: "You're a bit shook up, of course; but we get used to this kind of thing. I was engaged in that very similar case in Bernard Street. Same feller done 'em both, if you ask me. Well, good night, sir."

I should have offered him a drink if he had stayed another minute.

6

I went to bed as soon as he had gone. I took a book with me, as I was quite convinced that never in my life had I felt less sleepy. But as soon as I lay down I collapsed almost instantly into unconsciousness. Perhaps I fainted, and the faint developed into natural sleep. I remember that in the moment that intervened between my realisation of complete prostration and the blackness of coma, I made an effort to blow out the candle and was unable to make the least movement. And that uncompleted impulse was still active when Pferdminger determinedly woke me at eleven o'clock the next morning. I raised myself—at once, as I thought—and turned to the table by my bed. The beginning of realisation came to me when I saw that

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the candlestick was empty. Not until then did I become aware of Pferdinger.

"Ze police are in vaiting for you, in zere," he said peevishly, pointing to my sitting-room. "Zis is no ze sird time you *will* not vake yourself."

"What's the time?" I asked. I still found it hard to believe that I had been asleep.

"More than eleven o'clock," he replied impatiently. "I vant to know vat you say to ze police."

I got out of bed, and my mind, working back through recent events, picked up a memory of the injunction that had been one of my last waking impressions. "The inspector told me to keep my mouth shut," I said.

"But eet ees to me—*important*," protested Pferdinger.

"Why?" I returned snappishly, as I put on my dressing-gown. I was recovering, then, all the hard objective impressions of the night, and my chief concern at the moment was whether I had made a fool of myself. I could remember perfectly the parts played by the other actors, but the memory of what I, myself, had said or done or felt was as faulty as the memory of a book that I had read without attention. I seemed to have "skipped" in places.

"Zey must not know of men taken into ze house," Pferdinger was protesting. "Zat is—*important*."

"Oh, rot!" I said. "They know all that to begin with."

"No! No!! Zat ees not so . . ." the little man began to expostulate, but I cut him short by leaving the room.

I found two men, the inspector and a little greyn-haired, brown-eyed man in plain clothes, methodically searching my sitting-room.

"Just a matter of form," the inspector explained

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curtly, as I stared in astonishment. "Have you got a key for this writin'-case?"

I supplied the key and suffered one of the worst moments of the whole incident while they opened and glanced into half a dozen of Judith's letters.

"If you'll be long, I may as well have breakfast," I ventured after an agonised interval.

The little grey-haired man turned round and gave me a friendly nod. "Do what you like so long as you don't leave the house," he said.

The idea of going up to Hill's room came to me as offering a blessed prospect of relief, and then I remembered that he was away for the week-end. I must, indeed, have been in a queer condition of mind not to have missed him through the events of the night. But I was horribly over-tired and over-strained before the final shock of that awful discovery. And it seems probable to me that the condition I have so inadequately described (I do not believe that it would be possible to describe it convincingly to anyone who had not suffered a similar experience), that and the profound sleep which followed it, saved me from a severe nervous disturbance. For an hour or two I had been protected from all further shock to my sensibilities. If a bomb had fallen at my feet any time after I had left Bast in that horrible room upstairs, I should have watched it with a quite impersonal interest. Something in me that commonly responded to such terrors had been away, or guarded, or perhaps asleep.

I was almost my normal self again after I had chased Pferdinger away from the keyhole of the bedroom door, and had had my breakfast.

The two officials had completed their investigation before I had finished, and began my examination—"taking my deposition," they called it. And it was

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during this examination that for one detestable moment I was afraid I might be suspected of the murder of Rose Whiting.

The little grey-haired man asked all the questions and although his brown eyes had met mine frankly enough when he had given me permission to have breakfast, he never once looked at me directly while he conducted my examination. He did it all with rather a perfunctory air, as if he were thinking of something else.

"I want you just to give me an account as near as you can of what happened," he began, and he did not interrupt me while I repeated, in effect, the impression I have written here. After I had finished he started a series of kinds of apparently irrelevant questions about my profession, my family, my knowledge of the other people in "73," about anything but the details of the story I had just told him.

He gave a sort of inconclusive nod when those questions had been answered, and I thought he had finished. He was looking out of my window when he began again abruptly :

"Was there a light in Rose Whiting's room when you first looked in?"

And for the life of me I could not have answered that question without consideration. It is a fact that I was not sure whether or not the gas had been burning.

"There must have been," I said after a very sensible pause. "I'm sure I didn't light the gas myself."

"Why?" he asked.

"I should have remembered doing that," I replied not too readily.

"You are quite sure you didn't light the gas?"

"Quite!"

"But there was a light burning?"

Rose Whiting

"I couldn't have seen her if there hadn't been," I said.

"What did you say the exact time was?" he put in.

"I think it must have been after one o'clock," I said, again after a moment's hesitation induced by his suggestion that I had already made a definite statement on that point.

"How long had the man been gone before you went up?" he continued.

"A few minutes, not longer," I said.

"Why did you go?" was his next inquiry, and it was then that the dreadful fear of being accused came to me. I could not answer that question in terms that I could expect him to understand; and while I still hesitated he confused me still further by adding: "Did you hear her cry out?"

I believe I was really in danger of temporary arrest at that moment. I was not absolutely sure whether or not I had heard a cry, and if I had yielded to my craven impulse to take refuge in that simple explanation, I should have been open to the gravest suspicion, inasmuch as it was a physical impossibility for poor Rose Whiting to have cried out after that beastly wire had strangled her. But I did not think of that when I answered. I told the truth because among the absurd tangle of motives that influenced my replies I reacted against the one that would have made me attribute my actions to a supernatural agent. For I was aware in some way that if I had heard a cry I had not heard it with my ears.

"Oh no," I said, "I heard nothing"; and saw that I was, now, apparently committed to the very explanation I had wished to avoid.

"Ah!" commented my inquisitor, and I knew that he was drawing a false conclusion as to the reason for

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my visit. He wore that detestable smile with which many men leer at sexual intercourse. His next question confirmed me.

"I suppose you were waiting for this chap to go," he remarked, looking askew at his notebook.

"Oh, Great Scott! no," I replied fervently. "I only spoke to her once, ever. One night there was a frightful row here."

"When was that?" he put in.

"Some time last October," I said. "Soon after it came here."

The grey-haired man turned to the inspector. "That's right?" he asked sharply.

"October fourteen," the inspector replied with a nod.

That little interlude, demonstrative of such careful official record, made me more determined than ever to keep to the strict truth. That was my one hope of avoiding a trap.

"Generally work so late as one o'clock?" the inquiry continued.

"I have been recently," I said. "I am going in for a competition, and the drawings have to be finished by the next Thursday."

The grey-haired man sighed, and suddenly allayed my fear by dropping his inquisitorial manner and looking at me with the same direct stare he had given me before he had begun his examination.

"We've no suspicions of *you*, you know, Mr. Hornby," he said. "We know more or less who did this, though we mayn't know his name or where to put our hands upon him. But if I might suggest it to you it would be as well before you answer the coroner just to find out why you did go up to that gal's room at one o'clock in the morning."

Rose Whiting

"The truth is," I replied, "that I had a presentiment something was up when I saw that chap go out."

The little man pursed his mouth. He could believe me innocent of murder, but his faith in my moral rectitude went no farther than that.

"Bad luck on her, just now, wasn't it?" he remarked casually. The inspector had shut up his notebook, and I understood that this was mere friendly conversation.

"Why just now?" I asked innocently.

"Well," the little man replied with a shrug. "You saw her, didn't you?"

"Of course I did," I said.

"Stark?" he added.

"Absolutely," I agreed.

"Well, then, you know what her condition was?" he said.

But even then I could not follow him.

"Her condition?" I repeated vaguely.

He blew out his lips and winked at the inspector. I had convinced him of my innocence, but I had lost his respect.

He made a noise as if he were soothing an infant.

"Sh!" was his comment. "She was four or five months gone, poor gal!"

7

I spent the remainder of the morning in writing to Judith. I could not work facing the inquisitive crowd that continually shifted and never diminished, both under my window and in greater force on the farther pavement. Whenever I showed myself they stared and pointed at me, and I wondered whether they had learnt that I had been the first to discover the body. There was, of course, no report in the early Sunday papers,

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but the story of the murder had got about in some mysterious way. I saw two or three men who were obviously reporters attacking the stolid policeman who stood foursquare on our top step. His only reply was to shake his head and wave them away with his powerfully wooden hand.

Until three o'clock the house was strictly in possession of the police, who were going diligently through every room. I could hear their incessant tramping and the noise of those heavy footsteps got on my nerves after a time—the only effect that I could trace of my overstrung condition of the night.

