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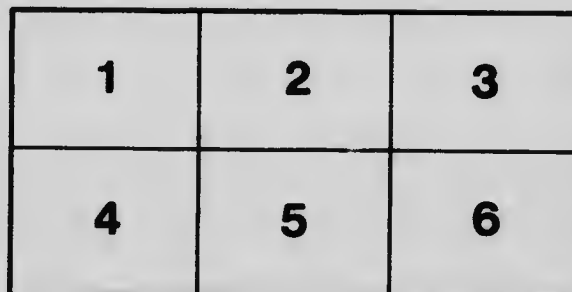
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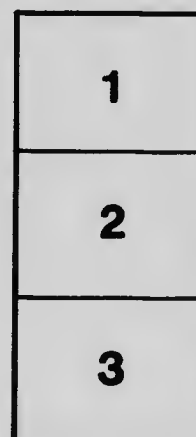
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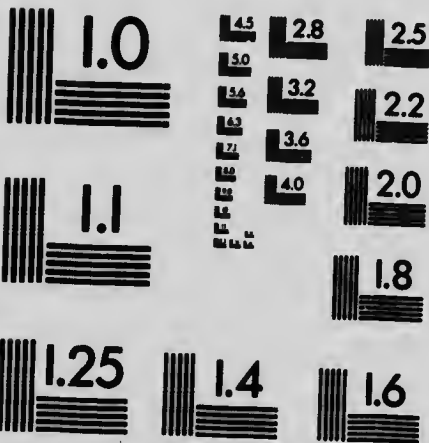
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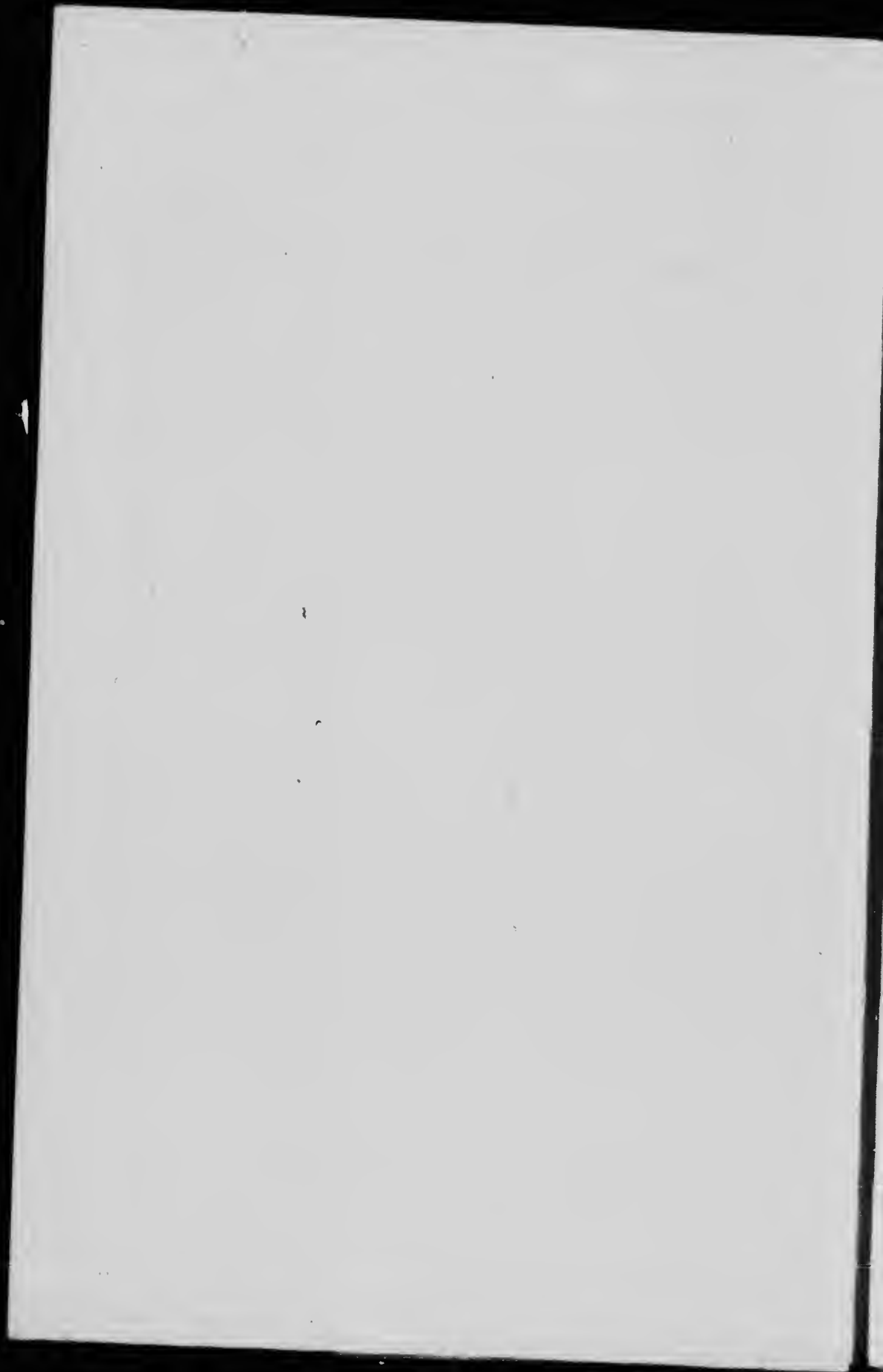
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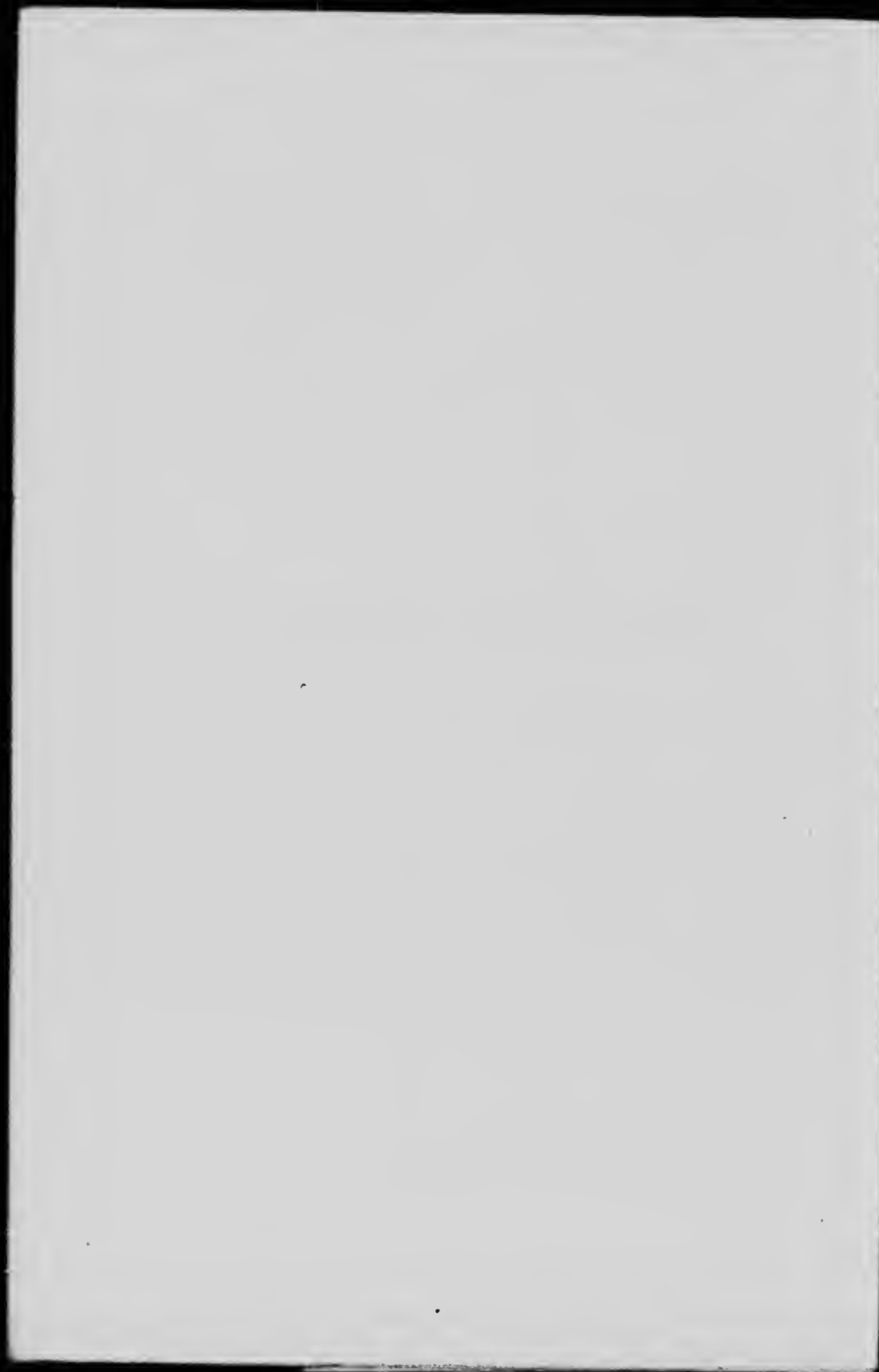


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THE GOLDEN BARRIER



THE GOLDEN BARRIER

**BY
AGNES & EGERTON CASTLE**

AUTHORS OF "ROSE OF THE WORLD"

**TORONTO
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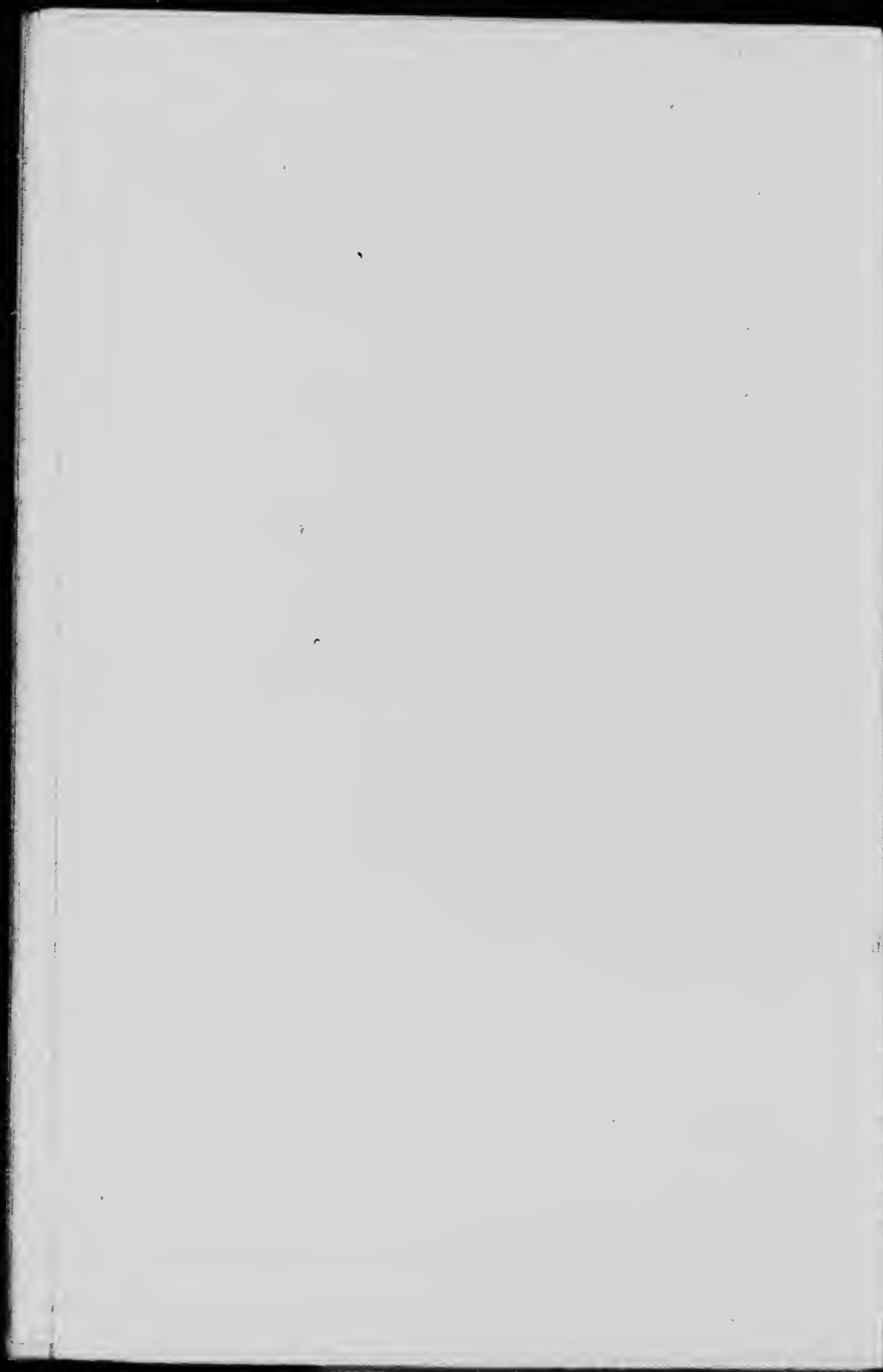
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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

TEYNE COURT

THE hottest afternoon of the hot summer—so Lady Adelaide declared it to be. And though she was assured of the presence of a breeze and confronted with a thermometer, she maintained (on the authority of the *Daily Mail*, just arrived) that, as it had been ninety-eight at Kew yesterday, here, in South Devon, it must be well over a hundred; especially as the forecasts announced a still increasing temperature. She announced that, if they all chose to behave like lunatics and seek sunstroke in the hayfields, she at least would prove her sanity by lunching indoors and spending the afternoon in the library—the coolest room in the house.

Mrs. Spofforth, the only other elderly lady of Miss Tempest's house-party at Teyne Court, after wavering a moment between the attractions likely to be provided by the picnic basket and those of the lunch requested of their hostess by Lady Adelaide—"just a cutlet, dear, and a glass of claret"—had reluctantly decided in favour of the latter. She was particularly fond of chicken mayonnaise, and she knew the hay-making party was sure to have that. But one could never make

really comfortable meals, sitting on grass mounds. And it was certainly very hot ; and her figure was not adapted to expeditions.

So the young mistress of Teyne Court had gone off with what Lady Adelaide called her "crew." The two ladies, after the *tête à tête* meal, which had proved, after all, of a consolatory nature, had settled down to quietude in the dim library till such time as tea and the return of the haymakers should provide the next diversion.

Lady Adelaide Bruce-Walsingham, aunt of Magdalen Tempest—"the rich Miss Tempest," as she had come to be known since her inheritance of all her grandfather's moneys and estate—assumed in her niece's house as much the attitude of proprietorship as she dared. She had been more or less a permanence there for the last year ; but, much as she desired to do so, she had not been able to emancipate herself altogether from the unstable position of invited guest. Nevertheless, she took it upon herself to entertain her fellow-visitors ; to order the servants about (with one exception) ; to criticize household arrangements and to suggest improvements with perfect impunity. It was only when she attempted to interfere with her niece's personal freedom of action—upon such matters as choice of guests, management of money, or upon certain others, still more intimate, that she was made to feel her insecurity and real impotence. This was a sensation which she resented as openly as she dared.

Lady Adelaide and Mrs. Spofforth—widow of the late distinguished Bishop—had been friends from girlhood, and Lady Adelaide did not feel called upon to exercise any of the fatiguing duties of would-be hostess in her

regard. She therefore had taken the most comfortable arm-chair, annexed the latest batch of papers and magazines, and set herself to a study of their contents ; which was not, however, so absorbing as to preclude an occasional doze behind the open sheets.

Mrs. Spofforth, on her side, made no disguise of her slumber. And, as silence reigned in the long, book-lined brown room—a silence full of dreamy comfort, set to the hum of the mowing-machine on a distant lawn, the mysterious drowsy croon of ' wood-pigeons amid the June leafages, the drone of a bee or two against a pane—it was not surprising that a couple of hours should have sped by, scarcely noticed by the companions.

It was Lady Adelaide who awoke first, startled by a faint snort which had escaped her own aristocratically curved nose. She instantly straightened her figure, composed her countenance, patted her hair—hair still wonderfully luxuriant and impossibly golden—and, these manœuvres completed, glanced with a sense of superiority across the window embrasure to her friend.

Mrs. Spofforth, whom no one would have guessed to be Lady Adelaide's junior by a year, belonged to the frankly elderly type of stout British matron. Her mourning for the Bishop had reached that stage of much-beaded black silk and small tulle cap in which it was likely to remain till the end. Her scanty fair hair, flecked with grey, was smoothly divided on either side of her rubicund face, which, in the abandonment of slumber after a generous lunch, was scarcely seen at advantage. Lady Adelaide remembered that year which lay between them, and caught up *The Times* with a movement of exasperation. The crackling roused the Bishop's widow, who yawned, sighed, and looked at the watch-bracelet adorning her fat wrist.

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"Two minutes past five o'clock," she announced plaintively. "I thought it was getting very late. Dear me, I'm rather hungry! Did Magdalen positively say she would be back for tea?"

But Lady Adelaide had become suddenly interested in a paragraph of social intelligence, and answered absently that she didn't know—that she supposed so.

"But I'm getting *quite* hungry," asserted Mrs. Spoforth. "I ought to have taken that third cutlet. Will Magdalen expect us to wait for her, do you think?" Although she received no answer, her voice trickled on, pathetic yet good-tempered: "Dear Magdalen is a charming hostess, I'm sure, charming. But she has a sad habit of being late for meals. It's such a mistake, you know; the appetite goes after awhile, and in the country, with everything so fresh and good—her own butter and cream, and that delicious mutton—the Bishop was so particular about his mutton, and nowadays it is so hard to have it the right age——"

Here she broke off to stare at her companion, who had flung down *The Times* with a gesture even more abrupt than that with which she had taken it up.

"A most unfair criticism of Mr. Blaise's speech at Teynstone!" she cried irately. "I declare I wish Sir Simon would write and tell them what I think of it. It is such a pity for a leading journal to be so narrow-minded, to refuse all merit to a rising thinker, just because they don't like what he has to say. Listen: 'The remarks of Mr. Blaise, in support of the Labour candidate for Teynstone would be mischievous in the extreme, were it not for the ineptitude which . . .' Ineptitude! Ineptitude! Vulgar abuse, and spite, and, besides, untrue. I consider him one of the most brilliantly clever—of the most promising intellects I have ever met.

"I think," she went on in a calmer key, "I will slip this sheet under the chair. I should be sorry if his good spirits were to be dashed to-day, poor fellow!"

Mrs. Spofforth regarded the speaker with some doubt.

"He's a most able young man, I'm sure, since you so often say so," she remarked slowly. "But I never can make out what he's talking about. It is a great pity, I think, that Magdalen should have such odd people about her, and take up with such queer ideas. The dear old Squire was such a staunch Conservative . . . one of those who are the backbone of England, as the Bishop used to say."

"My dear," said Lady Adelaide, "I used to be a Conservative too. But look how they treated poor Simon. No wonder the country's getting sick of them. And as for what Mr. Blaise says, he is merely saying to-day what all England will say to-morrow. We must go with our times, Lucy, and those who are not afraid to be a little in advance are the coming great ones."

"I heard your odd friend, Mr. Blaise, remark as much this morning. Oh dear, I am longing for a cup of tea! I really have quite a sinking. Don't you think we might ring?"

Lady Adelaide put up her eyeglass and stared at her friend with a malicious look.

"Certainly—oh, certainly," she said slowly, "so long as you don't ask me to do it."

"Oh, I'm sure I wouldn't dream of disturbing you," said Mrs. Spofforth huffily; hoisted herself out of her chair, waddled across the floor, jerked and released the handle of the old-fashioned spring-bell with determination.

Lady Adelaide's smile became accentuated, not very pleasantly. She settled the eyeglasses more securely upon the fine bend of her nose, and took up the *Daily*

Mirror with a detached gesture, remarking as she did so :

" You'll have to tell him yourself why you rang, my dear. Smallwood is probably at his own tea. . . . I wouldn't be in your shoes for anything ! "

Mrs. Spofforth immediately became seized with the flurry to which, in small matters, your comfortable elderly lady is often inexplicably subject ; probably from the mere fact that the wheels of life run so smoothly with them that the slightest jar is distressfully felt.

" Why did you not tell me ? " she exclaimed. " How could I imagine that one oughtn't to ring for a meal ? Of course I had no idea he was at his own tea. Oh dear, I do hope one of the footmen will answer ! "

" Don't flatter yourself," said her companion. " He will come himself . . . to punish you ! "

Even as she spoke, the door opened and Smallwood the butler entered—with a misleading quietness.

Smallwood had been born on the estate, had begun his career as boot-boy, to end by considering himself, even during his late master's lifetime, the most important person in the house. The Squire, who had been a man of some eccentricity himself, had encouraged the old servant to speak his mind with a freedom which, if often bitingly severe, never degenerated into familiarity. Indeed, as Lady Adelaide, who had a shrewd tongue of her own, once remarked : " Smallwood is much too superior ever to condescend to familiarity with us." He was no favourite with that lady, for obvious reasons.

This personage now advanced slowly into the room, halted and surveyed Lady Adelaide frowningly under

his bushy white eyebrows. He had a shock of white hair, a Newgate frill of a fashion that cut him off at first sight uncompromisingly from the present frivolous generation, and an odd, inscrutable face in which the lines of ill-temper blended with those of humour.

"Did you ring, my lady?" he asked gratingly at last, as she feigned to be absorbed in her reading.

"Mrs. Spofforth rang," announced Lady Adelaide, with the clear, uncompromising diction which was peculiarly her own.

Smallwood turned slowly upon the delinquent, and there was surprise mingled with the reprobation in his voice, before which she cringed, as he said: "Were you requiring anything, mem?"

He stood rigidly through her floundering explanations.

"No, thanks, not at all. Yes, that is to say, I thought it was tea-time!"

"Miss Magdalen's tea-time to-day is half-past five." He took out an enormous gold turnip watch. "Miss Magdalen gave orders that it should be served on the terrace—it is now twelve minutes past five, exactly. Anything further, mem, may I ask?"

"Oh no, thank you! I'm much obliged, I'm sure," the humbled lady hastened to asseverate.

"Then I will return to my tea, mem," announced the other, unmollified. He moved to the door, but paused, his hand on the knob. "When your tea is served, mem, I will hannounce it."

"Now he's offended!" moaned Mrs. Spofforth. "I see he's offended. And it's such a mistake to fall out with the butler, when one's a visitor! Oh dear!"

"He is offended," Lady Adelaide agreed. "When he's deadly polite and puts on his h's, it's a sign of utmost disapproval. We might have had some hope

if he had only insulted us—called us a pair of greedy women, or something of that kind."

"Oh dear!" moaned Mrs. Spofforth again. "Do you think he can be right in his head? I wonder why Magdalen keeps him!"

"Chiefly," cried Lady Adelaide, dropping her paper, and hitching her chair closer to her friend to speak with lowered voice, "chiefly because I want her to pension him off. 'Give him a nice, comfortable cottage on the estate, and a good pension. I've nothing against that, my dear,' I said. She would hardly allow me to finish my phrase. 'What! send away Smallwood!' she cried—she screamed. 'Smallwood, who carried me in his arms when I was a baby. . . .' 'All the more reason,' I said, 'for making him comfortable in his old age.' 'He's not a bit too old'—Magdalen has always an answer ready, as you know.—'He keeps the silver beautifully.' 'Of course,' I said, 'one generally expects one's butler to see to that.' 'And he keeps the servants in proper order.' 'He keeps everyone in order, I'm thinking,' I told her. And then I said that he was making the place the laughing-stock of the county. 'I don't care that for the county,' cries my young lady, snapping her fingers at me. Yes, my dear Lucy, snapping her fingers! I told her how vulgar it was. It's true, she does not care a snap for the county, or anyone. I may say she goes about snapping her fingers at everybody. As for me, dear Lucy, it is sufficient for *me* to suggest anything to that girl, for her immediately to insist the opposite."

"Dear, dear!" Mrs. Spofforth's ejaculation was sympathetic, but the glance which accompanied it had its reservation. The other proceeded, with the growing eloquence of one launched upon a grievance:

"You know what I've been to her: more than a

mother! I offered to have her to live with me when Simon and I were at Halberstadt. It would have been so good for her education, as you know. German and music. And, her uncle being Minister, she would have known all the little royalties. Such a start in life! Old Jack Tempest wouldn't hear of it, though I should have thought I might have had a look in with my own poor sister's child. However, it seems it was Magdalen's own fault. The Squire always spoilt her atrociously. It was enough for her to stamp her foot and declare she wouldn't leave the ponies, the rabbits, and all the rest of it."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Spofforth again.

"It's no wonder that I have no influence over her," swept on Lady Adelaide. "I remember putting her in the corner once, when she was a bit of a thing, and she licked the pattern out of the paper, to defy me! Licked patterns out of the paper, I assure you! And the Squire only laughed. Said it was quite an artistic design."

The listener gave an involuntary chuckle, instantly repressed. She had her own reason for wishing to remain on good terms with the heiress's nearest relation.

"It couldn't have been wholesome for her," she commented.

"Of course the poor dear man was quite dotty. Such a will as he made! Leaving everything to her. Everything—the money, the place, the property, without a restriction. Not a guardian, not a trustee. . . . An insane will! Insane! No wonder I am anxious. That silly girl can do absolutely what she likes with it all!"

Mrs. Spofforth, in her turn, shifted her chair a little nearer to her friend; and, after clearing her throat once or twice and rather uneasily measuring the handsome,

cold-featured countenance opposite to her, at last delivered herself, in a rather tentative manner, of the thought uppermost in her mind :

" I'm sure it would be a comfort to you, dear Adelaide to see her settled in life. Some nice steady young man of good family——"

She broke off before the steely glitter that had come into the grey orbs surveying her, and ended by stating feebly that Magdalen was a very taking girl.

" Taking ? " echoed Lady Adelaide, with her metallic laugh. " Giving, you mean. It is the young men, Lucy, the young men, that are prepared to be taking. Oh, there are only too many quite ready to help her in the spending of her thousands. But, if she goes on as she's going, there won't be quite so much left to play with."

" Dear, dear, Adelaide—you distress me——! "

Lady Adelaide got up, the strength of her feelings no longer permitting any attitude of passiveness. She began to pace the room, pausing every now and then in the midst of her indignant eloquence to smooth her very tight skirt over her finely corseted hip, to settle a tendril of hair in front of the Spanish framed mirror between the two windows. These interruptions were, however, purely mechanical. Her mind was still all to her subject :

" The silly girl is a tap—a positive tap ! She's only got to be turned on. First the village, then the Church, the county hospital, the Jubilee Nurses, the Recreation Grounds, the new Club Rooms, the Boy Scouts, the Girls' Friendly Society. . . . In our deep mourning, last autumn, of course, we could not see a cat ; there was nothing else to think of. And it was cheque, cheque, cheque . . . and Christmas on the top of us ! Christmas ! I've never seen anyone run riot on blankets, coal and

beef, the way she did. I suggested a little trip to the Riviera—and poor Simon had really a bad cough. But no, my dear, nothing would serve her; she must play the lady bountiful till, positively, she had to get an advance from Mr. Pawle before the new year."