But at three o'clock we reached a climax with the arrival of the ambulance. I detected a different note in the rumbling of the crowd as it drove up, and looked out of the window to see the gaunt horror of the stretch being lifted out of the wagon by four policemen. At last I heard the measured tramp of the men as they came slowly down the stairs, and the strange, excited murmur of voices that swelled into a hoarse rattle as the gratifying object of the crowd's curiosity was carried across the pavement.

Soon afterwards the little grey-haired man looked into my room again and gave me an informal notice of the time and place of the inquest.

"No need for you to stay in, now, if you've a fancy to go out," he concluded. "I dare say you don't find the place any too cheerful." And then he advised me that the reporters would soon "be on my track" if I did not keep my "eyes skinned"; and warned me to give them no information of any kind. . . .

I had an unpleasant sense, then, and for many days afterwards, of this interference with my liberty.

The inquest on the following Tuesday was a more bearable ordeal than I had anticipated, and the coroner

Rose Whiting

never pressed that difficult question of *why* I had gone up to Rose Whiting's room in the first instance. He accepted my statement that I was alarmed when I saw the unknown man depart, as a perfectly rational cause for making an inquiry. I suppose he had, in that particular at least, been advised by the detective or whatever he was who had cross-examined me. I never learnt his proper status. He did not appear at the inquest; all his evidence being given by the inspector who had accompanied him.

But although there was never any question of my detention, I could not rid myself for a long time of the feeling that I was no longer a free individual. If I was not watched by the police, I was a person of inexplicable significance to the crowd that for more than a week gaped and gaped about our front door; and found my presence at the window a source of apparently inextinguishable satisfaction. So that I had to finish my competition drawings under surveillance. I tried working with the blinds down and the gas burning, but I found those conditions even more trying in the bright May noonday than the stupid staring of the shifting, pointing idlers. And the incessant annoyance of their subdued chattering seemed to increase when I shut out the sight of them, as if they found cause for new suspicion in my desire for privacy. I am sure some of them suspected me of making away with important evidence when I took my great bundle of drawings to the stretcher-maker on Thursday morning.

(I am still proud of the fact that I finished those drawings in time. It was all mechanical work, then, I admit, and some of it was very hurried, at the last; but they were quite presentable.)

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8

I have nearly finished this unpleasant chapter, and I shall be glad when it is done with—all the dreadful sensations of that time have been revived as I have been writing, so that the thing has become very real again to me, even though I may have failed to reproduce a tithe of the horror and strain that I suffered. But before I leave the subject I may as well wind up the incident so that I shall not have to refer to it again.

The effects that the murder had upon the household at 73 Keppel Street were not important. Lippman left the house the day after the inquest, but he was the only deserter. And Rose Whiting's rooms remained unlet to the end of the lease. I fancy that Pferdminger was something half-hearted in his attempts to get a new tenant, and the only applicant I ever heard of was a very queer-looking chap who had, I infer, a taste for the morbid. He told Pferdminger that he was writing the story of a murder and had been waiting for a chance to get the proper atmosphere. My door was ajar when he came and I heard him talking in the hall. He talked a great deal, in a rapid, high-pitched voice. I received an impression that he was under the influence of drink or drugs. He was refused without hesitation.

Pferdminger had had a shock and meant to be very careful in the future. He was more restrained after the murder, or that was my impression, but he harboured a grudge against me—a fact that had, perhaps, a slight influence on my career. I believe he thought, in face of all the evidence, that he might have pretended the innocence of Rose Whiting's profession to the police if it had not been for me. Even at the inquest he took elaborate care to describe her as an actress.

And the murderer, as everyone knows, was never

Rose Whiting

caught. There were many reasons, I have heard, to connect this crime with the one in Bernard Street, and to point to their having been committed by the same person. There was no motive, as the word is commonly understood, in this connection. Rose Whiting was probably the victim of a violent lust for sexual cruelty, which nothing short of murder could satisfy. So far as society is concerned, that lust may be considered as a form of insanity, and it seems to me that the murderer who succumbed to that lust is not such a reprehensible creature as the man who kept Rose Whiting through the winter and threw her over when he found that she was going to bear him a child. I have little doubt that that was what had happened. The hypothesis so convincingly explains all the known facts, and although the man's name did not appear at the inquest, I believe that the police knew it. And in my opinion, if there were to be a hanging, he was the greater criminal of the two, and should have suffered the extreme penalty.

He may be alive now. If he is, I hope he may read this and recognise the story of the woman whom I have called "Rose Whiting."

XIII

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

I

As my bank balance steadily decreased until the calculation as to how much longer I could afford to remain in Keppel Street became an ominously simple sum in mental arithmetic, so much the stronger grew my determination to "stick it out" to the last possible moment. I had a feeling of unjustifiable pride in that intention to "stick it out." I comforted myself with the phrase. It appealed to some solid English basis in me that I had inherited from my father.

The principle of my attitude is not defensible in many cases. There are occasions when common sense is a greater virtue than stolid courage. I have heard how at the beginning of the war our gunners would stick to their guns when their battery had been located by the enemy, and how we had to learn from the French that the trained artilleryman is of greater value than many guns, and that his duty to his commander and his country is to take cover and not to die foolishly and obstinately at his post. But there was a reason in my case for holding on as long as possible. My hope of finding a client was not yet dead. My name was sometimes bracketed with my more successful contemporaries in articles that discussed the merits of the new school in domestic architecture. And I saw that should a commission eventually come my way, I stood a very good chance of losing it, if I had no office of my own.

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That, however, was my one justification of any worth; and on the other side was a whole array of considerations which made it advisable for me to save what I could while I had the opportunity. By selling my furniture I could have lived, economically, in one room for another six months at least, while now I risked complete destitution.

I consoled myself by postulating that at the worst I could always find work as an assistant, but that resource, also, I meant to postpone as long as I could; and meanwhile I began present economies by saving in food. For a whole week I had dinner at the inclusive cost of ninepence at a little eating-house off the Tottenham Court Road; but one night such a feeling of disgust took hold of me that I could never endure the sight—no, I think it must have been the smell—of the place again. Afterwards I got much less nourishment for the same price at an A.B.C. or an Express Dairy; but I suffered less, nervously.

Also, I began to prepare my own breakfast instead of buying it from Pferdminger, and this saving, altogether apart from economical reasons, was another means of prolonging my stay in Keppel Street.

Pferdminger, as I have said, had a grudge against me; and as soon as he began to suspect that I was in financial low water, he found occasion to annoy me in small ways. He ceased to wait upon me himself, and the slovenly girl who was the Pferdmingers' only servant had apparently been instructed that my bell was the least important in the house. My brass plate was allowed to become so tarnished that I swallowed my pride and polished it myself every morning; always with the ridiculous fear in my mind that the long-expected client might come at last and catch me in the act. But the most pointed of his innuendoes was the sudden

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solicitude he displayed with regard to the payment of his weekly bill. That instrument was now scrupulously presented every Saturday morning, and he took the further precaution of coming up with it himself to avoid any possible procrastination.

He must have meant that as an insult; he could not have been uneasy as to receiving ultimate payment while he had the security of all my furniture and effects. Not that the truth is that he disliked me, and wanted to revenge himself, not only for the part I had played in the Whiting tragedy, but also for my treatment of him. I had insulted him on the morning after Helen had come down to my room, and for that, and for my general attitude of superiority to him—an attitude to which I must plead guilty without the shadow of an excuse—he had his knife into me, to use the cant phrase.

He would have given me notice to leave, if he had not been afraid of me. Little money-grubber as he was, he would, I am sure, have sacrificed three months' rent in order to be even with me.

It is curious that I should write so bitterly of him now. I certainly bear him no grudge. But always as I write I recover my mood of the moment, and I cannot deny that in July, 1906, when I was run down in health and nervously worried, my dislike for Pferdinger was a positive factor in my life.

And that factor played quite an important part in my determination to remain in Keppel Street until the end of the lease. I would not be beaten by him. I believe it was partly on this account that I relinquished one of the last strongholds of my pride and went out one morning to apply for a job in the office of my old colleague, Horton-Smith.

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It may be thought that I was deliberately courting an additional humiliation by applying to a man who had been my equal in Lincoln's Inn. But apart from the main reason for going to Horton-Smith, I was in a state of mind just then which made tedious explanations and the demonstration of my capacity as an assistant almost unbearable. If I must accept degradation, I wished to plunge and be done with it. Smith knew my abilities as well as I did myself.

But what I have called my main reason was an eminently sound and rational one. Horton-Smith's "luck" had held, and he had won the big competition which had occupied all my best energies for three months, the competition upon which I had toiled so arduously to the accompaniment of that muttering crowd who had gaped at me after the murder.