"Mr. Paul?" questioned the listener, who had forgotten her sinking amidst the mingled feelings raised by these disclosures—feelings in which pleasure at the thought of so much wealth was clouded by dismay in the knowledge of such careless ownership. "Mr. Paul?"

"The family solicitor, Pawle and Brunton, you know. Tiresome old firm, I think, myself. But Magdalen makes a point of sticking to the Squire's antediluvian ways—in the wrong place. Teyne Court will be a home for octogenarians before long. The head gardener, now—quite past his work."

"Certainly," reflected Mrs. Spofforth, "the dear child does want a sensible husband."

Her own son was at this moment disporting himself in the hayfield with the heiress. "Teddy" had always shown plenty of common sense. And even if he had made a few debts, no one could expect a young man in the Guards to be as economical as a bank clerk. He would make a most excellent husband. She had hoped to have made Lady Adelaide realize this, and to have enlisted her as an ally; but she was beginning to find her old friend perversely blind and deaf on the subject. Meanwhile her ladyship's diatribe proceeded briskly:

"And what income the Church and the poor and the sick have left her, Budding Genius seems now determined to extract. Every day I see the prospect of our trip to Egypt next winter dwindling from us. Do

you see that daub over there? Yes—it is meant to be Magdalen! Do you see those books, in vellum—new Poets, new Essayists. Presentation copies . . . for the printing of which Magdalen has paid a hundred times over. Oh, she likes it! Flatters her vanity. 'Lady Mæcenæ' they call her. Not that I don't like a really clever man myself, a man like Mr. Blaise, for instance. I don't see any reason why Mr. Blaise shouldn't be Prime Minister one day. But the artistic, literary rabble; the poor little dank-haired youths with their extraordinary ties and the hair over their collars, whose boots curl up at the toes . . . they make me sick!"

"But how does Magdalen come across such people?" cried Mrs. Spofforth, who heartily shared these sentiments (and indeed privately included Mr. Blaise in the list of objectionables).

"Oh, my dear, it was those weeks in London that undid us. We ran up to Berkeley Square, from February to Easter. I, myself, thought that Magdalen could quite well have gone out this season. I wanted to present her at the last Court. This exaggerated mourning! So out of date, so out of taste I call it, nowadays. . . . But Magdalen went off into one of her furies at the mere suggestion. She didn't care what was out of date, she declared. She would show respect to her dead grandfather—if no one else did. And so we only went up before the season. That was when you were away."

"Bronchitis—Bournemouth," murmured Mrs. Spofforth, as her friend paused for breath.

"Well then, to show her respect for the dead, I suppose, Magdalen had the happy thought of setting up what she would call, I suppose, a *salon*. And Clara Mayne provided the company. Yes, it's that Clara Mayne," said Lady Adelaide bitterly, stopping with

emphasis before her companion's arm-chair. "She always has a fresh crop of them on hand. She does a deal of patronage—with Magdalen's purse."

"How did Magdalen come across her?"

"Oh, my dear, it's simple enough, unfortunately. She's cousin to the agent here——"

"Captain Denvers, do you mean?"

"I do," said Lady Adelaide. If her face had expressed hostility before, now a look of positive vindictiveness came into the hard, handsome eyes. "And an odious pair they are. . . . I wish they'd make a match of it, with all my heart! She's in love with him, of course. That's what brought her. She used to come down, for rest, you know; take rooms in the village, till Magdalen took a craze for her and would have her in the house. So now she sponges, like the rest. She's always breaking down, from overwork, since we came in for the property."

"She's a journalist, isn't she?" Mrs. Spofforth put this question in a shocked and awestruck voice, as one who hardly liked to speak of a profession so unbecoming to the female.

"A journalist. Too clever to live. I don't trust her an inch. I don't like your extraordinary superhumanly clever people."

"Oh, Lady Adelaide!" said a rich masculine voice from the threshold of the open French window furthest from them.

CHAPTER II

ISIDORE BLAISE

IT was Isidore Blaise—the rising man, the future “great one”—who stood framed in the doorway, looking in upon the two ladies, with a smile on his dark face. A tall, well-built man, with a somewhat Oriental quality in his unmistakable good looks. His black hair was flung back in a wave. It was just a trifle too glossy, and, though Lady Adelaide did not seem to object in his case, lay curling in closer proximity to the collar than is usually encouraged by the English youth. For the rest he had massive regular features, an olive complexion, full lips, very white teeth and very black eyes—with an enormous amount of expression in them, chiefly of the languorous or pathetic sort.

He was clothed in faultless white flannels, and wore tennis shoes, on the noiseless soles of which he had been able to approach unheard. It was impossible to say how long he might have been standing propped against the window-frame, listening to the conversation within.

Lady Adelaide had a flashing smile of welcome, as she wheeled round in surprise. Somehow, in a way not unusual with ladies of maturing years, she had developed an open infatuation for the young man, whose attentiveness to herself was of a description apt to strike onlookers almost as an impertinence. His speciousness she took for brilliancy ; his smartness for wit ; his flow of chosen

words and imagery for the genius of the born orator. No compliment was too outrageous, from his lips; no glance of meaning too open, from his eyes, where she was concerned. She believed that he cherished a hopeless adoration for her—which in no way interfered with, but rather furthered the plan which had come to be formed between them on the subject of her niece.

"It's Mr. Blaise," she now cried, in delighted tones. "Come in, come in!"

He advanced, smiling more broadly; paused at the grey marble pillar which supported the bronze head of Socrates, and propped himself against it as if he were posing for his photograph.

"Did I hear you say," he cried, in the tone which male listeners generally voted as confoundedly familiar, but which ladies were apt to hear with pleasure, so harmoniously modulated were its cadences, "Did I really hear you say, Lady Adelaide, that you objected to super-human cleverness?"

"In a woman, Mr. Blaise!—In a woman!" amended she, settling herself on a sofa with an inviting gesture towards a place by her side.

She flung a glance at Mrs. Spofforth. "Isn't he delightful?" it asked. But Mrs. Spofforth pursed her lips and sniffed unsympathetically. In countenance she was not unlike our late Queen Victoria. It is a type which readily lends itself to disapproval.

"I breathe again," said Mr. Blaise. His white teeth shone. He detached himself from his pillar and advanced to the sofa, talking as he came: "Though I'm not sure that I don't agree with you. Poor Clara!—Of course you were talking of Clara Mayne?"

"We were," rejoined his patroness. "It would interest us extremely to have your candid opinion upon Mrs. Mayne."

"The writer?—or the woman? Which?" Mr. Blaise formulated the question with that smile of satisfaction which went far to render him insufferable to so many eyes. He was always at ease with Lady Adelaide—a condition rather rare with him in the society in which he found himself at Teyne Court. Nevertheless he proceeded, with a watchfulness for the impression created by his words and an enunciation of them so careful that it would seem to indicate a haunting dread of betraying slips. "The writer or the woman—which" he repeated. "They are two distinct personalities. Well, I will give you my opinion on both in two words: as a writer, a success; as a woman, Lady Adelaide, dear Clara is——" he paused dramatically, and his companion on the sofa placed the missing word herself, with the sensation of sharing in the speaker's brilliancy:

"A failure!"

He bowed. "You have said it.—Inevitable! Think of it, dear lady: what a life for a woman! The sleepless nights, the hard, hurried work; the constant elbowing of her way among the other strugglers; the fight against the disabilities of her sex; the company she has to mix with—that horrible, journalistic lot. Do I not know too much of it? Brain-power abnormally developed . . . to the extinction of natural feminine charm. You see, you see it for yourself; an absolute impossibility to fulfil her real mission as a woman——"

"And what, may I ask," interrupted Mrs. Spofforth, her air of Victorian disapproval more marked than ever, "do you consider is woman's mission?"

Isidore Blaise surveyed the Bishop's widow, as he lolled back gracefully on the cushions, his half-closed black eyes somehow conveying insolence.

"A woman's sole mission, Mrs. Spofforth, is to delight the opposite sex."

Both ladies exclaimed. Lady Adelaide's "Fie—Mr. Blaise!" expressed her inner appreciation of the dear, naughty creature. Mrs. Spofforth's "Upon my word!" her unspoken verdict: "An ungentlemanly, coarse and vulgar man!" And as the culprit now leaned forward and placed delicately an olive hand on the white wrist nearest him, exclaiming at the same time: "Dare you deny, Lady Adelaide, that woman's mission is to please?" the Bishop's widow lifted herself out of her chair and markedly removed her portly presence.

As she waddled through the open French window by which Mr. Blaise had entered, the mirth of the two on the sofa rang out unrestrainedly. The rising young man's laughter had never been amenable to the strict control that marked his speech: it was for that reason, no doubt, that he seldom allowed himself that relaxation. Now his overloud laugh overpowered Lady Adelaide's well-bred giggle. She tapped him rebukingly with two taper fingers.

"Poor Mrs. Spofforth!—you really oughtn't to tease her . . ." She broke off, a sound of distant merry and young voices had struck her ear. "Here they come, and we haven't had a moment!" Her face became grave. "Well?" she said, turning her eyes anxiously upon him, "Well?"

"Well? my kind friend. Is it well?" he answered, his countenance reflecting consciously her earnestness. "Is it well? Sometimes I fear me it is ill. Our Magdalen is just a little uncertain, just a little elusive. . . . I am beginning to have doubts."

Lady Adelaide's foot, in the grey suède Cromwell shoe that matched the cool grey linen gown, began to tap the floor as, with some exasperation, she repeated, "Doubts!"

"Our little golden castles in the air, I see them rise and fall! I see them fall!" Dithyrambically the man took up the text. "Lady Adelaide, you have honoured me with your friendship, your confidence. It was you who first encouraged me to hope, you who helped me to build those airy edifices——" The readiness with which these set phrases rose to his lips, and the suave expression with which they rolled off his tongue in cadences of alternate sadness and enthusiasm, produced their usual effect on this particular listener. She sat enthralled. "That future home," he went on, "where your place is always marked, your room the brightest, your seat at the board the most honoured; that home where, with the double encouragement of your brilliantly perceptive intelligence and of our Magdalen's simple enthusiasms always circling round me, lifting me and spurring me on, as it were, higher, I might have risen in mighty flights, to poise at last upon one of those peaks which, eternal, overtop the world!" He illustrated this remarkable speech by getting up from the sofa, lifting one arm, as he stood, above his head, and twiddling his fingers, lark-like, in the air. "That home, with you always, and with the best of me—the me that is here within"—he thumped his breast—"as yet bound by a thousand carking bonds; but living, struggling, here, here!" After a final slap upon the silk-shirted region, he dropped his arm with a dramatic gesture of discouragement. "The vision fades. I see, instead——"

"What?" she gasped. "What do you see?"

His lip curled; that obedient instrument, his voice, took the desired note of bitter sarcasm:

"I see, instead, a comfortable, humdrum establishment. An establishment in which neither of us could

ever be welcomed, dear lady—an establishment ruled by Captain Denvers ! ”

In her turn Lady Adelaide sprang to her feet, as energetically as the day's fashion would allow.

“ Never ! ” she exclaimed. The man stood looking at her, with his smile.

“ Never ! ” she repeated. “ The agent ?—Faugh ! Why, she pays him. Magdalen's too proud ! ” But even as the exclamations escaped from her, it was plain that apprehension mingled with her anger—the apprehension of dawning, most unpalatable facts.

“ Captain Denvers,” said Mr. Blaise, now with an even voice, “ is a very fine specimen of manhood. He has been in a crack regiment, has knocked a few wretchediggers and a few Dutchmen into the next world. That's being a hero, of course. He's been done out of most of his money and had to give up the scarlet and gold and work in russet for his bread—that's being very romantic. Last night they sat on the terrace, in the sunset . . . and after. Now what does a young man say to a young woman in the afterglow ? ”

“ Then why did you let them ? ” interrupted she sharply. “ What have you been about all these days ? He's as keen on your work and your prospects as I am. She regards you as a kind of oracle on the subject of the housing of the poor and—and all that silly nonsense. Why, she was everlastingly quoting your pamphlet on ‘ Modern Philanthropic Make-believes ’—she had never understood about rich and poor before. . . . You've had the game in your hand a thousand times. Why on earth haven't you seized your chance long ago ? The other day, when you described the dying child in Cardiff, and curdled the blood in our veins—that was the moment to speak. I went out of the room and left you together :

she was on the verge of tears. Why on earth didn't you——"

He had been standing half-turned away from her, his head bent, his hands in his pockets, in an attitude very different from his usual graceful pose. He now wheeled round and the natural man revealed himself coarsely enough in voice and gesture :

"Because—because, curse it, the right moment never seems to come !"

She shrugged her shoulders. But, before the lowering of his brows, she dropped her irritable manner.

"I cannot believe," she exclaimed, "that Magdalen could be so lost to all sense of decency as to marry a man who, after all, is only a kind of upper servant. . . . But she is terribly headstrong. And she is surrounded by fortune-hunters. Lucy Spofforth, just now, was actually trying to thrust that idiotic spendthrift boy of hers down my throat ! No, I shall never have a moment's peace till I see her safely settled. Interested as I am in your career and prospects, you know, Mr. Blaise"—she turned up her eyes—"you know it is chiefly because I feel that you, at least, I can trust, and for dear Magdalen's sake, that I want so much to see you succeed."

"I know—I know," said Isidore Blaise. He had got himself picturesquely in hand once more, and his voice vibrated musically to deep emotion. "I know you love her . . . and you know I love her."

The two stood looking at each other—each with a sentimental, misty eye. But under their easily stirred sensibilities, the adventurer that lived at the bottom of each heart of them was, so to speak, measuring his fellow in full understanding.

Isidore Blaise had, among many other talents, an unusual gift of perspicacity—not always conducive to his own comfort, but likely to prove useful in his climbing career. He had very clearly read Lady Adelaide's character, and had formed an exact estimate of the height to which he could fool her to his own ends. Take her on her vanity, that went a good way; but take her on her self-interest, he was sure of her. A scheming, extravagant woman, with a limited income—an income, be it noted, likely to be more curtailed before very long, when that eccentric valetudinarian, Sir Simon, her husband, should have departed, and with him his pension. All her chances for the future depended on her retaining a footing in her rich niece's household. Isidore Blaise sometimes smiled to himself when he thought how easy it had been to secure this ally. A few rhetorical phrases of promise, a bargain poetically wrapped in those florid images of which he was master—and the trick had been done! He had not reached his present position—a man who already counted with his party, a member of several good clubs devoted to those party interests, a speaker already called upon in certain difficult situations where passionate oratory was required to induce the public to accept, or to condone, facts; and by reason of all this, not only admitted to every reception connected with the reigning Government, but also, here and there, to more intimately social circles—he had not climbed so far already without realizing the exact value of every step that supported him. He knew now, perfectly well, the antagonism that would ever exist between the character of Lady Adelaide and that of her niece. But against this he had weighed, and well weighed, the enormous value to him of the older lady's friendship, of her championship. That he

should be admired, acclaimed, supported by a member of the heiress's own family, removed at once from him that stigma which usually marks the interloper as a being hopelessly apart from the society to which only his talents have introduced him.

If he was not (and in his soul he knew he would never be) on a par with those easy-mannered, empty-headed young men who came—as it were by right, by the very nature of things—to the house, he nevertheless stood distinct from the mere on-hangers, from “the budding geniuses,” whom it was Miss Tempest's pleasure to patronize. These he knew that, while she succoured and encouraged and admired them, she nevertheless regarded as a race utterly distinct from her own.

To be able to discuss across the table, with Lady Adelaide, the last reception at the Foreign Office; to have a titter with her over that odd little intimate bridge party at Lady Mullingar's, where a certain distinguished member of the Government had, in the later hours, proceeded to deal matches instead of cards; to disagree with her over the beauty of a duke's daughter, and draw a veil over poor Lady Opie's “neuralgia”; to be able to recall the diverse houses at which they had met, the many friends they had in common; to establish, in fine, in some such airy manner, the fact that Mr. Isidore Blaise moved in the same circles as Miss Tempest's aunt—that was at once to challenge equality.

But where, perhaps, Lady Adelaide counted most, was in her outspoken and quite genuine belief in his star and the manner in which it was destined before long to shine forth upon the world.

And so he played in turns upon her rapacity and her vanity. If it had not been for the latter trait it was doubtful whether she would have placed such confidence

in his future loyalty to those easily uttered promises. But he had given her to understand that she was "his Egeria," his fire of inspiration, his angel of support: that without her intuition, her tact, her subtle understanding of him, her knowledge of the world, he could never hope to fulfil his destiny. And she firmly believed herself as necessary to his prospects as he was to hers.

The laughing voices had now reached the terrace. Mr. Blaise, with dramatic gesture, lifted the lady's hand to his lips, then dropped it and turned away abruptly. These stage tricks produced their invariable effect upon Egeria.

"The dear fellow!" she said to herself, "the dear fellow!" And the moisture that had gathered upon her own pure devotion to her orphan niece, gathered thicker over this display of pent-up feeling. When a man turns brusquely and strides away, everyone in the audience knows that his heart is too full for speech, and is stirred accordingly.

As he emerged on the terrace, Miss Tempest, the unconscious object of so many secret plans, had just reached the top steps at the further end. She advanced between the tubs of Agapanthus lilies and pink geraniums, with a free and swinging step.

Mr. Blaise had left her in the hayfields, as a protest against the frivolous licence of the afternoon's amusement and her inability to attend to his enlightening remarks on his new housing scheme. She now passed him by, meeting the caressing reproach of his eye with the innocence of a complete indifference.

"Is tea up? I'm simply starving!—Where's Aunt Adelaide?—Teddy, there's your mother waiting for

us. Run and ask her to begin.—Di, it isn't in the least funny to keep knocking Mr. Marvell's hat off. Not in the least. Nobody can see the beginning of a smile in it. And, besides, I will not have my poet tormented.—Oh, Mr. Dillwyn, did they make you carry all the rakes? What a shame, just drop them anywhere.—Clara dear, I hope you're not too tired. . . ."

It was little over a year since she had entered upon her inheritance; but, from the time when she had first crossed the threshold of her grandfather's house—a child of five years—she had been mistress there. It was a second nature, therefore, with her to order people about. She had always done so. The difference was that now she was obeyed with an alacrity that had been wanting to the tolerance with which she had hitherto been humoured. Before, she had been spoilt: now everyone paid court to her. She was still too young, too full of herself to realize the difference.

As Mr. Blaise joined the little retinue, his dark eye followed her in profound thought. It was very easy to be in love with Magdalen Tempest, for she was the incarnation of radiant youth. Had she been only the parson's daughter, or even Betty the milkmaid, that dewy freshness of aspect must have arrested the attention of the most fastidious. As she went before him now, holding between her hands a sheaf of bright-coloured flowers, Mr. Blaise found himself admiring critically the easy movement of her long slender limbs, the spring of step and gesture, the poise of head which always evoked the idea of the nymph in the woodland glade—*Candida Nais pallentes violas et summa papavera carpens*: the word images ran in his thoughts. His knowledge

of the classics was superficially wide ; but, like the rest of his knowledge, facile to adaptation—a trusty help to his rhetoric. His mind had a surface aptness which enabled him to seize some available, quotable impression from most subjects on the most perfunctory acquaintance.

He was, honestly, very glad to be in love : he was a well-meaning man. He would not have liked to feel himself a mere fortune-hunter. But now, as he strolled in the wake of the heiress—contemptuously oblivious of the presence by his side of the young man whom she had just dubbed "her poet"—there was an unwonted sense of doubt and depression upon him, due partly to his recent conversation, and partly to that glance of amiable indifference with which she had just now passed him by. He remained therefore in the background, an unusual position for Isidore Blaise to accept.

Jerrold Marvell flung a sidelong look of intense dislike at the massive figure pacing beside him, and deliberately fell out of step. He was a small thin youth, who gave an impression of narrowness in all his lines : long narrow eyes, thin twisted lips, narrow hatchety face, narrow angular shoulders, long narrow hands and feet. He walked in jerks, was restless to jumpiness, talked outrageously or was aggressively silent. He wore a green plush Tyrolese hat upon a shock of dry, mouse-coloured hair. It was this hat which had been the subject of Miss Diana Spofforth's humour, all during the walk home. She now lurched forward and hooked it off again with the end of her red cotton sunshade. He stood still, gave her an oblique look, folded his arms and shook his mane of hair with a contemptuous indifference.

"You may pick it up yourself, now," he said in that deep, grating voice of his that always surprised the hearer, issuing as it did from so narrow an instrument.

"Oh, I say," said Miss Di, "I like that! . . . Catch, then!" She applied a clever kick to the Tyrolese, and sent it spinning in the air.

At the shout with which she accompanied this prowess those in front turned round.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried the hostess, taking in the situation at a glance. "Di, it's too bad!" Her eye flashed. The poet's face was livid with disproportionate fury.

Here Isidore Blaise gracefully intervened. He picked up the headgear, dusted it on his coat-sleeve, manipulated it back into shape, and handed it to the poet with a courtesy that would have been quite successful but for a slight exaggeration.

Mr. Marvell rewarded him with a scowl as he snapped it from his hands. But Magdalen had an approving smile. Instantly Blaise was at her side.

"That was kind," she said under her breath, as they went forward together, Clara Mayne unostentatiously dropping back.

"I cannot bear to see a sensitive nature hurt," he said. "Poor little Jerrold . . . it's not fair play." His voice vibrated with that music of emotion which most women found attractive and which made most men long to kick him. "Who knows that he may not have gone without dinners to buy that hat!"

"Oh," she said, with a soft pitiful note.

Mr. Blaise generally insisted much upon the poverty and misery of the world in his conversations with Miss Tempest. He knew exactly where he stood with her. Could he but impress upon her that he was specially called to improve the lot of suffering mankind, he might well one day hope to make her realize how nobly she could co-operate: there lay his only chance.

CHAPTER III

MAGDALEN TEMPEST

THE eastern angle of the terrace was in cool shadow at this hour of the afternoon; and there the tea-table had been spread between beds of heliotrope and the bushes of lemon verbena, which the kindly Devonshire air permitted to flourish out of doors. Magdalen flung off her hat, slipped her hands from the wash-leather gloves, and set herself to pour out tea.

Speaking of the heiress of Teyne Court, people had been known to exclaim: "Oh, do you think her so pretty?" But few could be found to deny the charm and spirit of the girl's face; nor, about her, that air of breeding which is as indefinable as it is unmistakable. Her mouth was certainly not of the keepsake order; but it curved into delicious smiles—smiles so wide and frank that her grandfather used teasingly to say that she wanted to show everybody that there was not such a set of teeth in the county. Her nose was slightly tip-tilted; her eyebrows, tilted a little, too, at the outer corners, and running low, gave her face a curious and distinctive expression. Her chin jutted a trifle too forward for the conventional line of beauty. Lady Adelaide, herself with a profile that recalled Cellini's Diane de Poitiers, was prone complacently to lament that dear Magdalen had not taken after her side of the

family ; but not many of her hearers, with the vision of the girl's wild-flower face before them, could have been found to echo that regret.

Mr. Blaise dropped naturally into the chair beside that of his hostess ; while, as naturally, young Dillwyn sprang out of his on the approach of Clara Mayne ; and Mr. Spofforth—who had more the air of an overgrown schoolboy than of a Guardsman of some five years' service—remained standing with his hand on the back of the seat he was preparing to offer to Lady Adelaide, now slowly approaching in her turn. Sharp-witted though he might be, it was in details such as these that Blaise differed from that little social group of which he was so anxious to be considered a part. Jerrold Marvell remained standing too, not from any innate sense of courtesy, but only to emphasize the separating gloom into which Miss Spofforth's inane behaviour had plunged him. His arms were still folded ; it was a favourite attitude of his, even at meals. When addressed in the middle of a cutlet, Mr. Marvell had been known to put down his knife and fork and fold his arms before elaborating a reply.

Lady Adelaide cast a glance of satisfaction at the disposition of the party, as she accepted the chair proffered to her.

" Well, my dear," she exclaimed, addressing her niece, " I thought you were never going to let us have our tea to-day ! Cousin Lucy and I were feeling quite faint—as the servants say. Have you noticed, Mr. Blaise, that servants never will confess to being hungry, after our common fashion?—Thank you, Diana, my dear. I think I'll have some plain bread and butter. . . . How hot you look ! "

" It was hot in the hayfield," said Magdalen. " It is all

cut now—that lovely swaying silver field we drove by last Sunday ! There is something sad in harvest-time, after all, in the mowing down of so much sweet life——” She paused and glanced up at the poet behind her. Magdalen liked the sound of her own pretty conceits, and was accustomed to a keen appreciation of them on the part of her chosen circle. But her verse-maker, wrapped in his own wrongs, failed in the usual response, and she went on, her seeking eyes now turned to Blaise : “ When it comes to the threshing, it’s worse ; it’s like beating the summer to death ! ”

The climbing thinker hastily swallowed the piece of cake he had started on, to answer in a confidential undertone :

“ Ah, but think of the result. Sweet are the uses of such adversity. Out of the beaten wheat comes the flour, the bread of life—the bread of the poor ! ”

It was perhaps scarcely tactful to cap the lovely heiress’s poetic imagery in this fashion, and to rise above her thus on the high humanitarian plane. Magdalen’s gaze became veiled with a certain vagueness. Then her face lit up with its wide smile, as Dillwyn, who had sharp ears and hostile to too eloquent Isidore, caught up the text :

“ And jolly good cakes, too, eh, Mr. Blaise ! Don’t keep them all by your side. Shove them along, Teddy.” The two young men, Dillwyn and Spofforth, had an acquaintance of but four days’ standing, and were already Teddy and Jack to each other. Isidore Blaise would always be Mr. Blaise to them, were he to frequent their society for years. “ I say,” he went on. He was a quick-eyed, quick-spoken, lean creature, whose blue eyes looked oddly out of a face as dark and clean-cut as a young Arab’s. He hailed from the Foreign

Office, and was an old acquaintance of the Tempest family. He combined, after a fashion peculiarly his own, an air of delicacy amounting to languor, with a most extraordinary activity of mind and body.—“I say,” pursued this certainly attractive person, “what charming things you do say, Miss Tempest! Now, there was I, raking away, never thinking of anything but how hot the sun was and what jolly stuff ginger-beer is. We had ginger-beer, Lady Adelaide! Ever taste it? It fizzes, you know, like Eno’s Fruit Salt. They have it down there for the men. I feel rather queer, though,” he added confidentially to his neighbour on the other side, Mrs. Spofforth. One of Mr. Dillwyn’s special gifts was that he made himself just as pleasant to elderly ladies as to young ones. “I’ve got such an awful old liver—what?”