I saw the announcement in the paper which Hill lent me after I had cut down the extravagance of a separate subscription. Hill knew that I was hard up, but I had disguised the real truth from him. He believed that I was merely being prudent in anticipation of future difficulties. He was not a man who could be easily deceived, and I flatter myself that I played my part rather well.

I was not crushed when I saw that I had failed again. I knew the chances of competition work too well to count upon any probability of winning, and, as always happens to me, as soon as my design was finished I began to criticise it. In the six weeks that elapsed between the time my drawings went in and the date of the announcement, I had fairly convincingly persuaded myself that I was not going to win.

And I accepted Smith's success as an omen. I had been given, I thought, the choice of this opportunity.

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For I rightly counted it as almost a certainty that I should get a job as his assistant. This competition was the biggest thing he had touched—the estimate was for £80,000—and he would need a larger staff. Moreover, I considered it probable that among all possible applicants he would choose me. I smiled at the reflection that it was a Friday and the 13th of the month. I concluded that fact in the general portent of the omen, as a mark of my entry into servitude.

I took the paper up to Hill's room before I went to bed.

"I'm going out to get a job," I told him. "It means a weekly salary—four, perhaps five pounds a week."

"How do you know you'll get it?" he asked.

"I just know," I said. "It's by way of being a sign of the aftermath." And I pointed out the five-line paragraph in the paper. "You see, as luck will have it," I added, "Horton-Smith's an old stable-companion of mine. We were together on our articles together, some time last century."

Hill sat up in bed. "Look here, Hornby," he said. "If it's just a question of tiding over. . . ."

"It's mainly a question of my not being a silly ass," I interrupted him. "Besides which it's a Friday and the 13th of the month. I might get six pounds a week with luck."

I left him looking puzzled and a trifle downcast.

3

Horton-Smith's offices were still in Verulam Buildings, but he no longer lived there, as he had done when he first started in private practice. Indeed, I found that in addition to the three rooms which composed the suite of chambers on the second floor, he now rented another room on the floor above as a tracing office.

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He explained all that as soon as I had congratulated him on his latest success. He was a good fellow, and I could make allowance for a slight touch of swelled head that morning, although those symptoms made the offer of my degradation a trifle harder to make.

"Well, look here, old chap; I've really come to see you on a matter of business," was my method of plunging into his explanation that he would, now, have to get rid of his lease, or sublet his present chambers—and take larger offices.

He looked at me keenly when I said that. I have no doubt my manner put him on the alert. And he was a good business man. He won his competitions on his planning—the two things go together.

"That's good," he commented.

"I want you to give me a job—as an assistant," I explained.

"By Gad! I'm sorry, old chap," he said. "Have you made a mess of it, somehow?"

"Well, I've got no work in hand," I said, "and I've just failed to win a big competition."

He whistled and tried to cover a triumphant smile. "Great Scott! were you in for it?" he remarked. "I'm lucky. The drawings are on view this morning, just over the way. Shall we run over and have a look at 'em?"

"We'll settle the business arrangement first," I said. "I want to know what you'll give me. I'm not cheap, you'll understand, but I know my value," and I could not resist the temptation to cool him down a little by adding, "especially to you."

He smiled self-consciously. "Do you?" he said, attempting the air of a thoroughly successful architect.

"Rather!" I replied. "I'll help you to get a decent elevation for once. That's the one thing you can't do."

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He bit his lip and frowned with just the old boyish expression he used to wear when Geddes and I chaffed him about his designs in Lincoln's Inn; and then he laughed good-humouredly.

"Oh! well, there's something in it," he confessed. "How much do you want?"

"Well, you could hardly pay such an expert adviser as I am less than six pounds a week," I said.

He made a wry face, but he did not attempt to bargain with me. "All serene," he said, and added, "I shan't want you for a couple of months, of course."

I had not thought of that awful proviso; and I daresay he would not have made it, if I had not asked such a high a salary. In two months I should be on the rate unless I sold my furniture or borrowed from Hill. But I could not humble myself further to Horton-Smith. I had reached some barrier that I could not overstep, at that moment. I suppose the easiness of our relations had given me a sense of retaining my equality with him, in spite of temporary embarrassments. In any case, I could not face the admission that I was almost a pauper. I should have had to plead with him.

"About the middle of September," I said carelessly. "Do you expect to be in your new offices by then? Of course, if anything turns up to prevent my coming to you I'll let you know in good time."

"Thanks! Yes," he agreed; but I saw that he had no doubt of getting me.

Afterwards we went over to the Holborn Town Hall and viewed the acres of stretchers that were hung there. If there was anything in the arrangement of those drawings, my entry must have stood well with the assessors, for Horton-Smith's, the second premiate design, my own and one other, shared the place of honour on a big screen set across the end of the room.

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I had hopefully and yet sadly adopted the motto "Dumspiro," writing it in one word; and that, I think, was the only thing I was ashamed of when I saw my drawings again—drawings so tragically rich in association; every line of that hasty "lettering" cried aloud to me that two months ago there had been a murder in Keppel Street. Horton-Smith had unimaginatively signed his work "Munting," a joiner's word for the middle stile, or the mullion, of a framed door. But I think it represented him better than he knew. It so well suggested his consciousness of being in the centre of things.

I had the upper hand in our critical exchanges; my plan certainly stood the test of comparison better than his elevation. He admitted that, with just a touch of pique, and explained that he had always meant to reconsider the exterior if he got the job. And to cover his admission he gave me a lecture on the advisability of being practical in work of this kind. "It's the plan that decides most competitions," he said. "Now where I think you went wrong. . . ."

We were absolutely agreed that the second premiated design—the brute who sent it in got fifty pounds—was dreadfully poor stuff. That fifty pounds would have helped me to beat Pferdinger hands down.

-4

I was crossing Bloomsbury Square when I realised that I was not the least anxious to return to Keppel Street; and I had at the same moment a sense of loss which I failed immediately to understand. I fancied, at first, that it must have something to do with Judith; but when I thought of her I understood that my love for her was in no way related to my associations with

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the house in which I had met her. No, so far as she was concerned, my morning's work had brought gold to her promise. Economically we were free to marry as soon as she could find release from attendance on the aunt who still hovered between death and recovery. With my £300 a year and Judith's £200 we could be married in the autumn. For her letters had told me that she had no further doubt of herself. Our correspondence had grown more passionate in the last few weeks. We had ceased to disguise our longing for each other. My new employment had, in fact, brought the promise of happiness very near to me, and yet I had a sense of loss.

And when I recognised it, it seemed at first sight so trivial and absurd that I laughed aloud in the desert of my separation from the casual pedestrians in the Square. I was no longer tied to my rooms by the uncertain joys of expectation. My hope of that dilatory emancipating client had vanished. I had accepted the choice of servitude, and automatically I was relieved from the pains of indecision. What was there to regret I asked myself. For the present, I might sell my furniture and take two months' holiday somewhere near Cheltenham; I need do no work during that time; and Heaven knows that I wanted a rest. In the immediate future I might marry Judith and settle down on what was after all a quite sufficient income. And as to the dim future, that too would not be so gloomy. I knew that I was a better architect than Horton-Smith. I could make myself invaluable to him. I might reasonably look forward to some kind of partnership with him at no very distant time.

And then I looked up and saw a strange fascia glaring along the whole front of respectable houses that faced me across the Square. "Wilfred Hornby

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Failure" was the shout of that great sign, and I felt that all London was pointing at me.

I had given up the fight. I was the man who had accepted security at the price of his individuality. I was ready to take in exchange this partnership with a man who would never allow me a free hand. I knew well enough what that collaboration with Horton-Smith would mean, and most certainly it did not mean the development of my ideals. He was a practical business man with a good head for arrangement and construction. And inevitably he would use me for mere money-making. I should turn my back on ideals and become fat and prosperous. I should creep back into the shell that had, as I thought, been so effectively broken by the passions, terrors, and interests that had pierced me in that wonderful house in Keppel Street--the house to which I wanted to return no more.

5

My body was weak and my mind extraordinarily clear as the result of my recent fasting, and I look no farther than that for an explanation of my vivid illusion that the proclamation of my failure was written in fire across the dull solemnity of Bloomsbury Square. I knew perfectly well that no eye but my own could see that denouncement of my insignificance, and yet I crept away shamefaced, as if I were branded with the visible stigma of disgrace. I retreated aimlessly, and was hardly aware of my surroundings until I found myself on the diagonal path that would lead me to the still centre of the gardens in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

I found a seat there and rested for a time among the tired driftings of humanity that had been whirled out of the booming tornado of London traffic.