The deep voice of the poet here struck unexpectedly across the little group:

“Personally”—the poet was apt to begin his remarks in this manner—“personally, I pray I may never behold so revolting a spectacle again.”

Ejaculations of amusement and surprise greeted the sentiment; Magdalen had a certain expression of triumphant proprietorship as she exclaimed:

“Oh, do put down your empty cup, my poet, and tell us what you mean!”

“She does love making them jump through their hoops,” whispered the irrepressible Dillwyn to the Bishop’s widow, seemingly without moving a muscle of his dark face.

The unconscious performer had entered the ring, his narrow eye still vindictively fixed upon Di Spofforth’s scarlet face.

“To me the bare idea of manual labour is ghastly.

One knows it has to be—like butchers' shops and crying babies, and such-like atrocious things. But to go and watch it ; to join in it for pleasure ; to see a woman"—here he closed his eyes as if the vision before them was too distressing and proceeded in a still deeper note—"to see a woman transgress every rule of beauty, the first element of which is repose . . . becoming hot—dishevelled—oh, violent . . . repulsive !" Here he opened his eyes again, just enough to shoot a single arrow of malice at Miss Spofforth, and closed them again with a faint groan.

"Mercy !" said the object of his onslaught, laughing, but uncomfortably.

"What's he talking about ?" whispered Mrs. Spofforth to Dillwyn.

"He's talking through that hat of his," promptly answered the F.O. youth with a chuckle at his own aptness.

Magdalen, soothingly aware that her contribution to haymaking had been to sit gracefully in the shadow of the tallest haycock and criticize the amateurs' various styles, glanced up encouragingly.

"Personally," the poet resumed, his intensely vivacious eyes once more glinting between his drooped eyelids, "the country strikes me as an immensely overrated place. It is all so crude, so unsparing, so uninspiring, quite indecent in its want of reticence ! Give me the delicate veils, the tender smoke-medium that the town hangs before a man's vision. Those country blues and greens, that sunshine, spinach green, ultramarine, yellow-ochre—horrible ! Then those moors——" He had by this time turned to Magdalen, was bending towards her, his gaze upon her amused, interested face. "That moor you took us over yesterday, what is it ? A vast

expanse of vacuous earth, an immense face without features, all smiles or all blank—a nightmare ! ”

“ That’s dreadfully clever, you know,” said Mrs. Mayne, speaking for the first time.

“ Everything depends on the point of view, doesn’t it ? ” Mr. Blaise put in his earnest note, like the boom of a warning bell over a gay wrangle of chimes. “ I never feel the ghastly suburbs of a city close about me, without thinking of the cruelty—— ”

But Mr. Marwell was not going to have the attention of the table diverted from him. He proceeded, catching the word last spoken with an indescribable offensive air of ignoring the speaker.

“ Cruelty !—the cruelty of towns is a common prate. Look at the cruelty of the country ! Pulpy, misshapen monster, always digesting, like some giant boa-constrictor, the labour, the individuality, the souls, the very life of man ! ”

“ There’s certainly something in what he says,” opined Lady Adelaide, who hated the country herself.

“ There’s an awful lot in what he says,” added Mr. Dillwyn with a mock-convinced air.

“ The wretch that breaks the furrow grows himself into a clod. The herd turns bovine, sheeplike . . . swinish ! They bow to earth. Their faces become clay-coloured-featureless like the down. Faugh ! Only for the compensation within these precincts would I myself stay an hour in so brutalizing an atmosphere. I feel that my mind would soon become as barren as the moor, as incult and as blank.”

Mrs. Spofforth dropped the strawberry she had been holding half-way to her lips in a paralysed attitude, and turned a flushed face of alarm upon Mr. Dillwyn.

“ I do hope I haven’t got a touch of the sun, or any-

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thing. I haven't been able to understand a word of what that young man's been saying ! "

" But you know," laughed Magdalen; as the poet sank into silence with the same abruptness as when he had emerged from it, " that you are not very complimentary, Mr. Marvell, considering that I live in the country nearly all the year round ! I suppose it is a case where ignorance is bliss, but I hadn't a notion that my mind was becoming blank—and what was it you said——? "

" Bovine, I think," suggested Dillwyn gravely.

Marvell straightened himself, and folded his arms tighter.

" You're a law unto yourself," he said reassuringly ; then he cast one of his blighting glances at the last speaker and drew his lips into that set line which betokened that his burst of speech was over, for the moment.

" Our poet," here intervened Mr. Blaise, seizing upon the pause, " after the manner of his kind, has been content to draw a picture of effects, without considering causes. That is where, I hope, the Social Worker comes in. How often have I not felt acute commiseration for the dull routine of the labourer's life ! Miserable as that of the poor struggler is in the Town, in the Town there is an intellectual stimulus—the movement, the lights, the very newsboys' cries, the very jostling of the throng—whatever the Town may do to the human unit, at least it makes him think. And that is why I have felt that regeneration must begin with the rural community ; why I am one—however I may object in detail—with the great theory that the land system first and most cries for reform. I am bold to say this to you, dear lady," he dropped his voice, for Magdalen's ear alone, as she

turned on him a rather startled glance from her childishly limpid grey eyes.

"Georgy-Forgy, pudding and pie!" said Dillwyn, cryptically emphasizing the Georgy, to the increasing terror of Mrs. Spofforth, who, seeing her son and daughter purple with laughter, and Mrs. Mayne shake a warning finger at the young man, deemed that there must be something seriously wrong with her own intelligence.

Diana Spofforth created a diversion by diving for her Pekinese, who, very straight in the back, and very rosy of tongue, had been sitting up and begging (by no means vainly) on the other side of Jack Dillwyn.

"Oh, bother! Here's Captain Denvers' Judy," she cried. "He cannot be far off. Be good, Chin-chin!—no, you can't go and play with Judy!—No, he can't, Mr. Dillwyn; she only dances on him, and then he'll seize her by the lip, as he did yesterday. Lord, I have her howls in my ears still!"

Isidore Blaise and Lady Adelaide exchanged a glance. Then the lady said, with tartness, to her niece:

"Must we have Captain Denvers in every pause of the conversation, Magdalen?"

"I told him to come at tea-time," answered Miss Tempest shortly.

The beautiful white setter, announced by Miss Spofforth, here came bounding in amid the group; circled round them at a lolling gallop; and then, nose on the ground, vanished round the house, summoned back by a clear whistle. Almost immediately she reappeared as if to introduce her master.

Magdalen lifted her head with a little defiant gesture; and eyes and lips smiled frank welcome to the new-comer. Clara Mayne also turned to smile; her tired, pale face softened, glowing almost into youthfulness. But, with

these exceptions, it was noticeable that no one else seemed in any way pleased by the accession to the tea-party.

From under the brim of his green plush Tyrolese the poet shot at the new-comer as offensive a glance as that conveyed by the heavy eyes of the philanthropist. Mrs Spofforth gave her Victorian look, and the two young men assumed that expression of civil detachment which was all the disapproval their special code of manners allowed them to betray. Innocently, Magdalen now added insult to the general sense of injury.

"I am afraid the tea is quite horrid!" she exclaimed in a tone of concern. "Mr. Marvell, would you mind ringing at the door there, and telling them to bring fresh tea?"

The budding laureate turned his offended face to stare at the falling fields below the terrace, trying to look as if he had not heard. Dillwyn and Spofforth both sprang up.

"I don't want any tea," said Captain Denvers pleasantly. Lady Adelaide snorted, and pushed her chair from the table. "I see you've all done," pursued the agent generally. "That's all right, I only want half an hour's talk, on business, with Miss Tempest."

Magdalen rose with a radiant look.

CHAPTER IV

HARRY DENVERS

CAPTAIN DENVERS stood, just outside the circle, waiting for her to join him. Perhaps the first thing that struck anyone beholding Miss Tempest's agent for the first time, was the manliness which stamped the whole personality. Clean-cut, square-built and yet light ; of good height, but not out of the way tall ; quiet of manner, sparing of gesture, more addicted to silence than to speech. Such words as these might well describe many an ordinary being ; some type of soldierly Englishman as may be met a dozen times in a day. But Harry Denvers was not ordinary.

It was impossible to be in a room with him and forget his presence—even though, as often happened, he was the least obtrusive member of the company. People had a way of looking round to see what he thought of some speech of others or of their own. There was always a sense as of force about him, something that must be reckoned with.

Lady Adelaide chose to speak of him as " the agent "—a negligible quantity. Isidore Blaise regarded him, from the recesses of his own calculating mind, as a " deep one "—a danger. Neither were able to recognize, perhaps because of its rarity, the plain fact that here was a man both strong and simple ; silent because he did not care to speak unless he had aught purposeful to say ; in-

different to the world's opinion as he went his confident way, because his day was well filled with duties and all his energies were bent upon them.

Magdalen had known him, for the last five years of her grandfather's life, as the old man's right hand, and, during the year of her ownership, had come to rely upon him for everything. The force that ruled in her name was, however, so unobtrusive in its efficacy that she was the last to realize how little she controlled it.

As the girl now advanced towards him, he waited till she had reached his side and then turned, with what struck the onlookers as an intolerable air of appropriation. Mrs. Mayne half rose from her seat and then sat down again; then she called after her cousin, with a slightly tremulous voice:

"Won't you let me come too, Harry? I should like to know something about the mystery of landownership. It would be good copy, you know, for the poor journalist just now."

She was fond of speaking of herself as the poor journalist. The woman worker who has slipped into man's office is still unaccustomed to the sensation. Magdalen and her companion turned to look at her; and there was invitation in neither glance. Then Miss Tempest shifted her eyes upon Captain Denver, and he obeyed the mute command.

"I am afraid, Clara, we can't provide anything to-day that would be copy," he answered, "my business is very dull. Shall we go into the library?" he pursued, addressing Magdalen. "I have left the papers there."

Miss Tempest smiled acquiescence, and they moved away again together, her dark head on a level with the tip of his sunburned ear. The white setter careered in circles round them, after her foolish but not unpicturesque

fashion. The broken-up group at the tea-table stared after them a moment in silence.

"Well, Chin-chin," cried Diana Spofforth, laying her cheek against her pet's quaint muzzle; "we think that's an uncommonly cheeky young man, don't we? And if we were only back in China, we'd know how to put a little stopper on him, wouldn't we?—send him a cup of coffee with glass, or something nice in it, wouldn't we?" It was a practice with Diana Spofforth to make of her constant companion, the Pekinese, very much the same use as the jester of old did of his bauble; and thus, obliquely, to make statements, or express opinions through that privileged medium.

"How absurd you are!" said Mrs. Mayne. There was a heightened colour in her thin face. "Magdalen is still, naturally, very full of importance—and Harry is quite right to humour her." She got up and went into the house.

"*What does a young man say to a young woman, on the terrace, in the gloaming?*" Isidore Blaise had sarcastically asked of Lady Adelaide. The words had rankled in her mind, and now increased her uneasiness. Yet, could she have been present at the interview at that moment proceeding between her niece and the agent, her feelings of anxiety might well have been allayed.

Having pulled out the Chippendale chair from before the writing-table, that she might take seat at it, he selected some papers to spread out before her, and himself stood a little aside, one hand on the document he wished her to sign.

"We'll get rid of this first, please. It is quite correctly drawn up, on the lines I explained to you last week. You had better read it through, however, before signing."

Nothing could have been more business-like or more simply deferential than his manner. She glanced up at him ; and all at once it came to her that she had never really seen his face before ; had never noticed, so familiar was it to her, all the details which made it so characteristically different from that of any other man she knew. The dark blue of his eyes ! . . . She had never noticed before how blue they were, nor the shade of sadness at the back of their steadfast look, as of one who has measured life, has not many illusions left, and yet is full of courage and readiness to go on. She thought, suddenly, that if she had been a soldier, she could have followed him blindly. Then she fell to wondering if anything out of Sicily could be so brown as his face. And next she found herself approving the way in which he had his dark crisp hair cropped, instead of wearing it rather long and sleekly brushed back according to the latest fashion. Then she saw that there was a white line here and there, and wondered, for she knew that he could not be more than thirty-five or so, if life had been hard with him in some way she ignored. In the moustache there was no grey ; she was glad he clipped it so close, because she would never have been at ease with this man, who spoke so little and so dryly, were it not for the kindness of the lines of that handsome mouth—a kindness often absent from its speech. She began to smile at the sudden recollection of a peccant labourer's remark : "*A body would have to be a dog, or a cripple, for the Captain to be civil to un.*" Indeed, it was to the helpless side of creation that Captain Denver's real softness of heart showed itself—and, in the opinion of a good many people, quite to a ridiculous degree.

As she smiled, his stern face relaxed, and she felt suddenly and inexplicably content.

"Where am I to sign?" she asked gaily, dipping a pen.

"You have not read it."

"Haven't you just said it was all right?"

"But that makes no difference. You must ascertain that for yourself."

"What nonsense it is!" she cried in her spoilt-child way.

"One day," he persisted, "some one will tell you that a document is all right when it is all wrong."

"But that some one is not you," she argued, lifting her eyes and dropping them again with an unconscious caress in their teasing.

"Did nobody ever tell you," said the man, "that there is such a thing as principle?"

She shook her head.

"I would not drag in my principles where they are not wanted. It is a horrid waste of time."

"Well, I have mine." He was still smiling. He bent over, drew the deed from under her hand. "You won't refuse to listen."

With an air of mock resignation she leaned straightly against the high back of the chair, her eyelids cast down over her mischievous eyes, her slender hands folded. His voice was pleasant to her ears, as he read, standing. She liked to feel that he was a step nearer to her. Presently she found herself looking up again at that countenance which was so oddly new and interesting to her this day. Once she interrupted him and inquired what was meant by *message*—perhaps the only word that caught her ear out of the legal jargon he was gravely reciting. Before he had finished she interrupted him again:

"Why did you not come to the hayfield?" He glanced down at her over the paper with surprise. "You've

been away a week," she went on, with unconscious reproach, "and yesterday you did nothing but talk about the insurance difficulties, and all through that lovely twilight! And now—what do I want to hear about increment and rebates? Old Penlow wants the farm, and I'm letting him have it, at what you say is the right rent. I have not heard a word you read. And if I had I would not have understood it. Come, let me sign, and then you shall tell me why you wouldn't come to the hayfield when I asked you."

The surprise in his eyes deepened to perplexity, almost to trouble. Her lips were faintly tremulous, as she smilingly fixed him. The most innocent coquetry lay in those eyes of hers, which were remarkable at most times for their sweetness of expression. She had a trick of narrowing her lids, tilting her head and glancing through her thick dark eyelashes, that was apt to prove irresistible to her innumerable adorers. The agent met the innocent challenge with a certain steadying of the muscles of his lean face; then very quietly laid the deed once more before her.

"Sign here, please," he said, pointing. She dashed off her name, with the flush and quick gesture which betray suppressed annoyance. "Now I will witness," he proceeded cheerfully.

She got up, in silence, to let him take her place. As he laid down the pen, he looked up at her—their positions were now reversed. His glance was purely friendly. In her eyes there was a kind of reproachful astonishment.

"I could not come to the hayfield," he said slowly, with the air of one picking his words. "It was very kind of you to ask me, but——" He paused, then added, quickly and firmly, rising as he did so: "I'm a desper

ately busy man, Miss Magdalen—I cannot allow myself such indulgences.”

“ Oh ! ” It was a cold, hurt sound. She took a slow step, away from the table. “ That’s all, I suppose,” she asked him, over her shoulder.

“ Well, no ; there are just one or two more matters. Won’t you sit down again ? ”

“ No, I’d rather stand.”

The flicker of an indulgent smile played about his lips.

“ Old Grey tells me that you have promised to remit his quarter’s rent.”

“ He’s had influenza——” She wheeled round. “ Poor old man ! I——” she spoke hastily, blushing——“ I told him I’d speak to you about it . . . I told him I’d tell you——”

“ He’s quite able to pay. The farm is absurdly underlet, and we’ve had a record year. I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself for playing upon—upon your youth and inexperience.”

“ Oh ! ” ejaculated Miss Tempest again. She stared at him as if uncertain whether to be angry or apologetic.

“ And I hear,” he proceeded, unmoved, “ that young Tom Mallock is boasting that he has the promise of the Down Farm, from your own lips. I took the liberty of informing him that I was advising you to dispose of it very differently. The best farm on your property is not for a young scamp like Tom Mallock.”

“ Oh ! ” cried the heiress, for the third time. “ Really, Captain Denvers,” she pursued, scarlet-cheeked, “ I seem to have done nothing but make mistakes since you left ! ”

“ Well, Miss Magdalen,” he answered, dryly humorous, “ I have spent a pretty busy day undoing last week’s work. But I will not trouble you further in the matter.”

The heiress had a sense of failure and humiliation. Her pride would not allow her to shed the tears that rose to her eyes ; but she could not control the alteration in her voice.

" You do not seem to think that I am capable of managing anything for myself."

He gave a short laugh that was full of the same friendly indulgence as his smile. His eyes had lost their look of trouble—doubt or sadness. It was as if he had deliberately closed some window in his soul.

" I think," he said good-humouredly, " that you are a most talented young lady, with a cultivated literary taste." He laid his hand as he spoke on a white vellum-bound volume, the last production of Jerrold Marvell. Then he glanced at a canvas propped against a distant bookcase. " That you have an unerring artistic judgment, I would not attempt to dispute . . . however little I may consider that portrait to be like you. But, as a landowner, well—you are still a little—how shall I put it ?—immature."

She turned quickly, as if to leave him. She did not wish him to see the angry emotion on her face. Magdalen Tempest had a very quick temper. Not untruly had her aunt said that she had been spoilt all her life, and these last months she had, as it were, come into a kingdom over which she was absolute queen.

The little court that had gathered about the young heiress in London had surrounded her with an atmosphere of adulation which—had her character been less intrinsically simple and sweet—might well have turned her head completely. As it was, she had come to think it a law of nature that her smile should mean sunshine to all about her ; that no free man should fail to succumb instantly to her sway. This was the first time she had summoned a

party about her at Teyne Court as its mistress ; and could not be gainsaid, there was not a young man of her guests who was not a confessed adorer. She was distinctly intoxicated with the sense of power, with the tremulous, joyful daring which comes to woman in her early hours of conquest.

With perhaps no very definite purpose she had, nevertheless, set herself, this afternoon, to charm her old friend ; and all her delicate arts of smile and glance and soft reproach had failed before that front of his, good humoured, imperious, ignoring. There was not one of those others from whom such a sweet look would not on the spot, have produced a declaration. And then to be chidden like a child, overruled, even made fun of . . . The eccentric portrait caught her eye, and her wrath leaped higher.

With an inaudible sigh, Harry Denvers began to fold the lease as if much depended upon the neatness with which he did so.

Though, womanlike, she had no intention of leaving the room on the heel of discomfiture, Magdalen was taking another step towards the door, when it was opened by a decided hand, and Lady Adelaide came in. The girl instantly drew back towards the table. Her aunt looked from one to the other, and then said unpleasantly :
" Your face is very red, dear."

She had entered in a quarrelsome mood, spurred by a remark of Mrs. Spofforth : " That's a very good-looking young man, to be agent to a girl in Magdalen's position," had said the old lady emphatically, " and I wonder what this business can be that requires to be conducted *tête à tête*."

" I think that is all for to-day, Miss Magdalen," said Denvers, slipping the deed into his side-pocket. He

was about to pass Lady Adelaide, when she arrested him.

"One moment, if you please.—Magdalen, will you kindly tell Captain Denver that when he has your benches repainted, the least he could do would be to have a notice put up. . . . I have just got a green smear on my poor gown. You are altogether too easy-going, you will never have the talent to be served!"

She feigned to be absorbed in the contemplation of the marks on her skirt, after the fashion of those people who have not the full courage of their words and avoid looking at the object of their onslaught.

"I should advise a little turpentine," said the man, in his amused, well-bred voice. "And I will——" But Magdalen cut across him with an indignant:

"What do you mean, Aunt Adelaide?"

"Merely, my dear," responded the other, still shaking and rubbing a fold of her very tight skirt, "that if people are engaged to fulfil certain sets of duties, it is not too much to expect, I hope, that they should fulfil them."

"Aunt Adelaide," said the girl, in a low smothered voice, "I am ashamed of you!"

"Tut, tut!" proceeded the elder lady. "I shall have to get a completely new breadth!" Then she straightened herself and fixed her cold glance on her niece's flushed face. "Why this agitation, dear child?—Are we to make no allusion to business with your agent? Are we to start the genteel fiction that he is looking after your property . . . for love?"

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than she realized the mistake she had made. The man's blue eyes flared. He flung a lightning look at Magdalen, and walked out past both women on to the terrace, without a word. Magdalen had caught the look and stood staring

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at him for a startled moment ; then in her turn she moved away, but into the house, closing the door quite behind her.

"Upon my word!" said Lady Adelaide to herself. "Well, it is high time to put a stop to this!" She tried to stir herself into fresh wrath, but dismay was upon her, and the unpleasant conviction obtruded itself, that allowing her temper to run away with her, she perhaps given an impetus to the very possibility most desired to avert.

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CHAPTER V

AN EVENING AT THE COURT

MAGDALEN TEMPEST had dressed early that evening; had dismissed her maid; and now, resting her chin on her clasped hands, sat staring into the mirror—dreaming.

She had sent a message down to the agent's house, not so much inviting as commanding him to dinner. Since she had caught that flaming look of his, she felt that her life, already stimulated, had gained an added zest. She was not at all prepared to examine the matter with reference to her own feelings, but she had a devouring curiosity to know more—oh, much more—about his. Musing, her eyes fixed on her own reflection in the glass, she was calling up memories of the man she had known so long that he seemed part of her own existence, and scanning them in the light of this revelation.

The first time she had met him had been marked, disagreeably, by one of her grandfather's rare rebukes. . . . She had burst into the library, to find the old man in conference with the good-looking young stranger; and in her precocious, spoilt-child way, she had been prepared to play the fascinating young hostess. But when she had discovered that her airs and graces had been expanded on "the new agent," her manner had undergone a change that (her grandfather, later, had pointed out)

"would have been deeply offensive if it had not been ridiculous." The new agent . . . some one to take place of old Saunderson, who called her Miss and dropped his h's; who had been a secret tippler and a roger whom only death had saved from disgrace. Only agent! She blushed at the recollection of the way which she had stiffened, and stared, and turned away, and how the Squire had afterwards taken her to task, with testiness quite unusual with him: "Can't you see, child, when you've got to do with a gentleman?—Captain Denver is as well-born as you or I. And has been a very distinguished soldier." "Then what's he an agent for?" she had retorted, with that unruly temper that would have led her into many a scrape had not the way of life been so smooth to her. "Because he has met with misfortune, Magdalen," had answered Mr. Temple gravely. "Another title to your respect." . . . Then, seeing the tears in her eyes, how he had softened, the dear old man, and blamed himself for not having warned her in time! After that, naturally, she had disliked the new agent for quite a month, partly associating him with her little disgrace, but above all resenting his manner towards her, a manner at once formal and indifferent. She was already accustomed to be the centre of her little world. . . . But when her setter puppy got caught in a trap, and the vet said he must be destroyed, Captain Denver had come to the rescue and undertaken to save her pet. Then, indeed, she had forgiven him all.

Closing her eyes now against that radiant picture in the glass, the girl began to recall the little scene. . . . How kindly he had looked upon her tears, how comfortingly he had spoken, how understanding he had been! . . . She could still see the deft, strong hands at work. Even the poor maimed creature had known he was safe in them.

That same brown hand had laid the deed under her eyes an hour ago, with its slight gesture of command—command to her, Miss Tempest of Teyne, who ruled the world about her! She opened her eyes again and plunged them into the mirror. Was she just "quite a pretty girl," as her aunt said, or "rare beauteous ladye," as Marvell declared over and over again in one of those vellum pages which she had had printed for him. How much did the "awfully silly," the "ripping," the "stunning" of Teddy Spofforth really amount to? How much Dillwyn's diplomatic, more elliptical, style of compliment such as "Oh, I don't say she's like you, Miss Tempest, but she's quite good-looking!" or, "The day you stood with that white gingummy dress, against those delphiniums—what!" and yet again, if she could believe what the velvet-black lips of Isidore Blaise proclaimed, no more adorable being than herself had ever trod earth! But Harry Denvers' eyes had spoken quite a different language; had said something in a tongue as yet unknown to her; something that had leaped up, had puzzled her, stirred her, set her even a little tremulous. The predominant sensation was one of intense desire for a repetition of the experience—with developments.

So she had sent to bid him come to-night; had dressed herself in the gown she thought most becoming, and looked complacently forth, to find herself fair. Now she glanced at the little diamond-encircled watch that ticked on her wrist, the Squire's last present. No one would be down for another quarter of an hour. And she had said: "Come early, that we may have a few moments' talk before dinner." She would pretext old Grey . . . or young Mallock. Nay, better still, yes, she would apologize for her aunt's odious behaviour.

She felt very sure of herself as she stepped down the shallow uncarpeted oak staircase to the library, where the house-party met before meals. The room was empty, all lit up by the rosy glory of the sunset. Through the wide-open windows, gushes of perfume from the heliotrope, the verbenas, the tobacco-plants that lined the terrace walk, flooded the cooling air. She went toward the nearest window; she might perhaps see him coming across the park, go to meet him and take him to that old bench, where, yesterday, they had wasted just such sun-steeped, flower-scented moments as this on talk of stables, roofs, pump and village wells! A sound behind her, in the room, made her turn round. Lady Adelaide was advancing, with the mincing step demanded by her dressmaker; she had a smile on her lips, but her eyes were angry.

"I came down early to have a little talk with you, dear child," she began silkily. "I have just met Smallwood in the hall. In his extraordinary way he has given me a message for you! It seems that Captain Denvers is very sorry, but he cannot accept your kind invitation to dinner to-night.—Did not your Mrs. Mayne tell you that she was dining with him?——" She broke off and lifted her glasses to stare at the girl's suddenly scarlet face. "You've certainly been shockingly burned in the hayfield to-day, child," she pursued in increasingly bland tones.

"Clara did not tell me," said Magdalen.

"Didn't she, dear? How odd of her! She met Captain Denvers on the terrace after he had left you. I really think she lies in wait for him.—Of course, we are none of us blind as to what is going on there."

Magdalen made a quick movement forward; her skirts were not so exiguous as Lady Adelaide's, and permitted freedom to her young limbs.

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

"You must surely have noticed it," went on the other, her good humour rising visibly. "That poor Mrs. Mayne is madly in love with her cousin. Do you imagine it is for your *beaux yeux* that she is always tearing down to Feyne Court? Or that it is always on business that Captain Denvers is for ever falling on the top of us here? Well, after all, it would be a very suitable match, as I said, only to-day, to Mr. Blaise."

"Oh, very," said Magdalen.

She sat down, feeling unreasonably angry, unreasonably out of conceit with the world, and wishing, in the most senseless manner, that the sunset were not so rosy, that the flowers were not so cruelly sweet. She had written to Captain Denvers just merely to send a verbal message back by bearer. Now she told herself that he was very rude in having done so. She thought Clara might have had the ordinary courtesy to inform her hostess when she was dining out.—This was a sentiment she could proclaim out loud; and she proclaimed it now, with some asperity:

"Those kind of people have no manners," insolently and ungrammatically.

The object of this sweeping statement here entered the room, exclaiming as she did so:

"Dearest Magdalen, forgive me, I had to correct some proofs in a hurry, and then I could not find you.—You won't mind my playing truant here to-night, will you? That lonely cousin of mine——"

She broke off and stood for a moment considering the girl's frowning face. Then she proceeded smoothly: "Not that I could flatter myself I should be missed by you happy young things!"

She flung over her head the black lace mantilla she was

carrying on her arm, and passed quietly out to the terrace.

"I've never seen Mrs. Mayne look so nearly handsome," said Lady Adelaide, still with her new-found amiability. "That sort of black-and-white woman looks well in lace. —And now, darling, just a few words. Oh, tut, tut, here is Simon! We shall have no peace."

What Lady Adelaide had of importance to discuss never transpired; for the querulous voice of the ex-minister to Halberstadt, uplifted in the hall, heralded his immediate appearance. But Magdalen had a slightly sarcastic smile as she resigned herself to the deprivation. She had long suspected that her aunt had private means of information in Teyne Court, and was certain that the lady's early appearance was due to some hint previously received of the message to Captain Denvers.

Sir Simon Bruce-Walsingham had returned that evening from London; whither he had departed the previous day upon one of those fruitless expeditions to the Foreign Office, to which his friends and relations had become accustomed since his forced retirement from diplomacy. Lady Adelaide did not discourage these pilgrimages; for though he was apt to come back, if possible, a little sourer and more fidgety than when he left, "it kept him quiet, in between," as she would philosophically remark with a shrug of her shoulders. He was scolding now, almost before he opened the door.

"Adelaide, my stylographic pen has run out again! — I had a most important memorandum to have ready for the early post. A point which I unfortunately omitted to lay before Sir James to-day. . . . That fellow Smithers is not to be found, high or low. God knows where the rascal is! Gone to the chemist, I suppose, to make a beast of himself again, with Mrs. Allan's Hair-Restorer."

The speaker advanced with slightly tottering step, and halted between the two ladies, looking irritably from one to the other, with eyes singularly bright in his wrinkled parchment face. Incredibly withered, bent, bald, yellow, Sir Simon reminded one of a grasshopper, or some such creature combining the most lifeless, dried-up appearance with the extreme of vitality. He articulated every word with biting energy, and ended every phrase with an involuntary wicked snap of his unlikely teeth.

"I rang about a thousand times, Magdalen, before one of your lazy footmen would condescend to appear. And then the creature had the impudence to tell me that he was too busy just then to go down to the village after my man. He was getting dinner. Dinner! Ah, yah . . . pah, poison!"

"I'm so sorry, Uncle Simon," said Magdalen, laughing a little, in spite of her sore mood. She was always very gentle with her irritable relative. Indeed, there was an odd attachment between the two, and the girl was always ready to take his part.—"I don't care if he is as mad as a hatter," she had said only that day to Diana Spofforth, "I'd rather have him—forty times rather—than Aunt Adelaide. He's a gentleman, anyhow."—"Which she isn't, I suppose," had cried Diana, with a jovial crow of laughter at her own wit. "Which Aunt Adelaide isn't," had assented Magdalen gravely, leaving Miss Spofforth suddenly reflective. "I'm so sorry, Uncle Simon," she said, "I'll tell Smallwood to speak to the boy. But do tell me, how can your valet make a beast of himself at the chemist's?"

"That's Simon's nonsense, my dear." Lady Adelaide's well-shod foot was tapping the ground—she had been taking a good deal of exercise in this manner of late.

"We're always on the look out for new valets. The one, he swore, made love to my maid. . . . My worthy Tomken!"

"Ah, yah, pah . . .!" interjected Sir Simon in describable accents of disgust.

"And the one before would wear his pyjamas!—this one, he will have it, drinks his hair-wash!"

"His hair-wash! Drinks his hair-wash!"

Magdalen's laugh now rang out whole-hearted. It was echoed by a low, harmonious chuckle, as Blaise, in his usual noiseless fashion, glided in upon the terrace. He had a clove pink between his teeth.

The ex-minister flung at the new-comer one look which recognized and rejected almost at the same instant then turned his back upon him. But Lady Adelaide had her wreathed smile, the more welcoming for the fact that her husband's habitual rudeness to her favourite was one of the most recent trials of her married state.

"Simon is so particular about his hair-washes," she went on, addressing Isidore pointedly. "Not that it could possibly be any use to him, poor dear!"

Slipping the pink into his button-hole, Isidore Blaise looked humorously at Sir Simon's head, which indeed (even from that back view, which was all that was vouchsafed to him) was unusually destitute. As if he had felt the offensive glance, the old diplomatist passed a tremulous hand over his pate and jerked himself round to glare.

"Simon says," continued his wife, "that the man's got the drug habit, or something."

Blaise suddenly composed his mobile face to seriousness.

"But really, you know, I am quite interested," he said.

"Poor fellow! Heaven knows what terrible hereditary taint, what abnormal youthful privations may not have been responsible for this singular craving. As I said

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in my last lecture before the Eugenic Society, we build prisons where we ought to attend to milk supply and make the crèche a national institution. Nay, until maternity is recognized as the most important state function——" he broke off. "But you will say I am an incorrigible dreamer," he murmured to Magdalen, with his oversweet smile. Then, advancing to Sir Simon, he remarked ingratiatingly: "Do you know, sir, I would very much like to have a few words with that man of yours."

The old gentleman showed all his horribly perfect teeth, in a snarl.

"I have no doubt—that they will make you—very welcome, in the servants' hall."

"That's very rude, you know, uncle," said Magdalen, getting up, straight and tall and angry. Then she turned to Blaise, with a more gracious air of softness than she had vouchsafed him that day:

"Most people are so busy, nowadays, thinking about themselves, that they are quite injured if someone dares to speak of the misery of the world, still more dares to try and rectify."

The booming of the gong, the entrance of her remaining guests, Smallwood's condescending announcement, and the general movement that ensued, spoiled Mr. Blaise's unexpected moment. But he was destined to be favoured that night. For some reason hardly explained to herself, Magdalen chose him for her partner at dinner. There was a sense of lassitude and disappointment upon her. It was scarce an hour ago since she had felt so sure of herself and of the world, and of the certain joy of it. Now, as if the light of her own little guiding lantern had suddenly been turned off, she saw nothing but gloom about her; misery, disorder, suffering. To do what one

could to succour, to improve—was not that the best perhaps the only abiding good in life? So, as youth always in extremes, she took Mr. Blaise in to dinner. The poet, the Foreign Office youth and the soldier—in the latter's own phrase—had not a look in.

Jerrold Marvell, to whom Diana Spofforth had been unkindly allotted, bore the double annoyance with all the bad grace of which he was past master.

"Why are you always looking at the horrid little man?" asked Lady Adelaide of Mr. Dillwyn, as conversation languished between them.

He turned on her with a smile that was like a flash of light in his dark face.

"Oh, but don't you think it's a tremendous relief to one's feelings?" he answered her obliquely.

"What do you mean?"

"We're all in such a horrid temper here, to-night, don't you know"—in his confidential fashion—"except Mr. Blaise, of course—and yourself," he added with a polite little bow, "but we've all got such awfully good manners—except Mr. Marvell."

"I can't imagine what you mean," persisted the lady, staring through her eyeglass at the poet. Mr. Marvell was, at that moment, sitting hunched, his narrow shoulders as much turned upon the fair Diana as the exigencies of the table would allow; his arms folded. He had refused dish after dish, by an angry shake of his rough head.

"You don't remember the picture in *Punch*," murmured Mr. Dillwyn explanatorily, "where the young lady says, 'Thank you so much!' to the old gentleman—when both had the gate slammed in the face as they were racing for the train."

"What did she say that for?" Decidedly Lady Adelaide was not encouraging.

"Because the old gentleman had said 'damn,'" answered Dillwyn suavely, looking down at his plate.

"Oh!"

"Yes, and the young lady felt 'damn.'"

"Oh!"

"If you look at Mr. Marvell, you will see what dreadful language he is using . . . inside. Well, I am using the same. But not being a child of nature, I can't show it."

"Oh!" said Lady Adelaide for the third time. She glanced doubtfully at her companion, uncertain whether, in spite of his boast of good manners, he had not contrived to be very rude himself.

The rich tones of Isidore Blaise's voice continued in unabated flow at the end of the table. It was pitched in that undertone which is meant for one ear alone. And that ear paid it unremitting attention. Miss Tempest spoke scarcely at all; but a soft interjection here and there, and the earnest regard with which she fixed the speaker, displayed an amount of interest sufficient to justify the state of gloom in her other courtiers, so feelingly described by Dillwyn. It was only at dessert that she seemed to remember her duty as hostess. Sir Simon had long since disposed of his special repast—which consisted of a boiled egg and two plasmon biscuits, washed down by a generous tumbler of hot water. It was scarce surprising that, on such fare, he should not have found himself disposed to any cheerful interchange of ideas with Mrs. Spofforth, who thus had had all the more energy to devote to each course and now sat, in rather torpid condition, slowly munching burnt almonds.

On the opposite side, Diana, stranded between the social reformer and the poet, had been reduced to interchanging inanities with her brother across the table. As the peaches now came round, however, she helped

herself to a massive specimen, and once more addressed her sullen cavalier :

"Have half a peach, Mr. Marvell, and bury the hatchet—aha, I mean the hatchet !"

He answered her with that shrug of pointed shoulder and toss of unkempt head that was all he had vouchsafed her this evening. Magdalen looked at him with the indulgence one may display to a spoilt child.

"Do have a peach—my poet !" she urged, her smile coaxing adorably.

"From your hand, then."

"From my hand."

She was still child enough to be flattered by this open adulation. She leaned across and held the fruit towards him. The poor little verse-maker quite cheered up, as Blaise leaned back and Diana, with a heightened colour, bent over her plate and prepared stoutly to dispose of the whole of her prize helping by herself.

"No sugar, thank you," cried he. "I will have pepper. Personally, I never care for anything but pepper with a peach."

He cast his narrow look about the table. But except a *sotto voce* "Yah—pah !" from Sir Simon, no one seemed to notice the bait.

"Ah, the peach. . . ." murmured Mr. Blaise. He was still lying back, his eyes half closed. "Peach is the fruit for beautiful girlhood. . . . A peach bitten into by white young teeth, and red lips that smile at you—delightful picture !"

Diana Spofforth's round, indignant gaze, the slight, rustling recoil of Miss Tempest, struck his sensitive perceptions instantly. He straightened himself, opened his eyes fully, and dropping his luxuriant tone, pursued, now with the air of one continuing an ordinary discussion :

"Nature is so pleasantly appropriate sometimes! The peach, the strawberry, fruits of early summer. . . . Whereas, in autumn," his dark caressing eye sought Lady Adelaide (he was sure of his ground here)—"in autumn she gives us grapes . . . the fruit for riper life. To see the woman of—say a moment after thirty, with a bunch of grapes in her hand . . . ! A woman with a beautiful hand, toying with the fruit—to watch the movement from bunch to lip—why it is as if she were drawing dreamy music from a harp!"

He illustrated his text with a delicate gesture.

"No one could have said that but Mr. Blaise!" cried Lady Adelaide, charmed. She was celebrated for the beauty of her hands; and moved them now in her turn with a complacent curve of wrist.

Magdalen rose abruptly, neglectful of the fact that some of her guests were still agreeably occupied.

"It is dreadfully hot here!" she exclaimed. There was a sudden impatience upon her. She wondered what Clara Mayne and Captain Denvers might be saying to each other. All at once she felt she could not listen another moment to Mr. Blaise's dissertations either on paupers or peaches.

Uncle Simon, with his golden toothpick, the poet with his idiotic peppered peach that he seemed unable to get through, Aunt Adelaide with her fatuous smile, Mrs. Spofforth solemnly chewing, were all equally intolerable. What was the good of being rich and powerful, if everything bored you?

CHAPTER VI

EVENING AT THE OLD PLACE

AT this precise moment, away at the Old Place within the Park—the ancient house of Teyn abandoned in later days for the vaster modern built Court, and now the residence of the agent—Harry Denver and his cousin were lingering over the modest dessert provided by the bachelor's housekeeper—a dish of thin red gooseberries, and a plate of Albert biscuits.

Clara Mayne was a clever woman, with soft feminine ways, in piquant contrast to her masculine capacity for work. She had made for herself an unusual position in the world; she "counted," not only on the staff of the great paper by which she was employed, but also in the pure literary world—and, in the usual resultant way, in Society also. Born a Denver, she was naturally connected with many a good old stock; but it is to be doubted whether her claims of kinship would have been so eagerly remembered, had it not been for the distinction she had won for herself, despite disabilities of sex and fortune. The living of Chilworth Parva had been in the gift of the Denvers, lords of the manor of Chilworth since the Reformation. And not unnaturally, it was regularly bestowed upon some younger son or promising young cousin of the house. Clara's father had been first cousin of the late General Denvers—the last owner of Chilworth Park, whose eccentric archaeological extravagance on the

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one hand, and mad speculation on the other, had brought the old place into the market.

On the General's death the day of reckoning had come ; and Harry Denvers, who would have sacrificed a great deal to cleave to the old acres, found himself forced—to clear his father's name—into the sale of all he held most dear. He had had no suspicion of the critical state of the family fortunes, and the catastrophe had been as unexpected as it was devastating. From one moment to another he seemed to lose everything : his possessions, his profession, his position. But there are things of which financial ruin cannot rob a man ; and Harry Denvers, after the first giddy misery had passed, found that he still had courage left, with which to face life.

When the last farthing of paternal liabilities had been settled, it was even with a certain peace and some inner content that he set himself to build up a fresh existence. From his dead mother he had still a small competence of a few hundreds a year—enough to vegetate upon, not enough to satisfy such energies as his. He had no hesitation as to the course in which this new existence was to run. Life " in the City " would be an abomination to him ; desk work an impossibility ; the competition of gambling speculations had for him but a sordid side. He had always loved the country and, from his childhood upwards, he had had no higher ideal than that of the ownership of the old acres. Had General Denvers not been an autocratic as well as a cranky parent, nothing would have tempted the young man away from Chilworth and the simple manifold interests of the estate—the farms, the preserves, the stock, the stables, the crops, the welfare of the village folk, the pleasant neighbours ; all that goes to make the existence of the English country gentleman genial, kindly, innocent and blest.

It was to the country, therefore, that Harry Deny looked for his future. Vague schemes which had begun to evolve themselves during his long leaves—invariably spent at Chilworth—took practical shape in his mind. Hitherto so entirely satisfied with his lot as scarcely to have an ambition, he now found himself capable of determined and absorbing purpose. He would build a new fortune for himself out of his knowledge and love of the land. He would learn all that could be learned, he would see for himself and experiment for himself, and when he had acquired the power which both knowledge and love give, and had saved the necessary funds, he would start a system of agricultural insurance on lines which he was confident would mean triumphant success.

So, with the resolute vigour characteristic of him, he went through the wrench of breaking with his military life and all its ties, as he had done with the home of his fathers; put himself to school, at the age of thirty, on the estate of a brother officer; and when the offer of the Teyne Court agency came his way, was ready for the post.

He had been, for some six years at his task, able to set aside the whole of his private income; and a couple of years more would, he believed, find him justified in starting on his scheme. Meanwhile he had settled down at Teyne Court to an existence so useful and varied, so packed with materials for his energies, so completely free to exercise them as he chose, that—until quite recently—he had been an extremely contented man, with hardly anything to remind him of the fact that he was dependent upon any one.

To-night, however, Clara, watching him with a furtive anxiety, saw a cloud upon his face; felt an effort in his

hospitality. She had her own theory on the subject, and it was a torturing one.

He had always been very kind to her. He had a chivalrous compassion for the woman who works for her living. He never let her see that (and it was an unfortunate fact) she rather bored him; that the feminine activity, as a factor in modern public life, was a thing rather repellent to him; and that, in his mind, there was ever an uncomfortable shrinking, near her, from the memory of certain love passages which in their salad days had taken place between them—episodes on which he had a disconcerting tendency to linger.

The dinner, however, had passed off naturally enough. His self-invited guest had made merry over the pot-luck he had found in the bachelor establishment, in a manner agreeable to his simplicity. With three turns of the hand, he had given charm to the stiff posy in the middle of the table. She had called for a chafing-dish; and, in its confessed absence from the household chattels, had made a capable shift with a shaving-pot lamp and the lid of a biscuit-tin, thereon toasting a Welsh rarebit which he was able in truth to pronounce the best he had ever eaten. When she had cleared the impromptu gear away, without a fleck on the tablecloth or a smear on her white hands. All through she had been merry and tactful; she had endured the rampant attentions of his many hungry dogs with a grace so charming as to seem quite spontaneous; she had divined the blind old hound's thirst, when his master himself had been puzzled by the creature's restlessness; she had been amused herself, and for once, had distracted him agreeably.

She would have none of the glaring paraffin lamp which the scowling old lady, his housekeeper, was for bringing in; but begged that they might sit on in the sweet dusk:

the dusk of summer nights, more akin to light than darkness. She ordered him, then, to smoke, and he lit a cigarette. That was not his taste for a woman. But he could not deny to-night that the cigarette suited Clara, and that it was soothing to watch the comfortable manner in which she drew and exhaled the fragrant smoke. She was sitting forward, both her elbows on the table. Her eyes, in daylight a little hard, looked shadowed and softened as she gazed on him.

"What a dear old room," she said, in the middle of a pause, "panelled up to the very ceiling and so nice and empty!—If only that old Mrs. Green of yours had a notion of comfort, I could not imagine a place with more enchanting possibilities in its own way."

His pipe between his lips, he nodded without speaking.

"I wish you'd let me come and grub in the garden about October," she proceeded gaily; "you wouldn't know yourself next spring."

He puffed, still in silence, as if meditating upon her suggestion. She removed her cigarette from her lips and went on, with the sprightliness that betrays an effort:

"What you ought to do is to let me come and stay here, Harry dear. I'm simply aching to put your household in order, old man. I feel sure that you haven't got a sheet or a tablecloth that does not want mending. I'd sack your Mrs. Green, who, I know, robs you, and start you with something fresh and clean that could cook a chop. And I'd put bulbs all the way up the front path, and——"

She stopped. The man had stirred from his stillness with a movement that had the effect of speech.

"It would not do, my dear," he said then, very gently.

"What do you say?" she asked. "Not do—why?"

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"Oh, Harry, do you think . . . do you mean that people would talk? Oh, Harry, how absurd!"

She was stammering, blushing like a girl in the sheltering twilight.

"I know they would," he asseverated. He stuck his pipe into his mouth again, and spoke between clenched teeth. "Never was such a place as this for gossip! That's the reason I've got to stick to Mrs. Green, besides the fact that she's a decent old body, who's had a run of good luck all her life. Can't indulge in anything fresh and clean in that line. I have to put up with sodden tops."

But she would not allow this jocose turning of the question.

"Harry, but seriously," she exclaimed, "you don't think that people would be so foolish as to attach importance. . . . My dear old man, your widowed cousin is older than you are!"

"Two years older," he said uncompromisingly.

"Two years? Two centuries! measured by all the wretchedness of my married life, of my struggle, my repairs!" Her hand was trembling so much that she had to put down her cigarette. "I feel so old," she said, with a break in her voice that was almost like a sob.

He felt horribly sorry for her and yet uneasily aware that there was a kind of piteous delight, at the back of her whos, in that he had acknowledged the possibility of their names still being coupled. He got up and went to the window. His eyes were fixed unseeingly on the patches of overgrown flowers in his neglected garden, where Judy the setter and Chummie the white Highlandrier were unpoetically wrangling for the same bone. Another time he would have intervened judiciously, but he took his animals as seriously as human beings;

but he was all to the present perplexity. This was felt, the moment he had long instinctively dreaded, come upon him so suddenly that he could not avoid the odiousness of it. The voice, gathering emotion as it welled, sounded again passionately behind him.

"I sometimes think, Harry, that you have never forgiven me."

"My dear Clara, what nonsense!" He wheeled round just a dark outline against the afterglow.

"I know you haven't. Oh, I have never forgiven myself! Was ever a girl such a fool?"

Harry Denvers was silent. He had been only nineteen when he had proposed, in headlong schoolboy fashion to the cousin who had suddenly dawned upon his youthful imagination as a being of surpassing charm as well as beauty. Had he been thrown with any other tolerably good-looking, tolerably pleasant girl, at that particular moment, in the intimate fashion afforded by the neighbourhood and close relationship during his first Sandhurst leave, she would have been idealized in the same fashion. Clara had encouraged, teased, given some half-promises, and ended by throwing him over for the black moustache and second-rate fascination of a major in a marching regiment quartered in the vicinity. Harry's wound had quickly healed: it had not been a deep one. But how could he tell her that now? He stood, wondering at this odd freak of femininity. She who had so obviously played with his calf-love, who had been so perfectly untouched by any real sentiment (when he had thought to care so desperately), now could not refer to the old nonsense without a break in her voice, a tender misting of her eyes;—all the manner, in fine, of one contemplating the profoundest emotion of her life.

He was too simple to realize that the lonely woman

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was illuminating the past with the glow of the present fire.

"Harry!" . . . She rose, came over to him, and stretched out an unsteady hand to touch his arm.

No man, however guileless, could have been blind to the appeal and its meaning. He was glad of the darkness that hid from her the sudden guilty flushing of his face.

"Clara——" He took her hand in his, after a moment's hesitation, pressed it and dropped it, gently. "Do not let that weigh on you.—You did treat me rather badly." He was blundering out of the intolerable situation with the best tact he could muster. "I never was so conceited as to bear malice. And——" He sought in his brain, found the phrase he wanted and delivered it, though with effort: "We've always been the best of friends, haven't we?—We'll always remain so."

He could hear her draw her breath sharply. She was still so close to him that they were almost touching. Then she gave a little laugh of such exceeding bitterness that he felt his forehead grow damp—he that hated to see anything suffer.

"Do you mind if we have a little light?" asked she in a misleading, quiet voice. "No, not that evil lamp. Aren't there any candles on the mantelpiece?"

When he had dumbly obeyed and placed the lighted candles on the table, he found that she had resumed her seat. She stretched out her hand which no longer shook, drew the heavy brass candlestick near her, and rekindled her cigarette. She inhaled the smoke awhile with drooping eyelids, and then, suddenly fixed her cousin with a long searching gaze. She had hazel eyes, in which the contrast between pupil and iris was unusually defined. This gave a certain hawk-like intensity and hardness to her glance.

Harry Denvers felt it now, probing—almost violating his thoughts; and once more the unwilling scarlet over-spread his face. Her expressive mouth curled to a smile that matched the laugh that had just distressed his eyes.

"Poor Harry!" she said, flicking her cigarette ash.

"I don't know what you mean by that," he cried resentfully. He had better have kept silent.

"My dear boy, you are very transparent!"

"Transparent?" He felt himself grow white now with a sense of anger. "What the devil is the matter with me?" he was asking himself irritably.

"Though, indeed," she proceeded with that bitter smile, "it was so inevitable! A conclusion that was foregone!"

"Clara!" he warned. There was gathering thunder in his low note. His blue eyes flashed with an odd red light. But he caught himself up. "I think," he said composedly after a pause, "you had better explain what you mean, or you will be going away full of some ridiculous impression."

At this she got up, dropping her still unfinished cigarette.

"I suppose that is a hint?" she said.

"Clara!" There was appeal this time in his accents. "How tiresome all this is!" Then he laughed vexedly, a little alarmed himself at the strength of his exasperation against her. "Have I said anything to annoy you? If so, you must forgive the bad manners of one living so much alone: a confirmed old bachelor."

She had reached for her mantilla, which lay on the deep window-seat.

"You would anyhow have walked home with me across the park," she said in a more natural tone. "So it is not good-bye yet. The air will do me good. Let us go!"

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They went in silence out in the full brooding stillness of the summer night. The sky was of that curious, almost mauve, hue, more often seen in southern climates than in our own; and the stars shone faint against the light it still held. Into this amethystine vault the sickle of a young moon was exquisitely hung.

"Oh," said Clara, halting on the flagged path, "what a night!"

There was the dry echo of a sob in her voice. In a flash of disturbing perspicacity, he understood. What a night it would have been for joy, had the man she loved loved her! He went tongue-tied beside her, his face straight-set; and, hearing her stumbling and uneven tread, knew that her eyes were blind with tears. He felt wrenched with an odious misery. After a while he said to her gently:

"Take my arm."

The trees of the park were arching over them. Like a flight of lovely ghosts, two or three does startled at their approach, crossed their road and vanished. He felt her touch upon his arm and noticed, with some relief, that her step had grown firm again. When the lights of the house leaped into view at the turning of the path, she stopped and with a pressure of her fingers made him stop too.

"Don't come any further, dear Harry." Her voice was soft in tenderness. "Forgive me if I have teased you. It is not a subject for teasing, but then——" she broke off. "You and I," she began once more and paused; "you and I," she repeated, "were all our lives at cross-purposes!" Then, as his dumbness conveyed to her something of what he was feeling, she shook gently the arm she still held. "Oh, Harry, Harry!" she said, with another echo of that bitter laughter, "don't you think I

understand? Come, soldier, I'll give you a simile. Was a citadel is so jealously guarded——"

He started back from her.

"You see how right I am!" she mocked him sadly.

"I see nothing of the kind!" He was goaded. "A citadel is chiefly guarded to keep—to keep invaders out of it."

There was a moment's silence; then she flung up her lace-veiled head with a movement of defiance that coupled with the revelation of her words, had yet something of dignity:

"If your heart had been empty, Harry, you could not have kept me out."

At that he stood, struck motionless and silent, and let her leave him. He watched, with scarce seeing eyes, till the tall, slender figure was lost in the shadow of the shrubberies. Then wrath mounted—mingled wrath and discomfiture. Why should he feel such a "cad"? What an unfair advantage women had over men! It was monstrous to place any man in such a predicament!

He turned slowly back. That cry from her wounded soul, that dry sob had stabbed him: "Oh, what a night!" And then, out of the privilege of her humiliation and his assailed chivalry, she had dared to taunt him: "If your heart had been empty, Harry!" . . . And he had had no words to answer her.

He went back into his panelled room, where the candles were guttering between open door and window. The remains of their repast still littered the sideboard. He flung himself away in disgust and sought the refuge of his working-room, where Rollo, the old blind hound, greeted him with tail beating on the floor.

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The paraffin lamp, which certainly might have been better trimmed, shed a circle of radiance on his great writing-table. He sat down before it, drawing a sigh between his teeth—the sigh of one hard pressed. Rollo rose from where he lay and blundered across the room. With the instinct of his kind, scenting his master's trouble, he came and laid his long, melancholy head on his knee and adored him with unseeing eyes.