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I wanted to hold my thoughts steady, in order that I might make a new inquiry into my position, reconsider my determination to sell my artistic ideals; but I found that I had no power of guiding my mental processes. I saw clearly, but I could not choose my subject. Nevertheless it seems to me, now, that some control—it may have been nothing more than a congruous association of ideas—exercised a faculty of selection. It was certainly an association that set me thinking of Parkinson's job with its Queen Anne gables.

I had denied my artistic conscience in that case without a struggle, and I had sneered at Geddes for reproaching me, but I found no fault with myself on that score; Parkinson's commission had been a stepping-stone to private practice and the free hand that was my ultimate goal. And I had not, then, committed myself as I should now commit myself, for ever, by accepting the dictates of Horton-Smith. Moreover, that remarkable concession was made in the days before I went to Keppel Street. . . .

I lost sight of the old bargain with my conscience in the new suggestion. I thought of the change in myself. I affirmed the fact of change with a feeling of satisfaction. And then the panorama of my recent life passed before the background of my mind and temporarily obscured the consideration of my immediate problem.

I saw bright, fascinating pictures that seemed to condense experience into a single movement.

The figure of the unhappy Rose Whiting danced before me, passing through rapid phases of eagerness, resentment, and determination before she slid away cowering, with her eyes fixed in a beseeching stare of horror and dismay. Behind her came Mrs. Hargreave sturdily erect, with a fanatic gaze that was fixed too in

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tently on some imagined thing she had abstracted from the great content of life. And behind her the face of her husband flashed up for a moment, like the face of a wild creature that moodily paced a cage it had not the courage to destroy.

And I saw Helen, absorbed in the contemplation of her own misery; a drooping, despondent figure that passed with a moody resentment.

And then I tried to conjure up a vision of Judith, and the picture broke like an interrupted dream.

I became aware of the bright July day, and the hissing tremor of the tall trees that responded to a wind of which I was barely sensible. And high up through the leaves I could see the open blue of bright sky, and the bellying sails of majestic cloud, exquisitely white, that set a slow course across the great width of heaven. A little whirlwind of dust leaped and spun for an instant across the gravel playground.

I felt as if life was momentarily arrested; as if the wind and the cloud and the dust alone moved, while humanity waited for a new impulse.

I looked out towards the invisible windows of my old office across the Fields. I had begun there; shaping my desires within the shell. I had touched the need for a larger expression at Keppel Street. And, now, I waited for a fresh impulse. I was in the calm centre of the storm, relieved of the need for volition. Beside me an old man, with a grimy, deeply furrowed face, stared lifelessly before him, as if for him the need of a new impulse had passed for ever.

I got up impatiently and marched back into the wind and stress of Holborn. My resolve had crystallised into the bathos of an intention to drive away dreams by indulging myself with a sufficient meal. I wanted food and energy to take up the fight again. And, at least, I

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would not be beaten by Pferdinger. I would stay "73" until my time was up, cost me what it might. I had still two months of hope.

6

I calculated that with care I could make my present resources last for three weeks. I had closed my banking account and now carried my entire capital in my trouser pocket. When that money had gone I counted on my watch and my case of mathematical instruments to keep me for another three weeks. The last fortnight must be paid for by selling books or a piece of furniture unless I could manage to earn something before then—by writing another article, for instance. My calculations were based on an outlay of thirty-five shillings a week, of which Pferdinger took twenty-two and sixpence for rent and gas—the latter charge being based on an estimate of sixpence a burner, including a gas-rin in the bedroom where I now cooked my own breakfast. I worked out this summary of my resources after a really satisfactory meal that had cost me nearly three shillings, and I felt exceedingly hopeful. Incidentally I included that meal as a part of my capital. I meant to eat no more that day except a little bread-and-butter with a cup of tea in my own room before I went to bed.

That problem of economising in food began to fascinate me in the course of the next two weeks. Now that the period of my poverty was definitely fixed, this game of trying to save something out of the twelve and sixpence left to me for food and washing had no terrors. I looked forward to future compensations, and had no feeling of present martyrdom. Indeed, I think that I enjoyed this juggling with small sums of money. The four shillings and sevenpence that I managed to save out

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of my first week's allowance, gave me a delightful sense of living within my means; and I never once reproached myself for past extravagances.

I saw the announcement of Gladys's wedding on the Tuesday after I had seen Horton-Smith. Morrison Blake's celebrity had earned him a two-inch paragraph in the *Daily Telegraph*. I was surprised that the wedding should have been delayed so long. Whenever I had thought of my cousin since the great row at Ken Lodge, I had thought of her as Blake's wife. But when I came to consider the probable cause of the postponement, I attributed it to Blake's procrastination. No doubt, he had not been too willing to give up the opulent freedom of his bachelorhood. I wondered whether Gladys had had much difficulty in persuading him finally to fix the date. I guessed that she had managed him tactfully, but, towards the end, very firmly.

And it was on the following Thursday that I received a short note from Aunt Agatha expressing surprise that I had never been to see them, referring to Gladys's wedding with a hint of stating a grievance against me for not attending it, and asking me if I would not have dinner with them on that day week—"just Lady Hoast and one or two people," she added, probably as a hint that I should be expected to dress.

My first impulse was to refuse, but after deliberating the invitation over my preparations for breakfast, I decided to accept for two reasons. The first and more important was that I should be able to save at least a shilling, and get a tremendously reinforcing meal; the second was that, since my pride would not be hurt, the offer of reconciliation having come from them, I might as well make use of my uncle if his recommendation were still available. It was just possible that he might have a client in view for me, and that I might at this eleventh

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hour be saved from Horton-Smith and the expediency of his practical designs.

But chiefly I looked forward to the dinner, and was horribly tempted once or twice to anticipate the spending of that extra shilling.

The twenty-sixth was an abominably hot day. London was just at the beginning of that heat wave which scorched us in 1906. And although I enjoy hot weather as a rule, it interfered in this case with my arrangements for attending my aunt's dinner-party. I had intended to walk. I was determined not to throw away the cost of half a week's living on a cab. But without an overcoat and in full evening dress I could not face Camden Town High Street; while, if I wore an overcoat I foresaw that the heat would be too much for my shirt and collar. I decided at last to take the 'bus to Hampstead Station, and then walk very slowly up the hill.

I allowed plenty of time, but I was amazed at the effect the heat had upon me. I took off my overcoat as soon as I reached East Heath Road; but even then I had to stop and rest every minute or two for fear of getting too hot. I remember that I kept mopping my face with my spare handkerchief and commenting under my breath that I seemed to be as weak as a rat.

When I got to Ken Lodge I was five minutes late, but my shirt front was as stiff as a cuirass.

I entered the drawing-room with quite a gay feeling, of lightness and clearness. I greeted my aunt with, I thought, an appropriate ease of manner; and she shook hands with my uncle a little carelessly—I mean him to understand from the outset that I regarded myself as the injured party. And I found that I was no longer afraid of him. The portentous wink with which he returned my salutation made me want to laugh.

There were, I believe, four other people present be

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sides Lady Hoast—who was gracious enough to remember me—but three of them seem to have made no impression on my mind. I could not be sure, now, whether I had ever met them before or whether they were perfect strangers to me. The fourth was a thick-set, clean-shaven man, with an intelligent, keen face. He was introduced to me by my uncle as Mr. Henry Graham, a name that I felt I ought to remember. I thought he stared at me rather curiously; but I was conscious that both my uncle and aunt also looked at me now and again with a kind of quick furtiveness. I peeped down at my shirt front, afraid that it had, after all, begun to show signs of buckling; and when I was reassured upon that point, I began to wonder if I were not perhaps behaving a little oddly. I felt a tremendous confidence in myself, but I could not be perfectly sure that I was saying the right things. Occasionally I would become aware of the sound of my own voice speaking, and be quite uncertain what I had been saying.

Fortunately dinner was announced almost immediately, and I knew that if there was anything wrong with me it was emptiness. I had had nothing to eat since my bread-and-butter breakfast. I felt that it would be sheer extravagance to eat with that feast ahead of me.

And, indeed, the soup—it was mock turtle—had an immediate effect upon me. The slight feeling of being light-headed left me, and I began a perfectly reasonable conversation with Lady Hoast on the subject of motor traction. She regarded tubes and motor-'buses, I believe, as being almost works of the devil.

"Those awful tubes," I remember her saying; "so Noisy—and the Atmosphere! I thought I should certainly *faint* the last time I went in one."

I think I replied that tubes had their obvious disadvantages, and added, very reasonably, that the new tube

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from Charing Cross to Hampstead would nevertheless have been a great convenience to me that evening.

We had had fish and an entrée before I became aware that the heat of the room was horribly oppressive. I was wet with perspiration, my heart was beating at a most unholy pace; and, most curious of all, I was suddenly seized with an unaccountable distaste for food.

I frowned. It seemed to me that I frowned quite tremendously. I was afraid of doing something to disgrace myself. And then Lady Hoast most unexpectedly began to sail slowly up towards the ceiling, and at the same moment I had a blissful sense that it didn't matter a damn what she or I or anyone else present was doing. I dare say that the pendulum of my uncle's clock had barely time to swing a full arc between my sight of the ascending Lady Hoast and the moment when I fell into an immense abyss of darkness; but in that fraction of a second I was able to realise that I had no further responsibility of any kind towards my partner, my uncle, my aunt, or anyone else at the table. They were all phantoms of my imagination. I recognised that they had no relation to me or to the great reality which was sweeping me down into the great void.

If they had, I didn't care.

7

When I returned from my unremembered journey into space and took another peep at the Earth through the vehicle of Wilfred Hornby's senses, my first shocking impressions were of an overpowering smell of brandy and an unpleasant dampness, the latter condition being due, as I learnt afterwards, to Lady Hoast's prompt but ineffectual first aid. My next, which succeeded very quickly, were the strange facts that my collar and shirt

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were unbuttoned, that I was lying flat on the hearthrug in my uncle's study, and that my uncle and Henry Graham were kneeling by my side and bending over me.

"I'm all right now," I said. "It was the heat."

"Hum! Hum! Better lie still till Reynolds comes—he'll be here in a moment," my uncle advised me.

"But really, I'm perfectly all right now," I insisted. "A little giddy, that's all." But I lay still, nevertheless. I had been impressed by the fact that Dr. Reynolds had been sent for. I was not sure that I might not be much more ill than I felt.

"What happened?" I asked.

"You fainted dead away across the table, my boy," Graham answered. "You've been unconscious for the best part of twenty minutes."

I remembered my vision of the attendant Lady Hoast. "I say, I'm sorry, uncle," I apologised. "But look here, hadn't you better go back? I shall be all right here till Reynolds comes; and as a matter of fact, I'm perfectly well now."

"What I can't understand . . ." my uncle began, and stopped abruptly at the sound of the front door being opened and the voice of Reynolds in the hall.

"Well, well; here he is," he continued, and got up to meet the doctor in the doorway.

Reynolds seemed at first to regard me as a joke. "Fainted, eh?" he remarked when the case had been presented to him. "Dear me, and what have you been up to, young man? Living too fast, eh?"

But there was something dramatic in the change that came over him when he began to examine me. The hand he laid first upon my pulse and then upon my heart, moved with a sudden quick suspicion to my ribs, and I saw his expression of banter draw into a puzzled frown.

"Can you sit up?" he asked; and when I had obeyed

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him without much difficulty, he helped me to my feet. I felt empty and still a trifle giddy, but I was able to stand without support.

My uncle had also noticed Reynolds's new gravity for he began to clear his throat heroically, and then came out with, "Nothing serious, Reynolds? Er—er—nothing very serious, is it?"

Reynolds looked up with a glance of inquiry at Graham, who was standing thoughtfully in the background.

"If you'd sooner I went . . ." he replied, and left us at once; but I do not think he had anything to learn from the doctor.

My uncle had been either less observant, or was determined to disbelieve the evidence of his eyes. He mumbled out something in which the word "heart" was the one clearly emphasised word.

"His heart's as sound as a bell," Reynolds returned curtly. "My dear Williams, the boy's starving—there's nothing else wrong with him. Put him to bed and give him some good beef-tea with a drop of brandy in it. And see that he takes it slowly."

(I never dared to ask, but I am afraid there can be no doubt that the beginnings of that excellent dinner had been wasted so far as I was concerned. I was certainly aware of a great emptiness.)

I resigned myself to the armchair, and waited for them to dispose of me. I was full of shame and apology, but I had come to the end of my energy, and the task of explanation was beyond me for the time being. Alas! I was surprised to find that the anticipation of beef-tea and brandy aroused no sort of enthusiasm. It may be that the reek of brandy, still so unpleasantly dominating my every impression, had given me a temporary distaste for that medicine. I know that the smell of it filled me with repugnance for months afterwards.

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"No more brandy," I put in feebly, at the first opportunity.

Reynolds nodded. "All right," he said, and then advised my uncle to get me to bed as soon as possible.

They did not keep me waiting very long for that relief. It seemed that preparations had been begun before Reynolds's arrival. And the beef-tea, when it came unflavoured by any stimulant, was quite acceptable. My aunt came up with it herself, and explained that it had been intended for her own consumption. She was trying a super-feeding treatment, she told me, for some obscure disease of the nerves from which she had been recently suffering.

I hope that I was politely sympathetic.

I slept like a child, and woke ravenous.

I had three poached eggs and a glass of milk for breakfast.

After that I was practically normal again, if still a trifle weak. And neither then nor at any time since have I suffered any unpleasant consequences from the effect of that six weeks or so of underfeeding.

I do not know if my case was, for any reason, an exceptional one.

8

I had to dress in the wrecks of my overnight splendour. I had received no instructions to stay in bed, but I suppose they had been taken for granted. I know that my uncle, whom I found alone in the breakfast-room, looked uncommonly surprised to see me, and laid great stress on the "inadvisability" of my having got up so soon.

"Er—er, now what do you propose to *do*?" he asked when I had assured him of my ability to stand.

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"First of all, go back to my rooms and change," said.

"You're still in Keppel Street?" he asked dubiously; and when I replied that I was, he frowned and winked and hum'ed his sincerest disapproval. "After that terrible case—I saw you gave evidence," he scolded me. "H'm! How—how you could ever expect a client to come there? Absurd!"

"By Jove! that never occurred to me," I ejaculated. It is true that I had given no thought to that obvious consideration.

"You must come and live here for a time," my uncle said.

I shook my head decidedly. I could not go back to that atmosphere of suburban respectability. I had been alive and free for nine months, and a free man does not willingly return to imprisonment. Moreover, 73 Keppel Street had become a home to me, and I meant to stay there as long as possible. Everything that had ever deeply affected me was associated with the place. The house was full of my friends.

"I could not do that," I said.

My uncle's wink somehow conveyed his deepest suspicion and displeasure.

"We—we must talk this over, Wilfred," he said. "I—I feel responsible. I am not going to the office this morning. You shall have the brougham to take you to—to your lodgings—to change. And I should like you to come straight back here; the brougham will wait."

I agreed to that. I was glad to be saved the necessity of travelling by 'bus to Bloomsbury Street in evening dress, and with a collar that had suffered severely from brandy and water.

I found a letter from Judith awaiting me at Keppel

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Street, and she enclosed postal orders for £5. Hill had written to her and reported that he thought I was overdoing the economy business, particularly in the matter of food. She did not scold me for deceiving her, but her letter was full of anxiety; and she deplored her inability to come up to town and look after me. Her aunt, it seemed, was worse, and might die almost any day. Her final injunction was that I "must have proper meals," whatever happened.

I kept the brougham waiting while I answered that letter, and I was thankful that I could at least relieve her of all anxiety on my account. I returned the postal orders as an earnest of my newly assured position; and told her that I should certainly have kept them if they had come one day earlier.

Perhaps it was as well that they did come a day late. . . .

I found that my uncle had worked up a pretty grievance against me when we had our promised interview. He kept his hurt steadily in the foreground as he talked, harping on the note of an insistent "Why?" Why hadn't I been near them? Why hadn't I explained? And he gave me clearly to understand that he had a grave doubt whether the atmosphere of the house in Keppel Street had not seriously impaired my morals.

Indeed, it was not until I had given him an account of my engagement to Judith that he showed any sign of being ready to condone my manifold errors of commission and omission. And from first to last he never gave me the least hint of the real reason for his long silence. I learnt that from Aunt Agatha after lunch. "You see, Wilfred," she explained, "it would have been rather painful for Gladys to meet you again before she was married." I wondered whether Gladys had been spiteful.

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But after Judith's most reputable ancestry had been reported—her father had been a colonel in the Indian army—my uncle allowed a suggestion of graciousness to become visible through his mannerisms. He had a dry humour of his own, and remarked that he had not expected me to find a Lillie in the desert of Keppe Street; I had, wisely I think, suppressed all mention of Judith's brief ambition to go on the stage and her assumed name of Carrington. And then, having winked himself past that little jest, he opened the important subject of Henry Graham.

Graham was, according to Uncle David, the ideal of the almost mythical client that inspires the more brilliant day dreams of the young architect. He represented that wonderful thing Influence. His present requirements, so far as they concerned me, might possibly be insignificant; but if he "took me up"—a quite magic phrase in this connection—there was, I inferred, little he could not do for me. His chief interest was the celebrated Mechanical Wagon Co., of which he was the director and principal shareholder; but he was "in" everything that mattered, my uncle said, and made no secret of the fact that he himself had long been angling for a share of Graham's legal business.