"Well, well, old fellow!" murmured the man absently; and absently caressed.

Four or five business letters awaiting answers, the lease signed this afternoon, a map of the estate, and a rent book, lay where he had placed them ready for the night's work. This daily grind of business, these hourly claims upon his energies, mental and physical, and the companionship of his dogs—would life never hold anything sweeter for him? He told himself it never would. Between him and his heart's secret desire rose the most odious of barriers, money. The money that was represented by this tableful of papers, those bursting drawers, that turning bookcase at his hand. The money looming, inexorable frontier. The golden barrier, mountain high, the passage of which was prohibited even to his thought! The money out of which he was paid! Lady Adelaide had only stated a fact: he could not even serve for love!

Clara hesitated a moment on the threshold of the drawing-room, whence the sound of laughter in many voices proclaimed that Magdalen's guests had not yet separated. It was characteristic of the woman that she should have instinctively decided upon the one course of action most repugnant to her, and entered the room.

"If once I give way," she said to herself, "it will be the end of my courage."

The heavy waves of her black hair were slightly ruffled by the lace she had just removed. Her glance was bright with the tears she had forced back to their source; there was a fevered spot of colour on each cheek.

At sight of her, Magdalen's brow clouded ingenuously. For the first time she recognized the elements of real beauty in one whom she had hitherto, in the insolence of her own blooming youth, ranked among those whose attractions have ceased to count. What had Harry Denvers said to his cousin to have brought that passionate glow to her faded face?

"Well?" cried the heiress, quite unaware of the challenge in her voice and looks, "have you had a nice evening?"

Mrs. Mayne came deliberately across the room to her hostess, and sat down beside her. There was a smile upon her lips which the girl qualified in her own mind as taunting: little did she guess from what depths of misery it sprang. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness!" Can any bitterness equal that of the rejected woman in face of the one preferred?

"A most amusing evening," she said slowly. "Poor lonely old fellow, he does want a helping hand, now and again!—Well, we had a good laugh over Mrs. Green's cuisine, anyhow. I cooked him a little savoury, and made his coffee for him. . . . I was afraid I should be late; we dawdled so across the park."

"You had such a lot to say to each other, I suppose." The words escaped Magdalen upon the same inexplicable impulse that had prompted her frown.

"No," said Clara Mayne, in a dreamy voice. "No, we were very silent, the night is so wonderful!"

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Magdalen got up abruptly and left her. Mrs. Mayne looked after her, very well aware of the impression she had created. It was what she had meant to create. It would have taken a higher nature than hers to resist the temptation ; and yet she knew that Magdalen, whom she in her heart almost despised, would have been incapable herself of such manœuvring.

" I'm going to bed ! " said Miss Tempest in her petulant way. " It's been a horrid, horrid day ! " She had a way of gliding through her " r's " that hardly amounted to a lisp ; it gave a sort of appealing, irresponsible charm to her utterance. What she really said sounded rather like " ho'id, ho'id ! "

To a chorus of protest, she stalked straight out of the room.

" Miss Tempest has got horrid, horrid manners to-night ! " said Dillwyn, addressing space.

CHAPTER VII

MAGDALEN'S "CREW"

FOR two days Captain Denvers was not seen at the big house—and Miss Tempest's moods were as variable as April skies.

The gloom of her night's ill-humour hung over her at breakfast-time the first morning; but lapsed, towards lunch, into a pathetic *Weltschmerz*, in which Mr. Blaise found her again ready to favour him and his dramatically humanitarian converse. Towards evening she became dreamy and Keatsian, and would listen to no one but her poet, who read his last inspiration to her, in a deep crooning voice which scattered the rest of the party distractedly to the billiard-room.

The second day, it was a frivolous Miss Tempest who came gaily into the breakfast-room, who summoned, by fluttering glances, guardsman and budding diplomatist to either side of her, and kept up so brisk a flirtation with both during the whole of the meal, that Mr. Spofforth was emboldened at last to isolate her on the way to the stables—and propose.

Magdalen, so long known as her grandfather's heiress, could not have reached the age of twenty-one without having been the object of many such tentatives. And the manner in which she had early learned to refuse the husband, yet not dismiss the adorer, was a source of justifiable pride to her. It worked so well, that most

of these rejected suitors felt heartened, after decent intervals, to propose again. And indeed Magdalen was apt to consider herself a little injured if they did not do so.

Teddy Spofforth's declaration (his first) was somewhat overdue, according to her estimation. She surpassed herself in the sweet tact with which she disposed of it.

"Matrimony," she declared, with her adorably elusive "r," was a state she could not, at present, bring herself to contemplate. She was very, very much touched. Of course she could not help being dreadfully surprised. She had always thought of him as dear Teddy, her old comrade; a kind of nice big dear old brother! All this accompanied by those sweet looks through contracted lids which were the most telling shafts in her special armoury of pretty ways.

The crestfallen young man felt his first sulky discomfiture melt from him.

"I don't want to lose my big brother," said she in her coaxing way.

"Can't you come to think of me as something else?" he asked huskily.

She shook her head upon the first straightforward, honest impulse. And then, reading complete withdrawal in his injured glance, tempered the blow after the fashion which invariably left the stepping-stone for a second attempt.

"I'm afwaid I couldn't." She hesitated. "At least, I'm afwaid I couldn't now. I couldn't ever do anything in such a hurry.—Dear Teddy, don't be cross!" She gave his sleeve a little butterfly caress; and he caught her hand and kissed it, inarticulately exclaiming that he had never felt a bit like a brother, and she ought to have known it! Adding, in a sudden audacious spirit:

"I don't really believe you'd like me to, either."

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At that she gave an enigmatic laugh, shot him another provoking look, and escaped from his company.

He had a most uncomfortable weight of debts hanging about his neck, and being an honest young man, was desirous to pay them. But he was, at the same time, very genuinely smitten, and that made him feel virtuous.

"She jolly well sees I do care for her," he said to himself, as he strolled away to ponder over the situation, which presently struck him as by no means hopeless.

In the golden, sweet-smelling gloom of the loose-box, where her favourite mare was awaiting the morning lump of sugar, Magdalen neatly averted a similar demonstration of overcharged feeling on the part of Mr. Dillwyn.

Spoilt child though she was, she had the tact of a really good heart. She guessed that the youth was both proud and sensitive. She felt that she could not add him to the list of rejected yet encouraged adorers. At the same time—for vanity slips easily into most good movements in such a case—she did not want to lose him from her court. Therefore, when she saw his eyes become fixed and heard his usually glib tongue begin to falter, and noted the clenching of the long thin hand, she stuffed the expected titbit hurriedly into the mare's soft lipping mouth; and, calling gaily on Diana, rejoined that damsel in the main stable. Miss Spofforth was never very difficult to find, her voice being generally uplifted in ringing conversation even when she had no human being to talk to; for then she would address herself to Chin-chin, in language supposed to be suitable both to his Chinese nationality and his highly developed canine intelligence.

Magdalen now found her seated on a corn-bin. The

poet (in a state of gloom, pronounced even for him) stood leaning against a stall partition a few paces away, arms folded.

"Stables isn't any places for Manchu princes!" Diana was chanting to the lustrous-eyed, protesting animal on her lap. "Well, if you won't, positively won't ever, ever make a poem about me (and I think it's very unkind, Mr. Marvell), won't you write an ode, or a triolet, or something, about Chin-chin, my lily, bandy, blackynosy boy? He'd make a beautiful subject.—Hullo, here's Magdalen! Oh, Magdalen, order Mr. Marvell to write a sonnet on Chin-chin!"

The poet detached himself from his post and placed himself beside the heiress, with a defiant glance at the discomfited Dillwyn.

"If you will take that Pekinese in your arms," he said to Magdalen, "I will write a villanelle on Beauty and the Beast."

"Ah-ah-ah! There's a nasty one for you, Magdalen!" jeered Diana, frantically hugging her dog, and hammering the side of the corn-bin with the heels of her neat brogues.

Mr. Marvell's most withering smile twisted his lips. But it was his turn for favour again, it seemed, that morning. As they crossed the flagged yard in the full sunshine, Magdalen was a quite gracious enough object, in her white lawn gown, for any poet's adoration. He was pouring forth a disconnected stream of reproaches, descriptions of his feelings, passionate eulogies of her loveliness, confession of her power over him, when the massive form of the philanthropist loomed before him.

"Curse!" exclaimed, under his breath, the irascible little verse-maker.

Magdalen laughed out loud. The consciousness of sovereignty was once more hers. Mr. Blaise's eyes told

her, perhaps more fully than anyone else's speech that morning, how irresistible she was. A sudden plan formed itself in her mind; and she looked so sweetly at Isidore as she decided on it, that he went white with a genuine movement of passion.

What that plan was, she announced a little later at luncheon.

"A surprise tea, at my agent's," she said, with a toss of her head as she caught Clara's eyes, "and it does not matter whether he's there or not, I want to show you the Old Place. It's quite untouched since the middle of the seventeenth century.—I know my painter would like to see it."

Miss Tempest's painter was to arrive early that afternoon. His name was Martin Derehall. He was not the perpetrator of the portraits in the library, who was a post-impressionist, with a tendency towards cubism. But if not a *délicieux*, Mr. Derehall was, nevertheless, essentially a "modern"; and if his work displayed an eccentricity now and again, which might be (and was) qualified as disagreeable, there was a force of genius behind it which brought him into the ranks of those rare ones who "count."

His personality might be described in much the same terms as his art. Magdalen felt rather proud to number him among her guests; and still more for his promise to consider the question of painting her portrait.

Harry Denvers halted, astonished, on the threshold of his house.

The long panelled hall presented an unusual scene. The immense refectory table which, since Tudor days, had occupied the middle space, had been cleared half-way

down its length of its accumulated burdens, and (covered at one end by a tablecloth that, certes, had never been produced by Mrs. Green) displayed in proud array the sumptuous materials of Miss Tempest's surprise party.—The fruit from the Court gardens, the silver from the Court pantry, the cakes, the china, the sweets from the Court, were all laid forth in the opulence that distinguished the Teyne Court housekeeping. Smallwood, in a state of severity unwonted even for him, presided over the kettles.

Miss Tempest and all the younger guests seemed to be at the height of enjoyment; the only members of the house-party missing were Mrs. Spofforth and Sir Simon.

The long deep window-seat was occupied by Magdalen and Diana; and between them sat the latest arrival—Mr. Derehall, his shoulders as outrageously turned upon Miss Spofforth as ever those of Mr. Marvell had been. This latter gentleman, however—perhaps with a poet's feminine idea of arousing jealousy in the breast of his patroness, was, to-day, actually quite condescending in his attentions to the Bishop's pretty daughter: with ever and anon an oblique look upon the heiress.

The two other youths, who were unhampered by any artistic proclivities, fetched and carried with all the simplicity of their order, keeping up an agreeable tattle the while. Lady Adelaide, smartly gowned in mauve foulard, sat very upright and handsome in one of the Jacobean high-backed chairs, and subtly combined smiling approbation of Mr. Blaise (who stood before her, a plate of shortbread in his hand) with complete condemnation of the rest of the entertainment.

Clara, in the other chair, kept herself a little apart. Eyes cast down, she was absently stirring an untouched cup of tea. She, too, had an air of dissatisfaction. The place was so filled with laughter and chatter; its

occupants were so full of themselves and their occupation, that, had it not been for Chin-chin's sudden perception of Judy's long melancholy nose protruding between her master and the door, and his consequent sudden paroxysm of fury, the unobtrusive appearance of the dweller at the Old Place might have remained undiscovered for some time.

There was a shout of greeting. Most of the young people were in that condition of high spirits when everything becomes a huge joke. Diana's voice, as usual, predominated :

"Please, Captain Denvers," she screamed, good-humouredly authoritative, "you won't mind shutting Judy out, will you? Chin-chin can't bear her.—Can you, my Chinese Plince-kin?—And he says he's sure you wouldn't want him to be made uncomfortable when he's condescended to come to tea with you—without being asked, too!"

Harry Denvers stood a moment longer holding back the impulsive and too affectionate Judy by her collar.

"Stolen a march on you—what?" said Dillwyn, who happened to stand nearest to him, speaking in the civil but detached manner he reserved for his hostess's agent.

It was not indeed that Mr. Dillwyn would not have regarded the ex-lancer otherwise than as a being entitled to the utmost consideration, in spite of fallen fortunes. But, in common with Magdalen's other suitors, he had an ever-present uneasy jealousy of the silent, handsome man, whose contiguity to the heiress gave him a constant and unfair advantage.

"We hardly thought you would be home so early, Captain Denvers," said Lady Adelaide. She was unable to conceal her inimical feelings.

Softly, Clara Mayne slipped in her word :

"It's a surprise party, Harry—after the American style." She sat smiling on him quite imperturbably. Then she added, as if the fact required some apology, which her relationship to him entitled her to give: "Magdalen wanted to show your Old Place to her guests, particularly to Mr. Derehall. And she assured us you wouldn't mind. She said she knew you'd be away."

Magdalen, who, affable and joyous as a young queen, sat waiting on the window-seat till Harry should approach her, here flamed scarlet. His eyes sought her, held her a moment, then quickly turned from her.

After drawing in his breath with a long rasping snarl, astonishingly sonorous for so small a creature, Chin-chin went off again like a miniature mitrailleuse. Captain Denvers, saying "Come away, Judy," dragged the unwilling animal back towards the door, carefully but firmly thrust her forth, and then turned towards the company which, except for the Pekinese, had fallen into an uncomfortable stillness:

"The place is yours to dispose of, Miss Tempest."

The door closed upon his exit before Magdalen could gather her scattered wits.

"Oh, how stupid, how stupid!" she cried, the colour deepening on her face.

"Shall I run after him and bring him back to tea?" cried Teddy Spofforth good-naturedly.

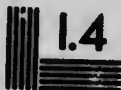
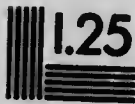
"I think that would hardly do," said Clara, in a chill, quiet voice.

"No, don't, don't!" called Magdalen. "Teddy, come back!" Her eyes flashed angrily from one to the other, as if seeking some one upon whom she could cast the blame. She took two or three hasty steps across the room, and was arrested by Lady Adelaide's cutting voice:



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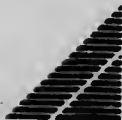
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"Surely, my dear, you are not going to apologize to your agent for taking your friends to see one of your own houses!"

Magdalen came slowly back. The full ire of her glance was now concentrated on her aunt. But she made no reply. She sat down on the window-seat again, and pushed her plate from her.

"Well," cried Diana, in her cheerful way, "I can't see why the poor man shouldn't have been asked to have some of this nice tea, anyhow!"

"Oh, don't you think, Miss Spofforth," said Clara sweetly, "that it is always so much better not to try to patch up a mistake? Since Magdalen never even warned my cousin this morning, how could she now say she wanted him to join us?"

"Oh, but don't you understand Miss Tempest's feelings?" interposed Mr. Blaise. "Such a horrible thing to think one may have hurt someone involuntarily! More especially," he added with a richly pathetic deepening of his voice, "a person whom one would wish for every reason to screen from any possible thought of slight." His velvet eyes sought Magdalen. "There is no one to whom I should, myself, wish to show honour more than to that soldier, brave in adversity, Captain Denvers."

Lady Adelaide interrupted sharply. She found it difficult at times to follow the subtle twists of her protégé.

"I think," she said, "we are all talking a great deal too much about nothing."

Smallwood here, most unexpectedly, jerked round from the teapot and faced the last speaker.

"Captain Denvers," he remarked, "has other things to do than to be bothered with tea-parties! And if it's American fashion, Miss Magdalen, to be breaking in

upon a gentleman in his own house without a by-your-leave, or with-your-leave, all I can say is, it ain't Devonshire manners, nor such as the master—my master—would have allowed. The Squire thought a deal of Captain Denvers, he did.—Will you have some more tea, miss?" It was Diana who was now thus sharply addressed. The circle gaped at him dumbfounded. All present were not yet acquainted with Smallwood's peculiarities and privileges; and those who knew them quailed under them. "Will you have another cup of tea?" he repeated in a higher key. "Will you, or will you not?" he added, as Diana was suddenly seized with irrepressible laughter, which, relieving as it did the disagreeable state of tension in the room, was almost universally shared.

Smallwood gave the mirthful young lady a not unbenevolent glance. He did not disapprove of Miss Spofforth, and took a kind of jocose interest in ministering to her excellent appetite.

"Well," he remarked, "if this American tea-party is come to a conclusion, I'll go back to the house for mine.—I'll send to fetch them things, by and by, miss," he declared loftily, from the threshold.

Magdalen made no reply. She had turned to stare, with unseeing, angry eyes, out of the window, biting a trembling lip. Clara, after watching her for a moment, rose and came very gracefully to the help of a situation of which every one was feeling more or less the discomfort.

"Would you like me to show your friends over the house, dear?" she said, approaching her hostess and touching her gently on the shoulder—"you seem tired."

The girl nodded. She could not trust herself to speak.

"Come, Lady Adelaide," went on Mrs. Mayne, "I think I know all that is worth seeing in this old house as well as anyone. There is some Elizabeth furniture upstairs that will delight you. And you, Mr. Blaise, will be interested, I know," she added, with a slight smile, "in the construction of a genuine manor-house. They had their own ideas then on the housing problem: the masters of the house kept good watch on all their dependents, as you will see—most of the rooms opening into the great chamber. Will you give your arm to Lady Adelaide? The stairs are worn rather uneven.—Come, Diana. Come, Mr. Marvell. Aren't you coming, you two?"

Her pointed look at Dillwyn and Spofforth, who shared a tendency to linger beside their hostess, was a hint which those youths were too well bred not to take. But, less amenable to convention, Miss Tempest's painter and her poet both found the opportunity too good to be missed. Mr. Derehall remained seated. Mr. Marvell propped himself against the window-frame on the other side of Magdalen.

"Aren't you coming too, Martin?" asked Mrs. Mayne, the mocking smile on her face becoming accentuated. She was on very intimate terms with Magdalen's artistic set, for whose introduction to the heiress she was indeed responsible. She had done a great deal to help Derehall, for she had an acute perception of all that was likely to spell success.

Mr. Derehall shook his head. She made a faint grimace, then glanced at Jerrold Marvell. That gentleman's arms were folded: obstinacy was written on every line of his angular form and face. Mrs. Mayne laughed as she closed the door. She had been good-naturedly anxious to create a diversion; but she was, perhaps, when it came to it, not

desirous of leaving Magdalen alone in her present agitated condition to chance a meeting with Harry Denvers.

Mr. Martin Derehall, the latest addition to what Adelaide dubbed "Magdalen's crew," was a long thin sad bearded man, with curious—not very pleasant—light eyes, prominent, roving, under red eyelashes, and a disconcerting habit of cracking his supple hands. Beside him, the poet was a very Chesterfield of politeness. But Mr. Derehall's rudeness was not uncalculated; he knew that it made the smallest concession to graciousness from his lips ring with extraordinary value.

However odd and abnormal the man's art might appear to the ordinary eye, however uncouth and disagreeable his personality, no one could deny the arresting power in both. Just as his clever and violent pictures could not be passed over, so his presence, while it irritated, was stimulative. He was a type; a latter-day product. He saw the whole world through the medium of a purposeful realism, and so transmitted his impressions. And, however one might disagree, one disagreed eagerly and with sustained interest.

To find this brooding leopard of a creature at her feet; to know that the ruthless artist, hitherto apostle of vigorous ugliness, was to-day the avowed worshipper of her beauty, gave a zest to Miss Tempest's patronage, in his case, somewhat lacking in that of others. There was, moreover, an attractive sense of danger in the intercourse. Though the leopard crouched, he might also spring. Compared to "her painter," Miss Tempest's poet had but the importance of a sulky little porcupine in her menagerie.

When it came to a struggle of wills between these two, the result was a foregone conclusion.

"Jerrold," said the painter, after a moment's steady fixing of him, "someone's calling you." He made the mendacious statement with an assurance that was admirably insolent. The poet frowned, but shifted his glance discomfitedly away from that of the hard orbs that stared pitilessly up at him.—"Don't you hear?" went on the leopard. "We really can't allow you to be so rude!"

The poet looked at Magdalen.

"Oh, yes, do go!" cried she, unkindly and impatiently, without moving an eyelash.

The unhappy porcupine, greatly bristling, detached himself and slowly moved out of the room, with what dignity it could muster. Mr. Derehall, left master of the field, stretched himself more at ease, nursed an angular knee between restless interlaced hands, and addressed the little ear persistently turned from him:

"Why did you bring me here?"

Slowly she shifted round her profile and raised an eyebrow inquiringly. She was rather glad of his bad temper. It matched her own mood. She was usually gentle and elusive with him, basking in the rôle of Una.

"I thought artists were supposed to like old places," she said at last, in a detached voice, and resumed her contemplation of the garden space. There, encroaching on the flagged paths from the overgrown borders, hoary bushes of lavender and half-wild roses struggled with bindweed and hemlock; an opulent group of Oriental poppies rioted in devastating splendour among a sickly patch of white lilies. The artist's eye followed her look, lightened a moment with the abstract joy of the initiate, and then came back, darkening, to rest upon the nape of her bent neck.

"Turn round!" he said, so imperiously under his

breath, that, startled, she had obeyed him, before realizing his audacity. "I didn't come down here to be driven about in a herd. Thought I'd like to see old places?—Do for my next picture, wouldn't it? Lady with spinning-wheel in that corner! And a young man with Cromwellian high boots leaning against the settle, staring on her. Shadow of mullioned window on the flagged floor. Bit of that linenfold panelling, highly polished, as background—*Graphic* Christmas Number! What do you take me for? I paint the actual, the alive, the real! No, I'm not going to be paraded through this conventional pile of wood and masonry with a sketch-book for local colour. . . . But if you keep up that face of fury a moment or two longer, I don't mind having a go at seeing what I can make of it."

He broke into an unexpected note of hard chuckling and whipped a block out of the pocket of his shabby coat.

"Your nostrils dilated like that . . . and the contraction of your lips! Upon my soul, I've never seen another woman painted with temper like you—except a model I had in Paris—and she's now in *Bicêtre*, for life!"

"How dare you, how dare you!"

The girl was scarce able to articulate. She hurled herself from the seat beside him and stood a second panting, flaming, in front of him. Again the laugh shook him. His eyes went swiftly, measuring, from her face to the block in his hand, his eyebrow jerking. "*Caramba*, if I only had my palette!" he muttered between his teeth. Martin Derehall had a cosmopolitan vocabulary, which suited his very un-English appearance.

"I won't have it!" cried Magdalen, on a sudden high note. Wrath strangled her.

THE GOLDEN BARRIER

Again Martin Derehall fixed his glance upon her.

"Stay where you are, I've not done."

Her girlish temper was no match for that leopard-malice. For one second she felt terror. Then she cast a wild glance about her. The sound of the mingled voices, the tread of many feet had passed away from overhead. She knew they must now be in the far wing of the rambling old house, out of earshot, even if her pride would have allowed her to call out. Then the noise of a drawer opening and shutting in the adjacent room brought a sudden sense of security, inexpressibly comforting. Her agent was there, within, at his work.

She walked slowly the length of the hall towards the door of the study, and when she reached it, glanced superbly back over her shoulder at the slave who had dared to offend. He was still sitting in his crouching attitude, his nervous fingers working the bit of chalk they held with extraordinary decision. A broken ejaculation escaped him, as he now surveyed her in this new attitude.

"Stay as you are ; stay as you are !" he exclaimed in quite another tone—one of utter absorption.

And Magdalen stood as she was bidden. The sense of anger and fear dying within her, her hand on the lintel of the door behind which sat Harry Denvers, how could she fear ! And this creature ! it might well be that her beauty maddened him. But why should she be angry, since it was only the artist nature that was stirred ? So, complacency stealing back upon her, she remained motionless, to be sketched till, with another guttural exclamation, the man ripped the second sheet from his block, and tore it across and across.

"No good !" he muttered, "no good ! All the glory gone out ! Pshaw, a Cipriani, a nymph, a Bartolozzi—Angelica Kauffmann—*quoi !* "

But the first sketch he picked up carefully from the seat and gazed at its few hasty lines, in complete satisfaction.

"Let me see," said Miss Tempest, with that unabashed vanity of hers, coming back towards him.

"Not yet," he said, clapping it under the canvas cover of the block. Then he thrust both hands into the side-pockets of his coat, staring at her, his eyebrows twitching.

"To-morrow," he said, and the note of satisfaction was uppermost, "to-morrow we'll have it again—with a dash of oils." He pursed his mouth for a whistle, took his hands out of his pocket to rub them together. "You and I, and let us have no cursed interruptions!"

Then, without a word of explanation or farewell, he strode to the outer door, stood a second on the threshold, grinning at her oddly, showing jagged white teeth, and was gone.

Diana's bright face peered unexpectedly over the bannisters.

"Hallo, Mag! All alone? Where's the impressionist?"

"I don't know," said Magdalen, in her grave, innocent manner. "He went away."

"Well, I shan't cry on that account," said the young lady, coming down, planting her feet firmly on the slippery oak steps. "Neither will Chin-chin. Chin-chin told me upstairs he would not mind biting that painter of yours."

"I think he is a very interesting man," said Magdalen, with her elusive "r's."

CHAPTER VIII

CLOSING THE LIST

"A DREADFUL thing has happened," said Miss Tempest, stopping in the middle of the park and addressing her group of adorers, who, collected about her as closely as the exigencies of progress would allow, naturally stopped too. "I've forgotten my gloves at the Old Place. Stop, Teddy—no, please—not any of you, don't offer to go. I'd much rather go back myself."

"I wasn't going to offer to go," said Dillwyn, with his graceful impudence. "Let them all run; I'm going to stop with you."

"How sweet of you." Magdalen was smiling. "But, you see, I prefer to go back myself."

"You'll allow me to accompany you," murmured Mr. Blaise insinuatingly; while the poet, darkly observing into space that he would go on alone through the brown hour, gave a desperate cock to his Tyrolese, settled his arms and marched away, violent self-consciousness visible in every line.

"How kind you are!" said Magdalen, now turning the charm of her smile upon the social reformer. "But I happen to be feeling just like my poet. I want to march alone, just like that. Isn't he too dear?—It's a very special pair of gloves, Aunt Adelaide. You're quite right, I should not mind losing half a dozen pairs any

CLOSING THE LIST

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day, but not that pair. I've grown quite, quite fond of them."

"Magdalen, you are too silly!" ejaculated Lady Adelaide, with a crimson face. But the words were lost upon her niece, who had already slipped away, with her free swinging step.

"What did I tell you the other day?" said Mr. Blaise in tragic undertones to his patroness, as the party moved on gloomily.

"I say," said Mr. Spofforth to Mrs. Mayne—the brilliant idea had suddenly struck him—"she just made that up, didn't she?"

Mrs. Mayne lifted sarcastic eyes; but she answered warily: "It's never safe to jump to conclusions."

Miss Tempest's agent laid down his pen as the voices of his uninvited visitors died away in the distance; he closed the account-book and stretched himself rather wearily. Instantly the restless Judy was on the alert, and the old hound turned his sightless head inquiringly.

"It's all right, old boy," said the man, addressing the latter. "Very good for me, really!"

Judy he thrust from him kindly. "Lie down, there's a good girl." The degree of intimacy upon which he lived with his four-footed companions might have been measured by these remarks. Affectionate but foolish, Judy had never grown into a confidant. As for the Highland terrier, he was a dog of greed and sought Mrs. Green's company in the kitchen more often than his master's.

Old Rollo dropped his head on his paws again, with a slight moan. Harry looked at his watch; it was time for him to pay his evening visit to the sick filly.

But in the hall he paused. The Teyne Court servants had not yet appeared to clear the tea-tables. The place had now, in addition to its usual untidiness, the forlorn and rather sordid appearance which the remains of a feast impart.

The lonely man had a smile of unwonted bitterness. If ever the folly had crossed his mind that he might consider himself the equal, intrinsically, of the woman he served, he had been shown his real position to-day. There was no resentment in him, only a melancholy clear-sightedness. To make him feel this, he knew, would have been the last of her wishes—warm-hearted, generous, impulsive, spoilt child as she was! Spoilt in one sense only: utterly, adorably untainted by her riches in another. She was as incapable of presuming upon the advantages money gave her as she was of realizing how much they influenced those about her.

The picture of her this afternoon, on the window-seat, hand outstretched, with light greeting smile drooping and changing, rose before him. The startled look of her eyes—what had there been in his own face, he wondered, to evoke that? Fool that he was, to be so vulnerable!

Slowly he went over to that window-seat. There, where she had flung it from her hand, lay a glove, a soft, long thing of pale chamois, with still something, in its emptiness, of the slender hand that had worn it. He took it up; and, letting himself fall on the cushions, lifted it to his lips—it had a vague fragrance of the orris with which her garments were imbued.

The spasm that shook him, as the perfume buffeted his senses, surprised him; it discomfited the sane, watchful mind that, usually, no emotion could unbalance. How had he come to let this slip of a girl obtain such a hold upon him? He had known her some six years,

and had regarded her, until a twelvemonth ago, with no other sentiment than that of the pleasure and sympathy which such vivid youthful life must always evoke. It was on the evening of the Squire's funeral that the inexplicable change had swept upon him. . . . He had gone up to the Court, just before dinner, knowing the child—she had been the child to him then—to be alone with her distress in the great empty house, for she had refused the proffered company of her nearest neighbours, even that of the rector's wife, and had likewise declined to summon Lady Adelaide.

Smallwood had met him in the hall, and greeted him with the irritability of the sore heart. "We can't do nothing with her, sir. She's not had bite nor sup this day! She's in there." He had jerked his thumb at the library door, and then added grimly: "Crying never put life back into a dead man yet."

Harry Denvers remembered now how he had found her crouching in the Squire's old leather chair; how she had turned a piteous face, marbled with tears, as he knelt down beside her. He had soothed and reasoned as if she had indeed been a child; and, like a child, she had ended by leaning her head on his shoulder and sobbing her load of grief into his ear. But it had only been when he went back across the park that he knew she was no longer child for him. He still seemed to hold her, to feel the weight of her ruffled head, the clinging of her hands, the fanning of her breath against his cheek. In every snatch of sleep that was granted him that night, the impression had repeated itself so vividly that he would start awake to know with a pang that his arms were empty. Forlorn creature—trebly forlorn, with her beauty, her money, her innocent and trusting youth. He registered, with himself, a vow of service. To

want help was ever a short way to Harry Denver's heart.

Now, as he sat and reviewed the year that had gone by, he knew his forebodings more than justified, and felt hopelessly how small was his power to assist. He had fully realized that the heiress, left alone, would promptly be surrounded with sycophants and fortune-hunters. But he could not have foreseen that her nearest relative, that Lady Adelaide, her aunt and her natural protector, would prove the least to be trusted; that Magdalen's own childish love of patronage would admit to her circle dangerous types of adventurers, such as Blaise the social reformer, or Derehall the irresponsible artist!

And now his own weakness, his own secret desperate folly had come to complicate matters still further—to bind his tongue when he should warn; to interfere with every step he might take, as her old friend and her grandfather's trusted delegate, to protect and control her!

He pressed the little glove to his forehead, and then again to his lips. As he dropped his hand, a shadow between himself and the outer light made him look sharply towards the window. Magdalen was gazing in through the open casement.

It was but a glimpse that he caught of her face, illumined, eager, incredulous, before he dropped his eyelid against the intolerable sweetness of the vision. He clenched his hand over the glove, and drew once more that long breath of the man hard-pressed. He turned then to walk slowly away as if he had not seen her. But she called, first softly, and then more firmly:

"Captain Denver!"

"Miss Magdalen?—Is that you?"

"Oh, don't pretend you did not see me before!"

Dewy, fresh, smiling, lovely: it was the flower of love

incarnate, the rose of youth that was leaning towards him across his window-sill.

"Won't you ask me in?" she went on with her pretty coaxing air.

He smiled. "Do you need an invitation?" It was the truth that he hardly knew what he was saying. But in the words she found a reproach for the recent uncere-
monious invasion. Only a little while ago the sense that she had hurt him had lain with an unwonted weight upon her spirits; but after what she had seen, she felt triumphantly certain of her power.

"Don't you want me to come in?"

"I will go round and open the door," he said gravely.

He laid her glove on the hall-table as he passed. They met in silence under the scallop-shell of the old porch; and, in silence, he preceded him into the hall where she had surprised his secret. She did not feel shy. Magdalen was in her element, with the atmosphere of a man's love about her. She had come to regard herself as one who had a claim on such homage; to feel almost affronted if it were withheld. The knowledge that she was the one supreme being to Harry Denvers too was fraught, however, with an unwonted sweetness, an hitherto unex-
perienced exhilaration. Though the silence held them a little longer, after he had closed the door behind him, it brought her no sense of irksomeness. She was accustomed to confer benefits and revelled in her consciousness of gracious importance.

She stood, her head very high, watching him through narrowed lids, a smile of delicious confidence on her lips. He was the first to speak:

"You have something to say to me?"

Her smile widened. "I dropped a glove somewhere."
Her air was mischievous.

" I know.—'Tis here on the table."

" Oh, Captain Denvers ! "

" Miss Magdalen ? "

" What a humbug you are ! "

" I beg your pardon ? " He had taken up the glove again, and stood as if arrested in surprise by her remarks.

She felt extraordinarily sure of herself. How oddly he avoided meeting her eye—this man, whom she had always known so strong, so reserved ! That she should have this power over him went to her head like wine. She stretched out her hand and took the glove.

" I did not leave it on the table, you know."

" No."

She burst out laughing. Then :

" Oh, how silly you are ! " she cried. " Don't you know I was looking in through the window ? " She made a step towards him. And then the unbelievable happened: he stepped back.

The ingenuous triumph on her countenance was swept away by a blank surprise. Then Denvers said, fixing her now full, with a grave, distant gaze :

" That which was not meant to be seen should be regarded as not having happened, Miss Tempest."

In just some such tone of rather ironic friendliness had he been wont to find fault with her when she was a little girl—the day she had put on a spur to race the old hunter ; the day she had forgotten the puppy in the woods. Even so had he spoken to her a couple of days ago in the library. Was that all she was to him, a tiresome, childish thing to be kept out of mischief ? Then why had he kissed her glove, pressed it to his forehead, and again to his lips ? She swayed a little, blown between the contradictory winds of her thoughts ; angry, puzzled, yet still pleased, exhilarated, stirred.

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His gaze enveloped her, from the glint of pearls round her neck to the white doe-skin shoe with its chased silver buckle. The fine lawn of her would-be simple country dress was embroidered and lace-encrusted from collar to hem. At her waist a bunch of honeysuckle was thrust carelessly; he had seen young Dillwyn pick it for her, as she had sallied from the porch. Harry Denvers measured the woman he loved, and his position with regard to her, with unsparing bitterness.

"Now, if you'll take your glove, Miss Tempest," he said at last, in successful everyday tones, "I will walk back with you across the park."

At that her temper flashed out.

"I suppose you're cross because I didn't think of asking you if I might come to tea? I thought"—she choked a little—"I thought—you've been so stupid lately, keeping away from us—I'd surprise you! Then I saw you were angry. I left my glove here on purpose. I wanted to come back and tell you I did not mean to be rude."

"No," he answered her, very gently, "no, I should never think you meant to be rude. Only sometimes"—he smiled—"a little too impulsive."

He moved towards the door as he spoke, hoping she would let things rest on that; hoping that the involuntary tenderness of his tone might not seem once more a betrayal of weakness.

She had taken the glove, and let it fall from her fingers, as if unconscious of her action. Then she went out into the overgrown garden and walked beside him towards the gate. She was biting her lip as she went, and casting side looks at him under the shadow of her wide hat.

It was that very lovely hour, just before sunset, when the light is deeply mellow, when the shadows are growing

long and the colours seem overlaid with golden translucency like the hues in old enamel. The honeysuckle tangle over the gate was flinging out an incense of unbelievable sweetness. And the starred lilies were sweet too—and so was the great bush of lavender that no one had thought of cutting. Magdalen suddenly stopped, her face turned to the man, and flung out her bare hand.

"I won't let you come any further," she said.

He felt his fingers ice-cold against her warm touch : while his heart was gripped, hers was beating smoothly.

"You may kiss my hand," she said, still keeping it extended towards him, after he had withdrawn his own. And then, with her smile of certain victory : "Is it not better than a glove ?"

Once again he took a step back.

"You force me to speak," he said, after a little pause.

"Well, perhaps it is best to make things quite clear. You caught me in an act of folly, and have drawn your own conclusions. I will neither deny nor explain. But this you must understand : I will not be added to the list !"

"The list ?"

With scarlet, convicted air, she repeated the words. Faintly smiling, he went on :

"You have your Painter, your Soldier, your Philanthropist, your Poet, your young Diplomatist. They are all your declared adorers. You like to keep them so. You like the incense and the excitement. 'Tis never very safe to play with fire ; but so far the fire has not been of a very dangerous description. At any rate, it is not my business, though I should advise you to be careful in your dealings with two of them—your Philanthropist and your Painter might make an ugly smoke about you, if nothing worse.—As for myself, I remain in my place.

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I am the agent, your paid official. Do not make the position intolerable."

"I hate you!" she said after a moment, between her teeth.

She had grown scarlet and then white. And then the blood surged back to her face once more and with it a rush of tears. She groped blindly for the gate and dashed it to between them, as he would have hastened to open it for her.

He stood, staring down the track, long after her swift, slender figure had disappeared. If it had not been the money—the money which passed from her riches to his poverty—he told himself that she might have had his heart to play with too, and welcome, so it had pleased her!

He gave a dreary little laugh as he went back at last into the lonely house. What would have been his name on the list, he wondered—her Agriculturist?

CHAPTER IX

AN HEIRESS'S STRATEGY

MISS TEMPEST was, apparently, in the highest spirits when she returned to her guests. "Well, did you find your glove?" asked Lady Adelaide, looking suspiciously at the girl's face. "She looks as if the man had been kissing her," she said to herself. She amended her conclusion presently, however, with a shrewder approach to the truth. The outrageous encouragement which her niece forthwith proceeded to bestow upon her collected swains, her laughter and wild speech pointed, on the contrary, to some hidden mortification.

"I'm going to give a ball," announced the heiress. "Immediately—a fancy-dress ball," she went on, improving on the first idea. "I shall give five days' invitation. Quite enough for anybody. And I want you all to promise"—Magdalen's lisp of "to pwomise" gave an irresistible coaxing to the word—"to promise to stay on for it!"

The infatuated group clustered round the young hostess, as she sat on one of the stone benches of the terrace dispensing her favours, was not likely to refuse. Each signified assent, after his own peculiar fashion.

"Rather! Won't I just!" cried Teddy Spofforth across the Foreign Office youth's polite: "It is really very kind of you, you know. I'd like to, most awfully!"

"I never meant to go away," said the painter.

Neither had the poet. But he glared at Derehall; especially when the latter proceeded to announce his intention of designing Miss Tempest's costume.

Mr. Blaise had not spoken. Now smiling up at him as he stood close to her, she sought his reply with that insidious sweetness that she could shift from one to the other, and yet make each feel peculiarly his own.

"May I really? May I really stay?" the social reformer bent to murmur.

"I shall have a moon," went on Magdalen. "And Chinese lanterns. . . . And gondolas on the lake, and——"

"My dear," interrupted Clara Mayne, looking anxiously at the girl's feverish face, "five days!—You'll never have anything ready. No one will have time to make parties. Half the people won't come."

"I'll make it in a week, then," answered the girl sharply; then added, with an unusual note of arrogance: "They'll all come, for me!"

"I say," cried Diana, "talking of Chinese lanterns, I'll go as the late Chinese Empress, and carry Chin-chin in my sleeve.—I suppose you mean me to stay, Mag—don't you?"

"Of course, child!" answered Magdalen, with that new voice of false gaiety. "But I can't think of letting you dress as a Chinese—it is to be a fifteenth-century Venetian fête.—Didn't I say so? If I didn't, I say so now.—Yes, Venetian—Aunt Adelaide. That's the place where they have gondolas, didn't you know? And I'm going to ask heaps and heaps of other pretty girls; I must have nothing but pretty young girls!"

As she spoke, she fixed her eyes almost insolently upon Mrs. Mayne, who was leaning against the balustrade,

just in front, watching her with a puzzled and pitying air. The elder woman coloured all over her pale face; then answered with the dignity she could so well assume:

"I did not consider the invitation applied to me, Magdalen."

But the girl was already horrified at herself. Springing up, she cast her arms about her friend.

"But of course it applied to you! I don't know what you mean.—You'll look better than anybody—won't she, Mr. Derehall? Much more Venetian than anybody, I mean. The other night, with that mantilla over her head, she looked simply beautiful, didn't she?" She appealed to the group. "I won't give it at all if you don't stay on."

It was worth while to be affronted by Magdalen, for the sake of her whole-hearted penitence. Clara Mayne returned the kiss without malice, more affectionately perhaps for that she too had drawn conclusions of a comforting character from Miss Tempest's demeanour.

"I think you're quite mad, all of you," said Lady Adelaide sweepingly.

The appearance of Smallwood, carrying the evening post-bag, closely shadowed by Sir Simon, produced a not unwelcome diversion.

"No, there ain't nothing for you, Sir Simon," the old butler was protesting sternly. "And it ain't no manner of use, your going over my letters yourself.—I could not allow such a thing!"

"But," cried the ex-diplomat, dancing in a frenzy of indignation, "this is the most extraordinary thing! There must be some rank carelessness in the postal arrangements of this house—Magdalen, I must protest!—

Adelaide, I must request to see that inquiries are made ! Yah, pah . . . village post-office—idiotic footman ! That idiotic footman ! ” He now turned fiercely on Smallwood. “ If you allow that idiotic footman, the one with the red hair, to post my letters, I will hold you responsible for the consequences !—Were my letters posted the day before yesterday ? ”

The privileged Smallwood had remained motionless during this charge ; but now he elevated his voice in his turn.

“ Was your letters posted the day before yesterday ? Yes, Sir Simon, your letter to the Foreign Office was posted the day before yesterday, for I posted it myself. And the day before. And the day before that too. And all the other days. No, there ain’t no answer, Sir Simon. It may be very odd, but there ain’t. And it’s my belief there never will be.”

“ Smallwood ! ” cried Magdalen. But though her voice was rebuking it shook with laughter. Smallwood’s eccentricities had become too much a matter of course in her eyes to be noticed as a rule, but she was in the humour when a woman must either laugh or cry.

“ Yes, Miss Magdalen, I’m coming with your post.—In a minute, miss,” responded the incorrigible servant. “ Plenty of letters they are. Too many, I’m thinking. Most of them begging—one way or the other. Some magazines in the hall. And four newspapers, miss. And a parcel of books.—Those writing gentlemen will be too many for you, one of these days, if you’ll believe me.”

“ Any letters for me, friend Smallwood ? ” said Mr. Blaise, approaching genially. He was fond of accentuating the bond of brotherhood with an inferior.

“ Beg pardon, sir, were you meaning me ? ” Without waiting for a reply the butler turned back to his mistress.

"I was obliged to leave Mr. Blaise's post in the hall. It would have taken a tray to itself, miss."

"Comic old fellow!" murmured Mr. Blaise, retreating a step, and feeling the rebuff acutely, as his uneasy smile betrayed.

Smallwood now approached Lady Adelaide, who was engaged in a smothered wrangle with her husband.

"Your letters, my lady. Two of them are bills, I'm thinking. Same kind of post for you, sir." Mr. Spofforth here became the next victim. "Them long blue envelopes ain't very welcome to young gentlemen, I know. But I'm not sure they ain't a safer kind than the note on the mauve paper, with the gold monogram, sir—readdressed, sir."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried the young man, with an agonized glance at Magdalen, stuffing the incriminating document into his pocket and scattering his bills on the terrace as he did so.

"What's that?" cried Diana in her cheerful shriek.

"It smelt of heliotrope, miss,—or was it werbeny?" Smallwood wagged his head jocosely, but not without a certain malicious intent. He did not approve of any single member of his mistress's circle of admirers. "Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about them, sir," he went on, addressing the flustered guardsman, as this latter stooped to pick up his mail. "They're the sort what keeps."

"Quite wrong," said the youth, turning a humorous, scarlet face upon his tormentor. "The sort I never keep." He began to tear the blue envelopes unopened as he spoke.

Magdalen had walked indifferently away with her share of the post-bag.

Miss Tempest's post, indeed, as the old servant had easily diagnosed, consisted chiefly of begging letters. In her hurt and baffled mood she felt less inclined than usual to rejoice in the sense of power and benevolence which these demands upon her purse generally roused in her. She crumpled into paper balls and flung away, one after another, the documents relating to the West Ham Infirmary Nurses' Outing Fund, the Pantomime Artists' Orphan Asylum—the Mission to the Covent Garden Porters and the urgent need of a new harmonium in the Resurrectioners' chapel in the neighbouring manufacturing town. The writer of this last appeal artlessly concluded that it would be a pleasure for Miss Tempest to supply this deficiency within the briefest possible delay.

One out of the monotonous batch she kept; read it over twice and finally slipped into her belt. It was from a young playwright whom she had already helped, indirectly, through Clara Mayne. He was a consumptive lad, believed by a certain literary clique to be the coming realistic dramatist: just the type to which Magdalen loved to play the Lady Mæcenæas. But she was somewhat revolted this evening by the directness of the demand which she had received from him.

"My ship is almost in port," wrote the youth, "but I want fifty pounds. I know you will not let all my hopes founder for want of such a paltry sum. You are the one being on earth I can ask, because I believe you are the one being on earth who understands how hard it is to ask, and how easy to give."

"I suppose I shall have to give," she said to herself with an angry laugh, "though it does not seem as if it had been so difficult to ask!"

She went slowly back to the house, feeling as if her gold had turned to dust and ashes. "Oh, I am not

happy," she said to herself in the words of *Mélanide*,
"I am not happy!"

The dressing-gong had scattered the group on the terrace. Mr. Blaise, still busy sorting his voluminous mail in the hall, was the only one of her guests whom she met as she went in. He looked up from the letter he had been perusing close to the window. His heavy eyes seemed full of the sorrow of the world.

"The worst of trying to help a little," he said, as if in answer to her thoughts, "is that one is sometimes so ashamed of poor humanity! But one must remember"—his voice sank with its emotional cadence—"one must remember the conditions of life which have produced the moral deterioration, and be very, very pitiful. For does it not show that the misery of the world has reached its lowest depth, when a soul has lost its self-respect?"

"Thank you," said Magdalen in her grave way.
"Thank you, Mr. Blaise, you have helped me."

She proceeded up the shallow steps to her room, feeling unhappy still, but with a sense of solemnity which was uplifting.

Isidore Blaise, running his soft-cushioned fingers through his thick wave of hair, an involuntary smile upon his lips, gazed keenly after her. That was his talent, the talent that had helped him from the Manchester back street to such places as Teyne Court—a trick of striking the note of sympathy just when it was needed; of seizing the psychological moment. It had only required some power of observation and a grain of intuition. . . .
"Begging letters," Smallwood had announced as he handed the pile to his mistress. Apparently begging letters of an outrageous description, for she had flung them one by one from her, with gestures of contempt, as soon as read. And then she had entered upon him

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(where he stood watching her from the window) with dragging step and an expression of discouragement, not to say disgust, upon her face. Simple conclusion !

Magdalen was obliged, after all, to extend her invitation to a fortnight. In the first place, with his usual neatness, Dillwyn found out that the moon she had ordered could not, with the best will in the world, make her appearance on the evening in question. He came to her with a grave countenance and an almanac in his hand.

Magdalen was inclined to think it extremely tiresome of him. But, finding that those of her party who could not prolong their visit would come back for the occasion, and having, moreover, certain qualms concerning the short notice to the neighbourhood, and the possibility of her own sumptuous Venetian garments not being ready in time, she gave in with a fairly good grace.

The period intervening before the great night was one which Magdalen ever afterwards remembered as among the most irritating she had ever spent. She, to whom life had hitherto been—save for that time of natural mourning—an almost unbroken record of pleasure and content, could now find nothing to her taste for an hour together, nobody to her liking. She did not know herself. She could not imagine why the sore, angry pain should go on burning in her heart. It was true that Denvers had humiliated her trenchantly—and she took humiliation very ill, spoilt child as she was—but her vanity was ready to assure her that there was a greater compliment in the unwilling love of this stern man than in the easy surrender of all the others. "I will not be one of your list ! . . ." In spite of himself his name was graven on it ! Had she not seen his self-betrayal with her own eyes ? Had not

the pain of his renunciation been written on his face?

And she could not banish the memory of that face from her thoughts. In the midst of the most animated conversation, at the most thrilling moment of an hour of flirtation, it would rise before her. The blue eyes, sad, yet with their glint of amusement, would seem again to be reading her soul; and she would sicken of her surroundings, of her company, of herself—wanting she knew not what. She would not let herself know what.

It was in these moods that Derehall, whose biting tongue and rude courtship she found more stimulating than the open worship of the rest, found her. Derehall, though he was for ever sketching her, found that the portrait he had undertaken made little progress.

Partly owing to the odd pleasure which, in her present dissatisfied humour, she took in thwarting him; partly owing to the man's own peculiar artistic temperament, he, as often as not, would wipe off all the day's work in a fit of black anger—declaring that she had smirked, that she had better have herself done by Smith or by Jones. Sometimes he swore that there, after all, was nothing in her to paint. He would paint no one that had not a soul! Let her get some one else to prop her against a pillar, drape her in white chiffon and call it art.

Then, upon her flare, he would perhaps catch his moment again, cry out to her with a gleam in his eye to stay as she was—when, as likely as not, she would dash his inspiration and thwart the purposeful brush by a yawn, or a petulant twist, or yet by an ingratiating smile.

"You're as impossible as a cat!" he exclaimed, one afternoon, with a face white with disproportionate fury. "I never set up to be an animal painter . . . I paint creatures of intellect."

Magdalen got up and walked to the door with her slow grace; turned and said exasperatingly:

"Cats are vewy intellectual creatures.—They have old, old souls."

As the door closed upon her, Martin Derehall dropped the palette on the ground and wiped his canvas with a fierce hand, as if he were obliterating the original from his mind; then, flung himself into a chair, legs extended stiffly before him, and sat staring. She maddened him. She obsessed him! He had sworn to have no mistress but his Art, yet if a passion stood between him and his Art, what then?

If Magdalen had seen his face, she might have thought again of that warning of Denvers, given in the garden of the Old Place. And yet it was perhaps this very warning that added a zest to the foolish game she was playing. The keenest desire at present in her mind was to sting Harry Denvers out of his resolution.

Each time that they had met since the evening in question, she had felt as impotent to move him either by pettishness, caprice, or smiles, as the wave against the rock—whether caressing with soft swell or dashing on to baffled assault with breaking spray.

Captain Denvers had the tact to appear at the Court just as often as usual. But Magdalen was not content to follow his lead and to proceed as if their passage of arms had never taken place. Every dart in her woman's quiver, sometimes shot at random, sometimes winged with sweetness, sometimes aimed with vindictive care, was put to use in this unfair war. But she could rouse

him to none of the desired response. When she was rude, he was silent. When she was argumentative, he was patient. When she was seductive, he was severely business-like. And, withal, there was that glint of amusement, sometimes joined to pity, in his melancholy gaze that drove her to desperation.

He had even ceased to remonstrate.—The whole freak of her proposed Venetian fête, for which, nearly every day, a fresh consultation with her agent was necessary, was accepted by him with what seemed placidity amounting to indifference. The whole scheme had originated round the girl's scarcely conscious yet burning wish to bring the man openly to her feet. She laid traps for him, in the way of unpardonably reckless expenditure, or outrageously impossible orders for out- and indoor preparation. But he avoided them with an ease that enraged her. He went up to London for the gondolas; succeeded at the cost of enormous trouble in procuring Italian gondoliers; interviewed and bargained with the best firm of caterers. He saved her, no doubt, by this personal intervention, many hundreds of pounds; executing the whole of the business as simply as if it had been a question of the usual farm, park, or stable concerns.

But the Bridge of Sighs to the island, the artificial cascade, the classic temple in the wood, he firmly declined even to consider. And when Magdalen broke out at him in a fit of fury on which she herself could never afterwards think without blushing, the agent merely took up his hat and left her presence, whistling for his dog.

Still choking with unassuaged wrath she watched him through the windows as he paused upon the terrace to lift the snarling Chin-chin out of Judy's exuberant way; and the next moment she heard him engaged in

conversation with Diana and prescribing a rattany lotion for her pet's eyes.

"Isn't he a kind gentleman, my plincee? Don't we love him welly, welly muchee?" Diana's mock pidgin-English was presently demanding in a high key. And Magdalen could guess how tenderly those strong brown hands were occupied about the little cross animal.

"He'd be kinder to me, if I were a dog!" she cried to herself, echoing unconsciously popular opinion on her estate. Then the tears rushed and anger left her; she only felt miserable and very lonely.

When the storm was over, and she did not allow it to last long—for how can a hostess, especially one with whom the sense of her own beauty is a constant pre-occupation, be seen with red eyes?—she tore up the sketches of bridge and temple, and flung them from her. She had made her painter draw them with great care, but the projects, it seemed, must be given up.

"I don't care about any of it, now," she said to herself; and chose a black gown for dinner.

But, next day, a batch of acceptances at breakfast-time, and another just after lunch; and, a little later, the thrilling visitation of the costumier from London to fit on the Venetian garments, made Miss Tempest's spirits rise. She felt that there was still much to live for.