And then he went on in his own peculiar unrepudiable way to tell me how he had mentioned my name to Graham and given an account of my abilities. And despite the aggravated complication of his mannerisms—they were becoming more marked with age, I noticed—I understood how he had wanted to make amends for his neglect of me, even before he had realised to what straits I had been reduced. He almost apologised, anxious was he, now, to do what he might have called "the right thing by me."

Nevertheless, when I again refused his offer to m

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a temporary home for me at Ken Lodge, he displayed the old inclination to hector. Perhaps he was glad of the excuse to cover up the signs of his recent weakness. It was almost with an air of challenge that he finally announced his intention of financing me until I was firmly on my feet. Afterwards I wondered if his offer of a home had not been made to save the expense of making me an allowance. I hope I am not doing him an injustice in admitting that speculation of mine; but his queer habit of miserliness was another characteristic that developed very noticeably in his last years.

9

I met Graham by appointment the following week. He had a great block of offices in Victoria Street, and almost my first remark to him was a criticism of their darkness and inconvenience.

"I suppose you'd like the job of designing new ones for me," he replied, with a dry smile; and I made sure that I was going to make a mess of the interview.

"Well, you certainly want them," I said.

He looked at me keenly and shook his head. "London wants rebuilding," he remarked, "but it'll have to wait, and so shall I. The problem is *land*, my boy." He gave me no time to answer that—not that I had any answer ready for him—but went on at once to tell me why he had sent for me.

"I've put up a little test for you, Hornby," he explained. "You rather took my fancy the other night, but I want to see what you're made of; so I've asked a friend of mine to meet you here. He's going to build what he calls a cottage near Haslemere somewhere, and I'd just like to see how far you're going to be amenable. Look here, now, I'll tell you what I mean. D'you know an architect fellow called Geddes?"

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"We were in the same office together," I said.

"Well, then I needn't tell you the sort of pig-headed fool he is," Graham went on. "I put some work in his way a few months ago—I'm interested in a good many building projects—and he'd have got a lot more if he had been reasonably amenable—but he was altogether too autocratic. Now, that doesn't do, you understand. A man knows within certain limits the sort of thing he wants. He mayn't know the difference between a Gothic and a Renaissance moulding, but he has a general idea of what style is going to suit him. He's out to buy something, and he's going to buy the kind of thing he wants, and not the kind of thing Mr. Geddes considers to be the one and only perfect design. Your friend Geddes is too arbitrary."

"Is he?" I said thoughtfully.

Already my idealist visions of a free hand were dissolving. The phantom of my ambitions was giving place to the detestable hard outlines of modern realism, and I foresaw that the prospect of working for Graham might not differ so very materially from the prospect of working for Horton-Smith.

"Now, you strike me as being a practical, capable sort of chap . . ." Graham was saying.

And were my ideals, after all, worth striving for? That was the question I had to answer.

Graham's friend—his name was George Bertrand—came in before I had had time to settle that problem.

He was a dark, fleshy man, and I guessed that I had a strain of Jew in him—the shape and expression of his eyes were certainly not English. Nevertheless his speech was English enough and he displayed, in thought, a typically English attitude with regard to architecture.

For after we had discussed the site and accommod

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tion for his proposed "cottage"—he intended to spend £8,000 on the actual building—he gave me his idea of what he was likely to require in the matter of style.

"Nothin' high-falutin—something solid and comfortable and English," he said. "What about Georgian, now? Something that suggests endurance, eh?"

"I agree with solid and comfortable and English," I said, "but Georgian is no more English than the Parthenon."

"It's been acclimatised," he said, "like the deodar."

"But has failed as yet to accommodate its appearance to the English landscape," I said.

"Well, it's up to you to make it," he retorted.

"Then it would no longer be recognisable as Georgian," I replied.

"What I want is a small English country house," he insisted. "What about Elizabethan if Georgian don't suit your ideas?"

"Why not a twentieth-century house that would represent you and your own time?" I asked. "Why should you want to copy the Middle Ages in architecture? You don't wear mediæval clothes."

"Meaning you're struck with this New Art fad?" he suggested.

"No," I said definitely. "I don't want to copy even that. I want to design you a house to live in. You wouldn't like me to make it a copy of an old house *inside*—you'll want bathrooms, and central heating, and electric light, and everything that is modern and convenient."

"Oh, that's right enough!" he put in, with a touch of approval.

"Then why should you want the outside to be a sham?" I asked. "Why shouldn't the house be *your* house outside as well as in? The house of George

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Bertrand, Esquire; designed and built in the year of grace 1906. You won't be ashamed of having built yourself, I suppose?"

Bertrand looked at Graham, winked and scratched the back of his neck. "What do you think, Harry?" he asked.

Graham was stroking his jaw. He looked at me and he said, "The point is whether we're willing to be educated?"

"Aren't you trying to educate people about motor vehicles?" I put in eagerly. "Do you find that the public always knows well, what's best for it?"

"I don't," Graham returned dully.

"Of course you don't," I agreed. "You're a specialist. When one goes to a specialist one goes for advice. Well, I'm a specialist, too."

Graham was smiling. "Here, wait a minute," he said, shaking his finger at me. "I'd like just to draw your attention to one little difference between you and the other specialists. It's this. If a man comes to me or to a doctor or a lawyer, we've only got to consider his requirements; but you and your friend Ged's and the rest of you inspired architects aren't thinking of your clients so much as your Art. You want to satiate or to improve the aesthetic of all England. You want Bertrand's house, for instance, to be an inspiring example of how to do it for all the country."

"Of course I do," I said. "Don't you?" I added, addressing Bertrand.

He did not answer me, but looked doubtful at Graham. I believed that I could manage Bertrand.

Graham shrugged his shoulders. "The point is whether we are prepared to accept you as an inspired prophet of the new style," he remarked. "We might prefer to put our money on the old Webb or Norman Shaw."

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"If you come to me you come to buy the goods I have to sell," I said obstinately.

"And you won't accommodate yourself to sell any others," Graham asked.

"I'm a specialist in any others," I said. "I shouldn't come to you to buy a stage coach."

Bertrand was grinning, but Graham leant back in his chair and laughed outright, a good, honest laugh that cleared his eyes.

"That makes me a strand," he said, still chuckling, "but the architect Hornby here was pretty well down on his hands a day or two ago. And now that he gets a chance of his life he's willing to chuck the lot for the sake of a letter of Art. How's that for a business proposition, eh?"

"See you in a night, Henry," Bertrand said. "I'd expect the cottage of mine to be something-good, you know."

"I've got him," Graham said, winking at me. "But now, here's another proposition for you. I'm going to build new works in Yorkshire—long. What are your ideals about the designing of these shops?"

"I'll do those works in a flash. The designing would be done very largely by yourself," I said. "For what you want is an effect of stability and groupings, not clean outlines as far as possible, and the absolute minimum of decoration. What I should try to express is organisation and co-operation, with well lighted, well ventilated buildings—simplicity and efficiency, you know. The thing I should try to avoid is that awful suggestion of ostentation and preening—be something else—a château, for example—that you see in the designing of so many works of that kind. I've seen a factory with machicolations, as if it were designed to stand a medieval siege."

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"You're all right," Graham said, and I knew that I was indeed all right so far as my prospects were concerned. But there had been a moment when I had wavered; when I had wondered whether I could face my uncle with the report that I had offended Graham for the sake of some vague idea. I had given way so easily about Parkinson in the days when I was engaged to Gladys.

"The difference between you and your friend Geddes," was Graham's last approving distinction, "is that you're broad-minded and he isn't. He's dogmatic. He's only got one idea. If he'd designed those works of mine he'd have tried to make 'em look like a garden suburb."

I believe Graham was right in that judgment.

10

I ought to have been very elated that evening.

I had so conclusively beaten Pferdinger that I could afford to forgive him—and if he did not forgive me, he reverted very easily to his old air of servility when he learnt that he was again to serve me with meals. And as an evidence of his returned docility, he went out himself the next morning and diligently polished the "sign on the post."

But the essential of my victory was that I had won the prospect of independence on my own terms. I knew that in future I would be able to do my own work in my own way. And there was a fair probability that I might presently realise an infinitesimal fraction of the ambition I had dreamed in the Euston Road—I might take a hand in the re-designing of London. (As a matter of fact I have already done something in that direction, although I am not going to catalogue my

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efforts here. I am not writing this book as an advertisement.)

And yet I was aware of loss that evening; of some sacrifice that I was making in order to accept success. I realised that I was no longer a true member of the community at 73 Keppel Street; that, do what I would, I must soon lose touch with my house-mates.

We had been united, all of us, in our common struggle. However diverse our characters or ambitions, we had for the most part achieved sympathy; and even where there had been hate—as in the strife between Helen and myself—it had had a human, I think I may say an honest quality, that had left no bitterness. Helen and I had in a peculiar sense been *equals* in our fight for Judith. All of us there in the house had been equals—with the one exception of Mrs. Bast, who had from the first put on airs of superiority.

And this simple realisation of essential equality with the rest of mankind constitutes, I suppose, the change in myself that I have insisted upon from the beginning. All my upbringing had taught me to divide society into categories. People were judged by their position and labelled as eligible or ineligible acquaintances; as people one ought or ought not to know. In Keppel Street I learnt to alter my standard of values. I learnt, before all, that there is not such a creature as a fellow human being I ought not to know; and that just so long as I shrank from sharing the interests of my fellow-men, so long must I remain a mere egg; a cramped, distorted entity, bound within a shell that permitted me no true sight of life.

In retrospect I always think of 73 Keppel Street as a "jolly" house. The epithet is Judith's, who adds that they were all such "jolly people."

XIV

PERSPECTIVE

I

ARCHITECTURE seems a very precise art when I compare it with story-writing. When I design a building, I come by degrees to visualise the whole of it and to place it, mentally, in relation to its surroundings. One begins with a rough plan, and from that everything springs, until at last the visualised thing is created in the solid, compact and whole, and varying only in minor details from the conception one has formed in one's own mind—many of the variations being due, unhappily, to the incompetences of contractors and workmen. It is so difficult to get away from the rigidities and limitations of the machine in modern building.

The writing of a novel (I suppose I can call this book a novel?), and more particularly the setting down of a piece of autobiography, is a very different undertaking. I began with some kind of plan in my mind, but I had to abandon it before I reached the end of my second chapter. For I intended originally to regard only one aspect of myself, and I very soon found that if I were to confine myself to that I should be compelled to write an imaginary story to fit it. The experiences of my life have not lent themselves to throwing one aspect into a high light.

Again, the belief that I was a very ordinary example of humanity, the belief which I clearly stated at the

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outset, has been severely shaken by the introspection that has been necessary in writing. Indeed, I have been driven to the conclusion that the typical in humanity is a mere abstraction. The differences between individuals are so inexhaustible; and the points of likeness furnish so artificial a means of classification.

But the insuperable difficulty that must confront the writer who would give to his story the neatness and finish of a completed work is the consideration that life is a succession. The account of an episode may be neatly rounded off, and given an air of completeness; but I can find no stopping-place in the story of a life. Even death would not, now, finish the long train of events; for something of what I learnt in Keppel Street has already been taught to my two children, and they in turn may pass on some version of it through unrealisable generations. While even in the ten years that have intervened between my last recorded episode and the present moment of writing, I could find material for another half-dozen books if I cared to write them.

Nevertheless, when I look back over all this heap of manuscript, I feel that the only year of my life which I have treated in detail has some special significance; that it forms the nucleus of a story to which my first three chapters were a necessary prologue. And I know that no other period of my life has the same significance. That is, perhaps, some kind of justification.

But my professional habit will not permit me to leave all the loose ends which seem to me so horribly obvious; and a few of them, at least, I can and will tuck in with a fair approach to neatness. My chief trouble is to find a method of doing the job quickly.

It seems fairly clear, in any case, that I must bring myself and Judith up to date.

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2

Her aunt died in August, 1906—three weeks after my reconciliation with Uncle David—and left her another £200 a year. I went down to Cheltenham for the funeral, and made the acquaintance of the surviving sister, who is still alive and stays with us now and again. She tolerates me, but I am afraid that we can never be equals. She does not approve my "principles," as she calls them. I feel her watching me with an expression of grave doubt, and know that she is wondering how I, the son of a clergyman of the Church of England, can come to have such queer ideas about society. She tries to find excuse for me on the ground that I am an artist—of a kind.

With that legacy in addition to our joint income and my professional prospects, there was no reason to postpone our marriage, and Judith and I spent the necessary five minutes or so before a registrar in the following September. I had introduced her to my uncle and aunt, but we steadily opposed the suggestion of a public ceremony. Hill and Mrs. Hargreave were our two witnesses.

We lived in a little villa in the Vale of Health for eighteen months after we were married, moved into a house at Northwood when our little boy was twelve weeks old, and finally settled down into this place, which I designed for myself on the heights overlooking Wendover, about four years later.

My uncle died in the winter of 1912, and left me £20,000. I regarded that money as a superfluous responsibility at the time, and I was planning to invest the whole of it in a model-dwelling scheme that was occupying my attention when the War broke out.

That cataclysm changed everything for Judith and

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me. We refer to the new period between ourselves as the beginning of the "third phase." For her life, like mine, has been divided into recognisably distinct phases, which we have labelled for our own convenience as the Cloister, the World, and the War.

My professional prospects temporarily vanished in August, 1914. In any case, new building operations were postponed; and two of the jobs I had in hand were hung up at that time by the building strike, which seemed so immensely important in July and so utterly negligible a month later. But the chief cause of interference was my immediate mobilisation. I had joined the Territorials five years before, and held the rank of captain; and Judith, after a terrible struggle with herself, permitted me to volunteer for foreign service.

I have written the word "permitted" after a long hesitation, and it does, as a matter of fact, suggest the final outcome of the three days' struggle between us; but no single word standing thus alone in this dull, curt record of a time so extraordinarily full of emotion could give any effect of Judith's submission, or of our relations to one another throughout the various stages that preceded her decision. She was so furiously opposed to the idea of war, and although she conceded the necessity for me to fulfil the duties I had undertaken as a Territorial, she loathed the thought of my killing a fellow-creature hardly less than the thought of myself being killed.

But I dare not, now, enter into any report of that argument of ours, inasmuch as such a diversion would entail an account of our relations to one another—and they cannot be explained in few words. For I believe that in some respects our married life has been unique. Judith and I are in many ways so independent of each other; we have so many separate interests, and our

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opinions—as in this matter of volunteering for foreign service—do not by any means always coincide. And yet we have kept our love not only sweet, but ardent. Our feelings for one another have deepened, but otherwise they are what they were ten years ago. Judith and I have always been, essentially, equals. . . .

I was not sent abroad until the spring of 1915, and then I went to Egypt for four months. I came back from there in September, had ten days' leave at Weymouth, and then, after being five weeks in France, I lost my right foot and four fingers of my left hand in a little affair between Auchy and Vermelles. The wounds might not, in themselves, have been so serious, but I was left in a bad position and nearly bled to death before help could reach me. One of the deepest satisfactions of my life is the fact that the little fellow who rescued me received the Victoria Cross. No face—not even Judith's—was ever so welcome to me as his. And his coolness and cleverness still seem to me almost supernatural. We were under fire all the time, but he saved my life by putting a tourniquet round my leg before he attempted to move me.

I was pretty bad for two months after that affair, but I get along famously, now, with an artificial leg—the surgeons were able to amputate below the knee, and I go with a scarcely perceptible limp—while my left thumb has become adapted to opposing itself against the stump of my hand. I can still do most of the things I want to do with that hand.

I began this book last January as a means of relaxation and forgetfulness. In five weeks—of which I spent altogether nineteen days in the trenches—I had suffered experiences that leave their mark for life on a man of my disposition and habit. We were not unusually active about my bit of the line during my time there;

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our lot compared with that of the men in, say, the Somme advance, might appear a peculiarly easy one; but my wounds and the illness that succeeded them seem to have enclosed the whole experience in a ring of agony and terror. Perhaps I was too old—I was some months past my 38th birthday when I went to France—or it may be that men of my temperment cannot endure the shock and threat of life in the trenches. I hope, in any case, that my feelings were not typical. For I can tremble now to think of the horror of reluctance that might have overcome me if I had not been incapacitated by my wounds; if I had had to go back. . . .

Even now I cannot describe my experiences to Judith, and yet I have always been conscious that some lurking danger awaits me if I attempt to forget too completely. I am undoubtedly mastering my horror by degrees, and I have had it in my mind to begin a quiet examination of my feelings during those critical five weeks by writing some sort of account of them—not for publication. After I have done that I may be able to speak more freely.

But when I began this book in January, I did it in order to forget. I was in danger of becoming insane then, and I found relief by plunging myself back into the past. And I can see—though I doubt whether anyone else would notice the change unless it were pointed out—how my gradual recovery has affected both my style and my method. I began with almost pure reminiscence and with a strong inclination to trace the subjective rather than the objective trend of my life. But as I grew stronger and less nervous I began to take a delight in the telling of a story; I invented conversations to fit my memory of actual events. Sometimes I was strongly tempted to invent incidents also,

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and I might have succumbed to that temptation if I had had more confidence in my ability as a romancer.