It had pleased Mr. Derehall's fantasy to set her delicate loveliness in a robe of flame, encrusted in fire-hued jewels and embroideries of every shade of gold, topaz and rose. The mantle which she was to fling over this sumptuousness—since the fête was to be as much out of doors as within—was a still greater miracle of inventiveness. Here a tissue, shot with gold, of the tones of some dying sunset, was unexpectedly and magnificently lined with

black velvet. Magdalen cried aloud with pleasure when she beheld herself in the long mirror.

"When Miss Tempest has her hair plaited in the two side coils, as designed in the sketch," said the Artist in Modes, "and the circlet with the great ruby over her forehead, the effect will be"—he paused for a word—"it will be," he repeated happily, "great, very great indeed!"

Magdalen, still drinking in the wonderful vision of herself, smiled. When Harry Denvers should see her, thus! . . .

The all-pervading satisfaction of this rehearsal remained with her throughout the afternoon; and when, towards evening, she met her agent by the lake-side, it was still upon her.

He was inspecting the work which the labourers had just left: a landing-stage, with stone steps leading down to the water's edge. In another mood, perhaps, she would have resented his greeting, which betrayed no recollection of yesterday's scene. But she was inclined to be pleased with everything, being, for the moment, so completely pleased with herself. And indeed Captain Denvers had suggestions to offer which could not but meet with her approval. She saw they had been planned to that end. It would be possible, he told her, to give the desired Italic appearance to the scene, by the temporary planting of some cypress trees, the bringing up of the benches from the Old Place—those stone seats which had been in that garden since the days of first James. Then he had made inquiries of a well-known firm of nurserymen, and found that he could have at reasonable cost orange trees in tubs, which could be placed at intervals along

the road leading to the water. "And in the boat-house on the island," he went on, "we might station half the mandolines and singers, and let the rest be in a gondola of their own, at the further end of the water, when they could seem to echo and answer each other. It would produce quite a good effect, I think," he ended modestly.

"It would be ravishing," said Magdalen, her grave gaze upon him.

She sat down on one of the still loosely fixed stones of the steps and settled her chin into the hollow of her hand, staring across the placid pool, her eyes conjuring up heaven knew what visions of romance, vanity, and picturesque triumph.

The man stood, looking down at her. He saw how a fold of her immaculate skirt was dipping into the water, and drew her attention to it. She flicked a glance at him, and then at the damage, but did not move.

"What does it matter?" she said indifferently; and, further extending her slender foot, clad in a shoe of white buckskin donned for the first time, dipped the tip of it deliberately into the faint ripple that the breeze was sending towards her. He was thinking to himself, in melancholy mood, how this one week had altered the beloved being. Wayward she had always been, petulant, wilful. But sweet, generous, as little self-conscious of her position as of her personal beauty. Now what was becoming of that rare simplicity? She who had had the coaxing charm of the child, was beginning to move and look and speak with the self-centred, sophisticated air of the coquette. She, who had dealt with her riches, as she had worn her loveliness, as simply as a flower wears colour and deals fragrance, was now aggressive in her prodigality, boastful in her recklessness. What did it

matter if she spoiled a costly dress? And to prove how little it mattered she would spoil a pair of shoes! No doubt such an assertion of opulence would enhance her value in the eyes of such a one as Mr. Blaise—poor child! Denvers' heart contracted. Struck by his silence, the girl's eyes sought him again.

"You've never told me," she said, in the caressing voice which was one of her dangerous charms, "what your costume is going to be on Friday next?"

He gave a slight start.

"My costume——?"

"Your costume," she repeated. Her eyes began to dream again as, in vision, she saw her own gloriously shimmering figure. He must have something that would harmonize with her, because she meant he should have every opportunity to admire her in her glory. "Of course," she proceeded, with accents matching the dreamy gaze, "you know the kind of costume: fifteenth-century Venetian. It's the colour I'm thinking of. I suppose you'll hire one, like all the rest.—Try and get something very dark, won't you?—A night purple, or black and silver—or a wick, wick Wembrandt bwown!"

He laughed, with something like heartiness. The lisp was attractively noticeable.

"Do you order the hue for all your guests? Oh, don't be afraid, Miss Magdalen, I shan't clash with your colour scheme!"

"I'm sure you won't," she said, with her sweetest patronage. She got up, with a lazy smile, stretching her long limbs. Then she measured him appraisingly—curiously obtuse to his meaning. "You'd look vewy nice in white," she said regretfully. "But I don't think it would do well beside me."

"I'm sure it would not. Neither white nor night

purple. Nor even rich, rich Rembrandt brown." He laughed again. "What makes you think I am coming to your ball, Miss Tempest?"

"Not coming to my ball?"

Somewhat teasingly he said:

"Indeed, I never received an invitation."

"But . . . how ridiculous!—Why, of course! I never thought of sending you one. No more than to the others." This was an unfortunate slip, with one who would not be added to "her list." She hastily and prettily amended it: "Are you not part of the family? And if I have not asked you, I do now. I want you to come. Do, do come!"

His face changed. The old charm was never very far to seek, after all, under the new artificialities. And yet, "lovely wretch" as she was, what use would she make of this sweetness but to play with his aching heart?

"You are always kind," he said formally. "I know that you would make me welcome. I never doubted that. But such festive doings are not at all in my line."

He was unprepared for the emotion that showed itself on her face. Her colour alternated, her eyes blazed reproach, her lips quivered.

"Do you mean to say——?" she began, then broke off, bit her lip, and resumed again in a high key, very unlike her usual lisping note: "You must come, Captain Denvers."

"Must, Miss Tempest?"

She had grown pale now, her features were set. She tilted her chin and shot between drooping lids a look deliberately cruel.

"Isn't it part of your duty," she asked, "to look after my arrangements?"

He went pale too. He had thought himself proof

against any such petty taunt. He was not proof against the fact that it could come from her lips.

"I do not neglect my duty. I shall not neglect it on the night in question."

"Very well, then——"

"It is not part of my duty to masquerade." She opened her eyes wide and stared at him like an angry and yet frightened child. He went on: "As to the arrangements, you need not be afraid. I shall keep an eye on the caterers, and on the electrician, and on the bands——" He stopped suddenly. The bitterness that had prompted these words was unworthy, and he was ashamed even as he spoke. He smiled at her suddenly—with the rare smile of his that lit up his face with such a look of kindness. "The cobbler, you know, had better stick to his last," he said. "I belong to the workaday side of life and you to the joy and the play of it.—I hope," he added, with a gentle intonation, "that you will enjoy yourself very much on Friday evening, and I will do my best to make it all a success."

Her lip quivered again, her eyes filled with tears.

"You've spoilt it all for me!" she said, with a catching breath, and ran away from him up the steps.

He watched her go, with an odious feeling at his heart as if he had hurt a child.

CHAPTER X

THE VENETIAN FÊTE

WHILE Magdalen was entertaining her large house-party and a few neighbours at dinner before the Venetian fête, Harry Denvers profited of the hour to take a last survey of the ball-room and the supper-tables. He had just finished his own solitary meal and had strolled up from the quiet of the Old Place to this house which was to be to-night a palace of excitement, of colour, light and sound. He had put on evening dress, so that—as he told himself with a smile which had a bitterness unsuspected by his own consciousness—he would be taken for one of Gunter's men, should any guest come across him. His inspection accomplished, he paused near one of the rose-wreathed pillars in the immense ball-room, and listened vaguely to the sounds of many voices, intermingled with bursts of laughter, which reached him across the hall, through the closed doors of the dining-room.

He was determined to accomplish to the letter those duties which Magdalen, in a tone so deliberately impertinent, had informed him she expected him to undertake. By those words, by the look which accompanied them, she had herself marked out the distance between them, shown him his place and hers. True, it had been but an outbreak of petulance; but the flash of girlish temper had revealed, like a sudden stormlight, the true

landscape of her mind—or so he told himself. A man less proud and less sensitive might have retaliated upon the young lady by pointing out that the agent's work on a landed estate by no means includes that of Master of the Revels, secretary and major-domo. Denvers took an acrid pleasure, on the contrary, in endeavouring to fill these diverse posts with the utmost accuracy.

Miss Tempest would find he had "managed" for her with such inventiveness and attention to detail that even her fastidiousness would discover nothing amiss. So much he had done and still would do—to please her. But to be patronized by an invitation, to be received among her guests as tactfully as if he were an equal—to that his pride would not stoop. The thought of her piteous child's face, quivering between tears and wrath, warred in his memories against this new attitude of reserve towards her; but the man in him, the love in him, had been wounded, and his was a nature where such wounds, deeply hidden, rankle deep.

The sound of opening doors on the other side of the hall made him step out of the ball-room through one of the rose-wreathed window arches on to the terrace: there a kind of loggia had been built, which had been given as old-world and "Venetian" an air for the occasion as palms and orange trees, antique seats, a gleaming statue, and an artful warmth of brocade, could contrive. Denvers' lips involuntarily twitched with a sting of sarcasm as he wondered which of the honoured list would most frequently sit out with Magdalen this night on the great stone seat that he himself had piled with orange cushions. She had asked to have it placed at the edge of the steps leading down to the lawns, so that the whisper of the woods in the night and the light of the moon must reach it.

"I want it quite hidden away," she had then said. And when the upspringing blossoming barrier of palm and rose tree had been complete, she had still stood discontented and declared that it all screamed for a fountain.

"Just a little fountain, hidden in the night."

"You can't have it, Miss Tempest," he had said to her, very gravely.

"I know I can't," she had answered him as gravely, "but I want it."

"Oh, Mag," had called Miss Spofforth with her good-humoured shrewdness, "that is you all over! You always want something else."

These words had haunted Harry Denvers. He remembered them now as he stood preparing to light a cigarette before running down the steps on his way to the lake. It was true: that was Magdalen Tempest all over. And the something else she wanted of him was just his dignity, his manliness, his self-respect.

He dropped the end of the match from his fingers which the flame had scorched. His cigarette was still unlighted. . . . How had he let himself fall so deep into this folly? He was jealous of the fools about her, jealous of the empty dalliance that this bench would witness. He hated the whole nonsense of the masquerade! How right he had been to refuse to dress up and make a fool of himself like the others! He fought against the inner suggestion that there was something in him which yet rebelled, regretted, yearned.

The sound of trailing silks caught his ear. He turned hastily and saw a solitary figure crossing the empty, shining spaces of the ball-room. It was Magdalen. In the middle of the room, she paused and called him by name. He came to one of the rose-embowered windows and stood, looking in at her—startled.

It was not so much that the strange robes enhanced her beauty, but that they imparted to her an air that was bizarre, arresting, alluring—he sought for words and found them with a kind of heart-sickness. In her medieval dress, the slender body outlined like a figure of flame against the dense lining of the cloak; with a shimmer of fires that ran along it at every movement; with the small head and its fantastic coils of hair; with the blood-red jewel gleaming on her forehead, there was a something about the girl's appearance uncanny, well-nigh evil—a witchery that he had never seen, or dreamed to see, about her flower-like innocence.

He walked up to her slowly. Her face looked unusually pale, set in all this riot of colour. Only the lips were singularly scarlet. It came to him then that, for the first time, she had painted them; that the shadows under her eyes were artificially darkened.

A storm of anger rose in him. Had Derehall achieved this? What were they making of the child? How would it end? He marked the gaze with half-closed lids with which she fixed him, and knew that it sought, challenged admiration. And in the midst of his anger his heart began to lament over her: she liked herself in this false loveliness. It was then that a longing leaped up beside this anger and this pity—to save her!

She was waiting for him to speak.

"Yes, you are wonderful," he said, "wonderful—but I don't feel as if I knew you."

"Ah!" She opened her eyes wide on him. "But if you had been kind—if you had gone back into this adorable century too, you would have known me. Perhaps we should have been very dear friends."

"She is becoming a consummate coquette," the man thought. He would not tread with her this aimless path.

"You want me?" he asked in his business voice.

Her face changed at this. A look of trouble came into it; she was the natural Magdalen once more.

"Yes, I do want you," she said, glancing over her shoulder, as if she did not wish to be overheard. "Shall we go out there?"

She moved through the loggia and led the way to the fountainless bench, her brocade loudly murmuring as she went. Denvers had a treacherous sensation at his heart as he sat down beside her on the orange cushions. So he was, after all, the first to be there with her!

"I've had such an odd letter from the bank," she said, with a catch in her voice; "I felt I must show it to you, or I wouldn't have a moment's peace to-night." From where she had hidden it under the square bodice she drew a folded envelope, but still held it in her hand. "It's"—she spoke like a child about to confess an oft-forbidden fault—"It's about a cheque I wrote for some one. They sent it back to me; they want to know if I've written it. I——"

"It's been tampered with, I suppose," said he dryly. "Let me see."

"Do," she said, and let him take the paper from her fingers.

He got up and went to read it under the nearest Venetian lantern. It seemed a long time to her before he came back.

"Do I know this Mr. McFein?" he asked. She shook her head. "He has not been among the——" he went on, but checked himself and amended his phrase: "He was not included among any of your guests here?"

"No—I knew him in London." She quickly grew restive under his tone. "You needn't speak and look like that, I didn't forge the cheque!—He wrote to

me . . . it was about his new play. He wanted fifty pounds. I know he's clever: a kind of genius——"

Denvers interrupted her.

"Is this your cheque—have you examined it?"

"I did not send him a hundred and fifty pounds," she flashed.

"No, I understand that. But it's pretty transparent that you've filled your cheque again after your usual careless fashion. How often have I not warned you that leaving these spaces is to invite fraud? Especially when you will have dealings with such . . . such specimens as Mr. McFein."

She broke in:

"That is not the question now."

"Is it not? Well"—he folded the papers and put them into his pocket—"I presume, at any rate, you wish me to deal with the matter? Your friend—or I should say, your late friend—the clever young man, shall be given opportunities to ripen his genius in retirement."

She rose with a single, abrupt movement.

"What do you mean? How absurd! . . . how shocking! Do you think I want him sent to prison, poor little wretch? God knows"—her voice deepened in unconscious imitation of Blaise the philanthropist—"God knows what dire straits of poverty have driven him to these depths!"

He answered her, still with hard look and accent:

"Every young law-breaker, or old one for the matter of that, is always the victim of external influence. All the more reason why he should be put under influences that will ensure his keeping the laws——"

She stamped her foot.

"I won't hear of it!—I shall swear I did write it. I shall telegraph to the bank to-morrow—I——" She

suddenly dropped from her high key. "Oh, don't you see?" she went on impatiently. "He's just impertinent, impudent, not a criminal! He wants to get the money out of me—he knows I never could have him taken up."

"I admire the distinction," said Denvers. "But what then? You mean to have the cheque honoured?"

"No," she said. "Or rather, yes—at the bank. But I want you to see Mr. McFein and make him understand—make him see he must pay back that hundred pounds . . . or be disgraced."

Denvers gazed at her, at first taken aback by the odd mixture of shrewdness and simplicity displayed by the plan. Then he laughed at the thought of the fresh duty meted out to the agent.

"Oh, don't laugh!" she cried, as the sound struck her ear. "Can't you see, can't you understand, how it has hurt me, how horrible it all is?"

She flung herself back on the seat, all her glorious draperies billowing and smouldering in the dusky space about her. He thought that there were tears in her voice.

"If you won't help me," she went on, "whom can I turn to?—I'm so, so alone!"

His heart smote him, the sublime egoism of her attitude lost in his mind before the piteousness of the appeal. It was true.—There never was anyone more alone, more abused.

He sat down beside her again.

"Don't think of it any more," he said, and it was in the old kind voice. She knew, without looking up, that the old kind look was upon her. "Don't think of it any more. Enjoy yourself to-night." Then he hesitated. "You ought to enjoy yourself, for you will have the most beautiful garments of any here."

"Then you do like me?" she flashed again. What a child she was!—In spite of paint, and coquetry, and her new sophistication, what a child still at heart! A creature only to be chidden while held in loving arms: chidden between kisses.

He got up abruptly and left her: the sense of her sweetness and helplessness drew him too dangerously. Even those painted lips added pathos to her need. He felt shaken in his soul; no longer clear as to his own course of action. So unfit for the world . . . and so tempting! To recover a hold upon his thoughts he must be alone in the night, away from her—from her scented presence, away from that slender figure overweighted in its grandeur, from the young, small face, so pale under the blazing ruby. . . .

As he once more crossed the terrace entrance to the hall, he paused a second involuntarily to gaze in. Both the doors were wide open, on account of the heat. Magdalen's guests—a fantastic and motley set in their vivid costumes—were grouped about its flower-banked spaces. He certainly was in no mood for laughter; but a chuckle escaped him at the sight of Mrs. Spofforth in black velvet, with a Mary Stuart coif, talking to Sir Simon, whose lean limbs and bald pate were sadly at variance with his tight hose and *justaucorps*. The transient mirth died on his lips, as a lithe figure of a man clad all in flame-colour stepped from behind a group of palms and joined another flame-coloured figure, which now emerged from the ball-room doorway. They met in the middle of the hall, and there stood together: Magdalen and the painter. Denvers quickly recognized the sallow face, the fierce eye and red pointed beard. He, who had designed his hostess's

garments, had dared to attire himself as her counterpart—her mate !

In truth, never had Martin Derehall looked so well. The something reckless, fantastic, even vicious in his appearance, made him a fit reincarnation of the Renaissance type he personated—the creature of impulse, talent, and ferocity, ready to love or to slay ; to love and slay. And Magdalen was smiling as she looked up at him !

" Good God ! " said Harry Denvers, and plunged into the shadows, on the way to the lake. The flame figures danced before his eyes as he went.

With the exception of Mrs. Spofforth, Magdalen, under Martin Derehall's commands, had succeeded in obtaining historical correctness in the costumes of her household.

It is true that all were not amenable to his suggestions as to the colour and style of their *Quattrocento* garments. Sir Simon had acridly refused to appear as Cardinal or Doge ; that is, in robes that would have become his age and emaciation, and resembled nothing so much as the *pantalone* of Italian comedy.

Mr. Blaise, clad like a bridegroom in white and silver, looked, as Lady Adelaide declared, " almost *too* handsome ! " And indeed the good lady expressed by this eulogy the thought that sprang naturally to every other mind at sight of the Social Reformer. Mr. Blaise was too luxuriantly effective ; his hair was too richly curling ; his limbs were too symmetrically massive ; his close-shorn face was too successfully coloured ; his eyes too dark and melting, and his smile too frequent and sweet.

This last, however, was at the beginning of the evening.—When the flame-coloured gentleman joined the flame-

coloured lady, the unctuous satisfaction which, in front of his mirror, had sprung in Mr. Blaise's heart and diffused itself overflowing through his whole person, began to ebb. He turned to Lady Adelaide, who stood watching her niece through her *lorgnon*, with a tight expression of disapproval on her face.

"I think, dear lady," he said under his breath, "that you are feeling much as I do, just at this moment. Surely, surely——" He broke off.

Lady Adelaide folded her eyeglasses with a snap.

"I am feeling," she said in a vindictive undertone, "that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to slap that silly girl!"

"Oh, no, no!" he protested. "Don't you see that it is her divine ignorance of life that leads her to accept such a situation? I doubt if she even realizes the effect it must produce. But the man, the man, who has planned thus—thus to compromise her! . . . In the eyes of the county——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Lady Adelaide. "Yes—it will be all over the place that she's engaged to the wretch—so eccentric as she is! Do you hear? She is calling him her Master of the Revels! I must put a stop to it, before people begin to come.—Magdalen, Magdalen!" She moved forward, heedless of the detaining touch on her arm and of the murmured "No—no, dear lady, believe me!" of the wiser Blaise.

He hastily drew back, then, anxious not to identify himself with that most fatal of all errors, futile remonstrance. Mr. Derehall and his hostess, turning at the end of their saunter, saw Lady Adelaide approaching.

"Hopelessly twentieth-century!" said the man. "What's the good of trying to dress a woman who was born to be a current fashion-plate?—Look at her hair, her

waist, her eyeglass, her high heels! I'd lay a wager nobody would guess what she is trying to be. . . . The world is peopled with fools!" His eye swept over Magdalen; darkened and lightened as passion and admiration seized him. "But you—you!" he said. And the husky note in his voice grated.

Magdalen gave him her grave glance, dropped her eyelids; the corner of her mouth tilted upwards, her nostrils became faintly dilated; this incense of adulation was becoming as the very breath of life to her.

"Magdalen," said Lady Adelaide, "may I have a word with you, apart?" She addressed her niece, ignoring Derehall with the deliberate rudeness that only a great lady can assume to perfection.

"Oh dear," cried the young hostess, alarmed, "anything wrong?"

"Anything wrong!" repeated the irate chaperon, dragging her niece safely out of earshot. "Anything wrong! Are you mad, Magdalen? Is it possible you don't see that man's deliberate insolence?"

"Aunt Adelaide!—"

"Don't you understand?—Why, the very moment he came into the room to-night, I could see his plan."

"His plan?—Oh, do let go my wrist, Aunt Adelaide. You are hurting me!—What do you mean?"

"Just this, my dear, that it will be all over England to-morrow that you're engaged to Mr. Derehall."

"What nonsense!"

"He's deliberately planned it, I tell you. Dressed himself up to match you. . . . The man's an adventurer!" went on the elder lady. "An adventurer, an impossible Bohemian! A creature from heaven knows what gutter! Really, Magdalen"—here Lady Adelaide passed beyond the bounds of even her usual indiscretion—

"you have peculiar tastes! First you fling yourself at your agent's head, and when the poor man has the sense to keep in his place you——"

"Aunt Adelaide!" The girl's eyes flashed warning; her painted lips trembled. The other saw she had gone too far.

"You see, my dear," she resumed in a more conciliating tone, "you are so young and inexperienced, and—and so rich, my dear, and pretty! People will talk. If you encourage this man, he'll think you mean to marry him, and——"

"He'll think nothing of the kind," interrupted the heiress. "Everybody wants to marry me! And anyhow, I'm going to do what I like to-night, and I don't care what you, or anybody, may say!"

"But, my dear!"—Lady Adelaide was genuinely aghast, for there was something reckless, almost desperate, in her niece's air and manner, "you'll compromise yourself!"

"I don't care."

"The man is madly in love with you. Anyone can see that. My dear child——"

"I don't care," repeated Magdalen. But there sprang a gleam in her eyes: she did care, she cared very much. It was her wish, always, that every man should be in love with her—madly in love! And, to-night, it was balm to her wounded vanity.

"You don't know what you are doing," urged Lady Adelaide feebly.

"Yes, I know perfectly well. I'm going back to Mr. Derehall."

As the discomfited matron came back into the hall, fanning herself with her spangled fan, Mr. Blaise glided back, unobtrusively, to her side. The two flame-coloured

ones had come together again in the middle of the ball-room. With a ruefully humorous glance towards them, he exclaimed :

"It is out of the frying-pan into the fire with my Lady Caprice—is it not, dear friend ? "

"I say, Mag," said Diana Spofforth, a little later in the evening, when the circumstances of her position as hostess inevitably divided Miss Tempest for a while from her Master of the Revels, "how can you allow that man to glue himself beside you like that ?—I'd as soon dance with the devil, myself."

"I think he's splendid," said Magdalen, fixing her friend with a hostile eye. Then she added, with a maliciousness quite unusual to her, "I think it's almost a pity I did not let you come as a Chinese, after all."

Indeed, Miss Spofforth, in spite of antique brocade from Burnett's and Mr. Derehall's careful sketch, looked as hopelessly unmedieval as Lady Adelaide herself. Not that it mattered. Most of Magdalen's guests from a distance had developed a great deal of "fancy" in the choice of costume, and interpreted the directions, "Fifteenth century, Venetian," in a wide spirit. The rector's wife had fallen back on Marie Antoinette, even as Mrs. Spofforth on Mary Stuart ; and her girls had donned those charming shepherdess dresses in which they had made such a success at Lady Teyne's bazaar. Lady Teyne herself, a giddy young matron, made a startling irruption into the room with her giddy young house-party, all attired in those remarkable garments which they had donned for the "Hundred Years Ago" ball, last June ! And there was a silly gunner from Exeter who came as a

toreador because his black moustache (he thought) gave him a Spanish look.

"It's disgusting," said Magdalen to Derehall, when they met again to lead that *gaillarde* which was to be the feature of the evening, and which nobody could dance—it having only been thought of and practised that morning.

"Never mind," said the man. "What does it matter? Look at me—as I look at you." Then he added, in a low note of ardour: "You fill my eyes!"

The incense rose gratefully to the girl's nostrils. But if she had not laughed and talked so high and excitedly, she would have burst into tears. Everything was horrid to-night. She must not stop to think; she must not give her soul a minute's pause to recall that look of Harry Denvers, grave and pitying.

When she went out to the loggia, a little later—it was only with Dillwyn after all—a low rumble of thunder seemed to run round the horizon. It was breathlessly hot, hotter in this semi-open place even than in the lighted rooms.

"I say—too bad! Moon never turned up after all," said Dillwyn. Then he added: "Going to be a first-class thunder-storm."

"There is not," said Magdalen sharply. "How stupid you are! Only a few clouds over there."

The young man glanced at her quickly; then looked away and nursed his abnormally slender leg between his clasped hands. He was looking attractive and unusual in his black-and-silver garb—quite in the period, both in looks and in dress, as the painter himself had told him with one of his artist's flashes of approval. But Magdalen found his company dull and flat. After the lurid adoration of Derehall the company of the rest of her admirers, to-night, was naturally like to pale.

"I'm going in a gondola after supper," she announced defiantly, after a pause.

"Of course it could not storm then," responded her companion, so gravely that she failed to perceive that he was faintly joking.

He felt himself quite as dull and flat as Miss Tempest thought him. He had returned to the Court only that day, to find that in the brief time of his absence his hostess's intimacy with "her Painter" had assumed what seemed to him quite undue proportions. He did not approve of the artist's look and manner towards her; he resented it, and marvelled that she should not herself resent it infinitely more. And he did not like Magdalen's costume; it offended his fastidiousness as *outré* and startling, too pronounced, too theatrical for her delicate personality. He was furious (as were all the other young men) at the painter's audacity in garbing himself to match her.

So, being a well-bred Englishman, he showed his feeling, paradoxically, by an increase of reserve and an outward show of indifference.

"I say, may I come with you in a gondola?" he asked now, with so obvious an effort that Magdalen exclaimed angrily:

"No, I am going with my Master of the Revels—he amuses me. With Mr. Derehall," she added pointedly.

The music struck up, and Dillwyn sprang to his feet with alacrity—yes, quite with alacrity. It was no wonder that Magdalen should smile at Mr. Derehall, across the ball-room as she went back into it; no wonder that he came swiftly to her, as if she had actually called him.

CHAPTER XI

EXIT MARTIN DEREHALL

"**I** BEG your pardon, sir——" The words, almost whispered, startled Harry Denvers, who was leaning pensively against one of the pillars of the hall door.