One result of this recovery of mine strikes me as worth noting—namely, that while I am thankful to have re-achieved a certain normality, I am inclined to regret the lost spirit of my first three chapters. I know that I shall never recover it, and I could not wish to pay the penalty that alone might re-induce the nervous sensitiveness which enabled me to write of my more or less transcendental experiences. But I feel that I came nearer to the underlying truth of life when I concluded my earlier history than when I plunged into the realistic account of my year in Keppel Street. If I could have written that, too, subjectively, I might have justified any claim to hatching.

3

To return to my loose ends; Hill did not join up until last April, and he is at the present moment (October, 1916) in Ireland. I hope he may remain there I believe he will. Since the early days, when we lost such men as Rupert Brooke and Dixon Scott, there has been a recognisable disposition to save men whose services to literature, art, and science cannot be replaced. Hill's name would, of course, be known if I described his literary activities during the past ten years; but he has asked me to say nothing that will "place" him, and I must respect his wish.

Mrs. Hargreave is less easily disposed of. She developed a form of megalomania not long after she left Keppel Street, and her husband, who had completely failed to find any evidence against her that would give him grounds for divorce, had her confined in a private asylum at Chiswick. She was released

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after twelve months—she had grown very stout in that time—and lives now on an allowance of £150 a year that her husband conceded her. She is certainly not mad, but she is unquestionably eccentric. She still talks sometimes of going on the stage, for example. She took no active part in the militant movement after she came out of the asylum, but she was, and is, an ardent feminist.

She stayed with us down here for a fortnight last August, and her theory of the war seemed to be that it was an interpolation of Providence designed to put women into power. I am willing to agree that the enlargement of women's energies will be one of the war's effects, but I cannot admit that it will be either the principal result or the only one. I feel as if there was some undefinable constriction in Mrs. Hargreave's mind. I believe that if she could have shaken off that dominating *resentment* of hers, her life might not have been wasted.

The same opinion is true of poor Helen. She, too, is in effect a monomaniac, although she has never suffered from the mania of greatness that landed Mrs. Hargreave at Chiswick. Helen reverses Mrs. Hargreave's judgment. She regards the war as an intolerable interference with the great militant campaign which was moving in 1914 towards its triumphant achievement. She has been doing office work for the last two years. She had a serious nervous breakdown after her last hunger strike, but she is a perfectly competent secretary. She is working, now, for a well-known woman organiser—she steadily refuses to take employment under any man.

Herz is interned. He had neglected to take out his naturalisation papers, and applied for them, too late, when he had received his notice to return to Germany

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for service in the Landsturm. He preferred internment to the obeying of that summons. I don't blame him.

Pferdminger had shown greater foresight. He had become a British citizen many years before the war broke out. After he left Keppel Street he started a boarding-house in Torrington Square and succeeded very well. I have not seen or heard of him since 1912 but I have no doubt that he is surviving the loss of his German boarders.

I do not know what happened to Lippmann after he left us; and the Meares, as I have already mentioned never wrote to me after their arrival in South Africa.

I have left the Bastis until the end, and I find some difficulty in dealing with them, because Judith and I adopted "Oracles"; and although I have no intention of ever letting her read this story, I cannot avoid a feeling of distaste for putting down the facts about her father. I picture her accidentally getting hold of the book this manuscript may become, recognising herself under her *alias*, and being horribly confronted by a bald statement of the manner of her father's death. She will probably be told the truth when she is older, but she is a delicate, nervous girl, and I should not like her to receive the news in that way.

Her mother married again, a moderately rich man, I believe; but we have held no communication with her for many years.

* * * * *

It is quite evident that my story is finished, but I am as loath to leave my manuscript as was Gibbon when he had finished the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. I cannot, perhaps, speak of my book as "an old and agreeable companion," but it has afforded me a very valuable distraction from the

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immense pressure and menace of the war; and I believe that it was largely instrumental in saving me, nine months ago, from melancholia. Little wonder, then, that I feel unwilling to write "The End," and put my task on one side. And as I have said, a book of this kind can never be finished.

Only yesterday I found new experience that was like another beginning.

I had been to see a friend in Gospel Oak, a man who was a private in my company, and has since been invalided out of the Army.

I left his father's house oppressed by a sense of the narrowness of life. All that quarter is, to my mind, representative of the worst of London and of our old civilisation. The slums vex me far less. There I find adventure and zest whatever the squalor; the marks of the primitive struggle through dirt and darkness towards release. In such districts as Gospel Oak I am depressed by the flatness of an awful monotony. Those horrible lines of moody, complacent streets represent not struggle, but the achievement of a worthless aspiration. The houses with their deadly similarity, their smug, false exteriors, their conformity to an ideal which is typified by their poor imitative decoration, could only be inhabited by people who have no thought or desire for expression. And the boy I had visited confirmed me in that deduction. He had had what he called "good news" for me. The loss of a leg had not incapacitated him for the office stool, and his employer was taking him back at his old salary—with his pension he would be, as he said, "quite well off." Eleven months in the Army had had little effect upon him. Perhaps he was a little coarsened and hardened by his experience, less inclined to respect the sacredness of life, but in other ways he was the same youth with the

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same ambitions that he had had before the break came. He talked of being able to save, of setting up for himself a home modelled on that of his father, who had served the same City firm for over forty years. I could detect no sign of any reaching out towards freedom in his talk; and by freedom I mean not the choice of occupation, but the freedom of the mind, of the imagination. But, indeed, any freedom of imagination must be almost impossible in those surroundings. The dwellers in such districts are cramped into the vice of their environment. Their homes represent the dull concession to a stale rule; and their lives take tone from the grey, smoke-grimed repetition of one endlessly repeated design. The same foolish ornamentation on every house in each dreary slab of blank street reiterates the same suggestion. Their places of worship, the black chapels and pseudo-Gothic churches, rear themselves head and shoulders above the dull level, only to repeat the same threat of obedience to a gloomy law. There is but one voice for all that neighbourhood, and the message is as meaningless as the crêpe on a coffin. The thought of Gospel Oak and its like is the thought of imitation, of imitation falling back and becoming stereotyped, until the meaning of the thing so persistently copied has been lost and forgotten.

I made my way out of it at last on to the spaces of the Lower Heath; and there I found great depths of cloud that were like the openings of a door into life. Over Highgate and the North the weak blues of the October sky thrust forward rolling piles of cumulus white and primrose and dusky purples, that stood gigantic above the little swell of hill and wood. The whole panorama of the Heath seemed small and composed beneath the height of those gigantic clouds; the Earth, I thought, was no more than some wonderful

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beautiful sediment at the bottom of an enormous bowl. As I reached the Spaniards Road, a sharp shower drove suddenly out of the south-west, and for a few minutes the promise and contrast of the sky were blotted out in swirls of lowering grey. Then I saw that the horizon was slashed with a yellow band, and presently the curtain of rain was rolled up to discover the deeps of clear sky filmed here and there with drifting scarves of white. And with the return of the sun the distances were wrapped in that wonderful veil of atmosphere which sometimes transfigures the Heath, an almost palpable atmosphere that is like thin, clear smoke; that is like the bloom on a September plum. The nearer trees in their dark greens and browns and scorched yellows melted back across the valley into lavender grey, and then into a sweet, warm blue; and yet the depth of the picture right back over the Middlesex hills had the appearance of being an effect rather than the presentation of true distance—I had a sense that all this beauty of line and mass and colour was in some way composed, as if I myself had composed something more wonderful than any haphazard view of natural landscape could ever be.

And it may be that the thrill and elation of that feeling made me more susceptible to emotion when at last, and reluctantly, I descended from my point of vantage and made my way along one of the raw brown paths that wind among the silver birches and lead out to the Heath Extension. I know that when I came in sight of the Garden Suburb, grouped about its two churches, I was ready to shout with joy, as if I hailed some great achievement. It seemed to me, then, that these open roads and graceful houses were so infinitely more beautiful than the dying miseries of Gospel Oak. In another mood I might have been critical, but then I

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rejoiced as if I saluted a new age—an age of hope and aspiration and individuality. . . .

And surely we are moving towards that; towards recognition of the universal claim to beauty and imagination. Ahead of us lies only too clearly another and possibly a greater phase of strife. I know that when this war is over we shall have to face the immense conflict between Capital and Labour; between the aristocracy and the dispossessed, separated as they are by that dull, immobile crowd that we speak of as the Middle Classes. And I know that it is a conflict that will come all the sooner if we should be blessed by fruitful, unarmed peace. But that struggle is inevitable and in a sense I do not deplore its necessity. It will not be wasteful, but constructive. This contrast of the Gospel Oak and the comparatively free suburb cannot be endured much longer. And if we can only find release from all the oppressions of conformity and ugliness by revolution, then revolution may be a blessed thing.

THE END

January-October, 1916.

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