He had just completed a renewed survey of the special items of Miss Tempest's great entertainment, and was now assured that all the phases of the night's foolery (as he angrily called it) were in full swing—the illuminations, the gondolas, the hidden music by the lake.

It was that hour between the coming and the departure of guests when revelry is at its height. The last car had ceased throbbing in the yard. There was not even a footman lingering about the entrance. He could hear the sweeping strains of the band from the ball-room, maddeningly intermingled at intervals with the inane mandoline tinkling from the waterside. Now and again a gust of laughter and excited voices struck the air, then died away, as groups passed to and fro from the house to the terraces and the landing-stage. With a long-drawn-out wail of violins, the waltz within came presently to a languorous end; and then the mandolines and guitars held their own in the night.

A distant roll of thunder ran up from the horizon, like a wave towards the beach, and seemed to take possession of earth and sky. Denvers glanced anxiously

upwards and stretched out his hand. There was no rain yet, but dire threat of storm was in the air. He sighed impatiently: this was beyond his management. He could oil the wheels of Magdalen's triumphal car, but he could not bribe the gods. It was at that moment that the words fell on his ears: "I beg your pardon, sir——"

Their anxious tone was as a reflection of his own vague sense of apprehension. Turning, he saw Smallwood, whose old face was puckered with distress.

The butler had been no silent critic of his mistress's latest freak. He had indignantly refused to wear the fifteenth-century seneschal's garb of Magdalen's command; and, not content with emerging victorious on this point, had constituted himself a kind of drag on the progress of the preparation, after the exasperating fashion which only an old family servant can achieve to perfection. It was indeed only on Captain Denver's diplomatic interference that Smallwood's uncompromising "resignation" from the night's work had been prevented.

"Yes, Smallwood," he had said patiently, "yes, I know these are very different days. You are quite right. I dare say the old Squire would not have approved at all. I cannot fancy him, as you say, presiding over this masquerade. But we must remember, my good old friend, that it is not our business to criticize Miss Tempest; we are here to serve her. Yes, we both mean to serve her as faithfully and as long as we can—don't we?"

At this Smallwood had growled something in his throat, of which the only distinguishable words referred to "Miss Tempest's need of a master rather than of a servant." The look accompanying these words had been full of a meaning which Captain Denver had refused to read. Agent and butler were perhaps a little

better friends after this colloquy than before, and Smallwood ceased to place any active opposition in the way of the hated entertainment. Now, however, the first glance at the old man showed Denvers that trouble was afoot.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You'll excuse me, sir, I don't know anybody else I can turn to—not them, surely, as ought to be looking after her. It's not her ladyship would be a bit of use. It's as bad as anyone she is—with that Mr. Blaise. But, there, the old Squire thought a deal of you, and—Oh, Captain Denvers, sir, there's folks here that shouldn't be about her—and she no more than a child . . .!" He broke off. Then the quavering accents suddenly took an angry high note: "It's time somebody should interfere, or there'll be mischief!"

"What can I do?" said Harry Denvers. He spoke as if he were addressing an equal; and indeed, at that moment, they stood as allies in a common anxiety. Smallwood pointed in the direction from whence the tantalizing, foolish music still strummed through the heavy air.

"You can go after her, down there, to the water, where she's just demeaned herself by going in the company of that—that painting fellow, sir—Mr. Derehall as they call him. He's not safe——" Again the worn voice lifted its pitch. "If ever I see a devil—and even before he did himself up like one, I knew him for that, sir—if ever I see a devil, that's him!"

From the distance, over the throb of mandoline and guitar, came the lilt of a Venetian boat-song, promptly joined by a chorus; the sounds rose fantastically, with singular incongruity in this English atmosphere. Almost at the same moment the first livid flash ripped the black

canopy of the sky; the mutter of the approaching storm spread and gathered and re-echoed as if from every point of the compass at once; not yet loud, but unmistakably threatening.

"This will bring everybody in," said Denvers with a confidence he did not feel. Then, as within the house the band broke into one of those two-steps that seem to set to dance-music the spirit of the age—restless, trivial, reckless—he exclaimed with an altered air: "Yes—I will go in search of her. I will find her and bring her in . . . out of the storm."

He set off at a running pace through the darkness of the plantation, and only fell to a walk as he emerged into the lantern-lit way that led down, between the temporary orange trees, to the waterside. A few couples, then a group of three or four, passed him hurriedly on their flight back to the house: singular, unrecognized figures, that eyed him curiously as they went as if indeed they and he had been denizens of different ages, crossing each other's path in a night of dream.

In vain he looked to see those two of the flame hue hastening towards him: those two whom some evil intent of fate had paired to-night. Further on, another couple, coming more slowly, stared like the others, then smiled and halted. Both looked unnaturally long and slim in the uncertain light of the swinging lamps. Denvers, on his side, recognized in the black-and-white lady his cousin Clara, in the black cavalier, Dillwyn.

"Oh, Harry," cried she, with a glad movement, checked by a second thought, "what a dreadful storm this is going to be! One can hardly breathe.—Poor Magdalen!"

"Gondolas didn't take anybody's fancy, anyhow," put it Dillwyn, in peevish tones. "Not a bit of good

playing at Venice in Devon—what? Ah, you wouldn't play the giddy, medieval goat in tights, wise man! I never thought much of fancy dress, at any time. Never thought so little of it as to-night."

Clara amended this grumble with her usual suavity.

"We are all a little cross, I am afraid. It's the thunder.—Come, Mr. Dillwyn, the supper's English anyhow." She was moving away when, hesitating, she again dropped her companion's arm and ran back.

"Harry," she said breathlessly, "do make Magdalen come in if you can. You'll find her on the island—with Mr. Derehall. They are both quite silly, declaring there is no storm."

She paused panting a little, then urged him again, her brilliant eyes fixed upon him:

"You will go after her, won't you? She's so . . . so excited to-night!"

"Do you think she will heed me?" asked Denvers, but did not wait for the answer and moved swiftly onward as he spoke.

His nerves (he told himself) were as much on edge as anyone else's this night. Clara was a good friend. Was she not proving it by this womanly solicitude for her unconscious rival? . . . Why had he fancied that there was something malicious, almost cruel in her gaze?

The singers on the lake fell abruptly into silence as a flash once more seared the blackness and the angry thunder roll followed in menace. Denvers thought it was as if the mean sounds of earth and its false cheer had been rebuked by the voices of heaven; and instinctively he longed for the relief of the great crash, the cleansing downpour, the devastating forces that should overpower, put to naught, the folly of this Venetian revelry in wholesome old Devon.

He had reached the landing-stage now. A couple of empty gondolas were moored to the left of him; the gondoliers in charge were nowhere to be seen; no doubt they had been glad enough of the excuse of the storm to seek better entertainment indoors. The lake seemed deserted, the vast black space reflecting sullenly the coloured glow of the lamps. So windless still was this hour of coming turmoil that the little patches of orange and red and green lay upon the water as if painted there—only broken, far away, towards the corner of the island where an unseen gondola swung to a languid oar.

Denvers stood a second or two, doubtful whether to make use of one of the Venetian craft at his feet, or to find a less complicated passage to the island. He decided on the latter course and ran down the wood path to the boat-house. Here he untied one of the skiffs, took up a pair of sculls, and rowed away upon the dark waters, breaking the painted reflections that lay like flowers into tinted ripples that sparkled and fled and leaped again.

He was well in the middle of the lake when the first blast of storm-wind sprang, suddenly, as if out of the water itself, dashed past him and was gone. He could hear the outcry of the woods behind as they were caught. He pulled a quicker stroke; a couple of raindrops, the sparse, weighty drops that herald the squall, fell on his bare head. He was close to the head of the island, when the long-delayed menace fulfilled itself in clamour and glare. And it was in the livid light that hung and shimmered for what seemed an unusual length of time that he beheld at last the two he was seeking.

They were not on the island as he had been led to imagine, but in a gondola lying stationary close in on the further side. That protracted flash painted the scene

upon the night with a vividness that left an ineffaceable impression in his mind. The outlandish lines of the boat black against a livid world ; and under the shadow of the canopy, those two, side by side, in their garments of flame, both horribly pale. Behind them, towering it seemed and unnaturally large, the figure of the gondolier : a grin on his swarthy southern face.

Through the fury of noise that followed the flash, and through a blackness commensurate to the vanished splendid light, Denvers seemed still to see that vision. And the fantastic thought sprang upon him that he had beheld Magdalen in some barque of death, with the Spirit of Evil by her side, his livery on her innocent body, while the mocking impersonal demon ferrying them rejoiced with the malice of the lost over another lost soul. The absurdity, dismissed as soon as formed, nevertheless distinctly influenced his decisions on that eventful night.

And now the haste of that rage which a man can only feel when the woman he loves is concerned, came as a lash to his energies. Through the muttering recoil of the thunder, rose her voice, angry and frightened : " I will go back, I tell you ! Go back at once, gondolier—— ! "

" He doesn't understand you," came her companion's reply with a laugh, acme of insolence. Upon which, in a kind of sibilant sing-song (which Denvers surmised must be Venetian dialect) bantering words were exchanged between painter and oarsman. The accent, the tones, the laughter of the one as coarse and offensive as the other's. Then Magdalen gave a cry :

" Mr. Derehall, how dare you ! "

There was terror in it, Denvers thought. He saw red. The next moment found him alongside of the gondola. He caught hold of the larger boat with both hands and

leaped in, the recoil driving his own skiff adrift. Magdalen cried out again, and this time it was joy that rang wildly in her voice :

" Harry ! Harry ! "

The gondola rocked again as Derehall, thus taken unawares, sprang to his feet, with a noise in his throat that did not sound human. Odd splashes of light fell on the faces of both men standing, in fierce nearness to each other, like furious animals on the edge of a leap. The gondolier might well have thought himself back on his native waters. He had not dreamed that the blood of two cold *Inglesi* could boil up in that guise : knives should have been out in a moment, only that in this land of slugs, no one ever seemed to have a weapon to his hand !

Angered though Denvers was, he had the soldier's cool mastery over his fighting instincts. But the other's passion was blind, raving, that of a temper that is beyond control, as reckless as it is savage—Magdalen's leopard roused at last !—Denvers saw, or felt more than he saw, the contraction of the muscles that precedes the lashing out of a blow ; heard the quick breathing suddenly arrested.

He eluded with ease the mad, clumsy attack ; then his opened hands fell like clamps on the assailant's sides and, in the very instant of lost balance, with a single heaving movement, he had shot him overboard.

" *Cospetto !* " cried the gondolier, and unconsciously flung his steadying weight on his oar as the craft threatened to capsize. But the Englishman (who was behaving so like an Italian, except that no Italian would have remained so curiously dumb) had already shifted his weight and righted the boat in the nick of time.

There came, for the gondolier's eyes, a burst of whiteness over the black waters: that was where the gentleman who had attired himself like the devil had gone in. Then there was, for his ears, the young lady's loud sobbing, like a child's after intolerable terror. The dumb Englishman, at that, made a little exclamation; it sounded as tender and soothing as if it had indeed concerned a child.—And the Venetian in his soul cursed the canopy that hid the two deeply interesting forms from his view. Under the canopy, Denver was still silent. He had sat down beside the sobbing girl and very deliberately drawn her into his arms.

The heavy, unconscious stroke on the oar had already shot the gondola far from the spot of white. The gondolier paused again as if uncertain. Just then a prolonged lightning flash flared out once more; the man instinctively turned his head to peer back, and he could see the flame-coloured gentleman clutching the bough of an overhanging tree and staring round over his shoulder after them. "If ever I saw a Satan . . . !" thought the Venetian, and crossed himself. "It is a marvel the water did not hiss . . . !"

Denver, with Magdalen in his clasp, suddenly realized that the unbelievable had happened; and, more singular still, that he had meant it to happen. In that one unreasoned movement, the man of no fortune had taken the heiress for his own and—anomaly of fate—taken her for her own sake, to protect her, guard her. Taken her because, without his love, she was altogether forlorn and lost. And the first broken words that escaped her gave a final sanction to his purpose—that purpose to which circumstances, surely, had long inevitably been leading him:

"Hold me!" she murmured, weeping, "don't let me go!"

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His clasp about her tightened. He lifted the wet face and gravely kissed it.

"Never will I let you go now," he said. "You are safe with me."

With a guileless movement she flung her arms about his neck:

"Oh, Harry," she cried, "I love you!"

Unbidden, but with the common sense of an individual not under a love spell, the Venetian had worked the craft back to the landing-stage.

It was only as Denvers lifted Magdalen out of the gondola, with the drenching rain driving into their faces, and the storm grumbling and muttering between incessant flickerings of lightning, that he suddenly remembered, with a cold stab of apprehension, how he had left Derehall's fate unascertained.

Holding the girl's cloak closely about her, he paused, trying to scan the waters through the impenetrable wall of rain. A score of unpleasant, not to say disastrous, possibilities chased each other through his mind. He somehow felt sure the painter could swim; and yet—how if he had brought hideous scandal upon the woman to protect whom had seemed a duty paramount beyond independence, pride or conventional honour? He left her side and ran back down the steps, drawing a piece of gold from his pocket which he first showed in the lantern light, then tossed to the gondolier.

"Find the gentleman!" he said.

The man caught the coin cleverly (and sent it to join a comrade of Mr. Derehall's production).

"The gentleman . . . who fell out of the boat—you

remember, fell out," insisted Denvers, nodding up at the grinning face.

The man nodded back, and then showing—in spite of Mr. Derehall's assurance—a sufficient command of English, assisted by the intuition of his race, responded cheerfully :

"Yes, ver unhappy little accident ! Red gentleman all safe on island—but ver, ver angry ! I go fetch him."

Denvers, who had been on the point of leaping back into the gondola and calling to Magdalen to go forth alone, drew a sharp breath of relief as the Venetian, with one masterly sweep of his oar, turned the head of his craft outwards and glided away.

His arm once more about the slender figure, Harry led his beloved swiftly through the deserted way, now almost in complete darkness, for rain and wind between them had extinguished most of the illuminations. If her steps faltered, if now and again they lurched against a bush, it was sweet to them both : for him to feel how she leant against his strength ; for her to feel what strength she had in him to lean against.

True to his vocation of protector—that vocation so long followed in secret and now to be openly consecrated—he brought her to the unlighted garden entrance which he himself had used that night for coming and going unnoticed. There he bade her slip up to her own room and change her shoes—just as he would have bidden a child.

"If you take off your cloak, it will do," he added. "I don't think the wonderful dress underneath will have been much injured."

"No," she answered. They stood together in the narrow dark passage. He could not see her face ; but there was wonder in her voice.

"You had to hold it up pretty high to be able to run with me," he went on, with a little tender laugh, as a passing vision of slim foot and ankle, caught ever and anon in a watery glimmer of light, came back to him. Then, after a little silence: "We don't want any talk in the ball-room, about Mr. Derehall, his exploits and his—accident," he explained in a warning tone.

"No," she said again. The doubt deepened in her voice. "But will he tell?"

"I think not," said the man grimly. "I think we can assume that he will not."

Then the lover in him overcame all the rest; and he felt that it was hard to part from her. He caught her to him and, in the dark, kissed her wet hair. She lifted her face, with that adorable confidence, that spontaneousness that was so peculiarly her own innocent attribute. And their lips met.

A wondrous bloom is that flower of passion, which can lie folded in the heart and in the senses, for months, nay years, but which, at a touch of the lips, breaks into such colour and fragrance that our whole being is possessed within an instant!—Wine of life that intoxicates at the very first sip! Harry Denvers had never really known hitherto the power of that elemental force; he hardly recognized his own identity as it now revealed itself in him. But solicitude for her still dominated his reeling brain.

"Go . . . Magdalen," he said, and his voice shook. "Hurry, you must show yourself to your guests, as soon as possible, and you must do your hostess's duty till the parting. Go—I will come round in the morning and wait for you in the library. Go, love, go!" he said again.

She went from him, loosening her clasped hands from

his ; and gave a faint, nervous little laugh to feel how loth, in spite of his urging, he was to let her do so. Then the tapping of her feet in the medieval shoes, the long reluctant rustle of her heavy draperies, withdrew down the passage and grew fainter. He remained listening, still hearing the light fall of her step, and the attendant murmur of the silk up the wooden stairs, until they became mere sounds in his mind ; and at last only a memory.

He went out then, back into the rain ; and, with long strides, devouring space because of that exquisite but unwise delay, hurried down the flagged walk towards the landing-stage. The rain had settled to a steady down-pour. The storm mutter was losing itself behind the distant hills : the noise that now filled the night was that of the rain, myriad, minute and yet immense.

Suddenly, as if echoing to that of his own quick feet, came the beat of another's rapid tread upon the gravel. Derehall and he met face to face, by an odd chance, just within the narrow pallid circle of light cast by one of the few lanterns still unextinguished. They almost collided, and drew back from the contact with a simultaneous movement—aversion on the one side, fury on the other. The light patch of lantern light swung backwards and forwards over them, wind-swayed, and Derehall's figure, in his sodden red, still dripping as he stood drops red as blood, was a hideous and a sorry sight. His face, livid with cold, was twisted with a rage that drew the lips back as upon a snarl from chattering teeth. Denvers was the first to recover himself.

" You've had an accident, I see," he said, in clear common-sense tones. " Fell into the lake ?—These gondolas have a way of swerving, I know."

The painter with that inarticulate sound in his throat ; had a gesture of clenched hands, and then—ignominy

of cold and weakness!—such a rigor seized him, shaking him impotently from head to foot, that his enemy had to catch him round the shoulders to keep him from falling.

"Hot blankets and a hot drink—that's what you want," said Harry Denvers, and there was almost leniency in his voice, so quick an appeal did helplessness always make upon him. "Come, I'll get you in by the back way—and see that some one looks after you.—You'll be all right in the morning."

"Blast you!" growled Derehall between shudders; but he allowed himself to be led on.

"You'll be all right in the morning," repeated Denvers genially, but with a new hardness in his touch, "and able to travel. There is a very good train up at 10.20."

"Blast you, for an intermeddler!" cried Derehall again; lurched, nearly fell and had to clutch his companion for support. "Do you think I'll take orders from you . . . you bailiff!" he panted, as, happily, the cramp left him.

"There's nothing like a screeching hot jorum," pursued the other, with increasing cheerfulness; and then he went on, gripping the drenched figure more firmly: "Tell you what, I'll see to you myself. The servants—the other servants—are a little off their heads just now . . . and anyhow they're never any good in an emergency."

Martin Derehall cursed for the third time; but there was a kind of grim mirth at the back of his hoarse voice as he did so.

"I'll sue you, if I get pneumonia," he croaked.

"I'll drive you myself to the station and you'll be as fit as a fiddle," comforted Denvers serenely.

"What have you done with your Master of the Revels,

dear?" asked Clara Mayne of the pale yet radiant Magdalen, who had suddenly reappeared in the ball-room, none knew quite when or how.

Miss Tempest was now doing the honours of hostess very prettily to two or three of her chief guests. She turned to the speaker with a smile so ingenuously sweet that only Mrs. Mayne herself perceived the delicate impertinence behind it:

"What were you saying, dear?"

"I was only asking what you had done with Mr. Derehall.—You and he must have been caught in the storm, and I have been in such a fright about you."

"How kind you always are!" said Miss Tempest.

"Really too kind, Clara!"

"But where is Martin Derehall?" insisted her friend.

"I haven't the vewy least idea," said Magdalen with charming languor, and turned back to her dowager.

CHAPTER XII

AN APPOINTMENT ON BUSINESS

"**I** AM driving Mr. Derehall to the station," wrote Magdalen in a little note that was brought to Magdalen with her morning cup of tea. "I shall be back at eleven. But rest as long as you can."

The girl drew a breath of relief as she read the lines. She had no wish whatsoever to meet "her Painter" again. The man had frightened her, had insulted her, had treated her as no one had ever dared treat her before. In that gondola she had been to him, not princess and sovereign lady, but something subject to himself, to be bent to his will! Vaguely she felt he had looked at her, spoken to her, as he might have looked at and spoken to one of his models! True that, except for his insolence in refusing to return to the shore, she could recall no exact word, certainly no deed, that warranted the extremity of her terror. It was the gaze of his bold relentless eyes, the tone of his voice—and, above all, that sudden movement of his arm, as she had crouched away from him, that had filled her with unnamed, unknown apprehension. Magdalen had loved to play with fire, so long as the flame only illumined her own beauty, careless of what havoc it brought upon others. But, that the scorch of it should have touched her—that was horrible.

Truly had her Harry warned her, that evening in his

garden! "Some day," he had said, "there will be an ugly smoke about you." Well, now, thank Heaven, because of him, she need not fear that smoke! The strength that had snatched her from danger last night, was her protection even this morning. . . . And for life!

She need not meet Derehall; need not have the tiresome alternative either of speaking to the man as if nothing had happened, or of haughtily dismissing him from the house. She need not even apprehend idle gossip or ill-natured talk, or any pursuance of his odious pretensions. Harry would see to everything. She lay back and closed her eyes; felt utterly content. Had Harry Denvers been the greatest match in England, she could not have felt prouder of her conquest. . . .

Spoilt, Magdalen certainly was. Well might she have become self-centred and light-minded in such an existence as that of the last months; but her fundamental disinterestedness and generosity of nature were as yet untouched. She gave not one thought to her own riches and his poverty; there was not in her the faintest shadow of regret for the many more brilliant possibilities she was putting on one side. She knew herself safe. . . . And she knew herself beloved. Her horizon was filled with images and memories of him; kind, handsome, capable, strong . . . proud, and at last conquered! That was the sweetest of all the sweetness. She dreamed open-eyed upon his kiss; upon the completeness of his surrender. Pictures of him chased each other in her mind. . . . Harry leaping into her boat from out of the darkness; his masterful face seen in the lightning flash; and—wandering back to older memories—the look of flame cast upon her, that day in the library, the stern fold of his lips when he had put her from him in the garden. . . .

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It was a dejected party that met at Miss Tempest's belated breakfast-table, the morning after the Venetian fête. The only exception to the general state of gloom was the hostess. She glided into the room in a kind of beatific dream, in which she remained for the most part oblivious of her surroundings.

Mr. Dillwyn had a cold in his head. With husky voice he congratulated Magdalen on her wonderful party.

"I declare, you know—brilliant, what?"

"Ripping!" asserted Mr. Spofforth in sepulchral tones.

Their good-natured effort, so obviously and painfully an effort, fell flat after the manner of all such attempts. Magdalen smiled vaguely in their direction. But she was observed to continue smiling, while Lady Adelaide declared that the whole thing had been the ghastly failure it deserved to be; and that they were now the laughing-stock of the county; and Sir Simon had sciatica; that, well, she hoped his niece would look after him—for when Simon and sciatica were conjoined in one person. . . . Here the irate lady broke off; for Magdalen had said, and quite unmistakably with the intention of joining pleasantly in the conversation, that she was "so glad!"

It may be surmised that she meant to answer Dillwyn's remark, just filtering through her contented reverie.

"Sir Simon would wear tights," this latter gentleman was saying, always ready to be sympathetic.

"Mad!—mad!" said Lady Adelaide. "The whole thing—insane, idiotic——!"

The poet sat, with his rough head on his hand; a bunch of dyspeptic sulks. He had a sick headache; and Magdalen had flouted him on the previous night;

and the world was drab. The sensible Diana was having her breakfast in bed ; so there was no one at hand to goad him to speech.

"Oh, come, come, dear friend," said Mr. Blaise, helping himself to marmalade and fixing his large gaze upon Lady Adelaide. "Let us not deny the brief joys of the night because we are awakened to the long sorrows of the day ! I always think such is the very tragedy of joy : we shake the fool's bells, ring out the merry tune ; we dance, we forget ! But it is only for an hour. Life's responsibilities press but the heavier on our shoulders. The taste of the wine is bitter on the lips——"

He looked unwontedly flaccid and unwholesome this morning, under his olive. He could not find it in his intelligence to be jealous of such an one as Derehall : Magdalen had been (as he phrased it) naughty, oh naughty ! How fondly could he not have reproached her, have made her see that she had been unwise, that she had acted unworthily ! But, on the other hand, he could not deny to his intelligence the fact that he, Blaise, in spite of the wonderful white-and-silver costume (hired at such expense and difficulty from Nathan's), had been but a negligible quantity in the heiress's eyes last night. He had felt himself to be at the height of his undeniable good looks, and inspired to an eloquence and persuasiveness that could not have failed to make an impression, had he but been given a chance. He was very sad. Never had *Weltschmerz* weighed more heavily upon him, as he spread the bitter marmalade upon a piece of unduly blackened toast. His glance wandered desperately out upon the lawn, where sodden rose-wreathed posts, gibbeting the wire and pulp of quondam Chinese lanterns, had not yet been removed from the scene of last night's downpour.

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"If it had not been for the storm—so unfortunate!" murmured Mrs. Mayne, his neighbour, following the direction of his eyes. "Oh, it was a pity!—And I was so anxious about Magdalen, left on the lake with Mr. Derehall!"

"By the way," interrupted Blaise, with sudden malevolent interest, "where is Martin? What became of him last night?"

"Drowned perhaps—what?" cried Dillwyn, with alacrity.

"I believe he's gone," said Magdalen dreamily.

"Gone!" The word was echoed in different tones of amazement, from different corners of the table.

"Left your picture—left your portrait?" exclaimed Lady Adelaide ill-naturedly.

"Gone, my dear?" said Mrs. Mayne, her glance searching. "Will he not be coming back?"

"Nothing's been arranged about that," said Miss Tempest, with her airy smile. A rolling of wheels here caught her ear. The colour rushed into her face. She glanced at the watch on her wrist.

"It is five minutes to eleven!" she exclaimed. "Please excuse me, all of you, I must leave you, I've got an appointment."

"An appointment?" repeated her aunt, in a loud voice of astonishment.

Her tone expressed the sentiments of all. Everyone scented mystery about Miss Tempest, this morning; and the conviction was growing that the clearing of the mystery might not prove pleasant news. There was anxiety and eagerness in the looks that followed her to the door which Dillwyn and Spofforth simultaneously rushed to open.

"Yes, Aunt Adelaide," said Magdalen, turning on

the threshold, "an appointment, on business, with Captain Denvers."

There was a moment's dead silence after the door had closed upon her mischievous smile.

The house-party dispersed, glad to escape from the atmosphere of storm diffused by Lady Adelaide. In a little while, by twos and threes, they crystallized on the terrace; the men, with cigarettes, ultimately to gather round Diana, who appeared bright from her long rest, her nut-brown curls crisp, as fresh as a daisy, in her green-and-white striped cotton frock and with the inevitable Chin-chin under her arm. Clara Mayne sat pensively apart, very pale, yet handsomer than usual; hers was the type of beauty which seems to need a touch of tragedy for its emphasis. Mrs. Spofforth, basking in the sun like a sleek white cat, after her ample breakfast, was the only placid member of the group besides her irrepressible daughter.

It was a lovely morning after the storm, with a translucency and softness of sunny air in which every tint and every fragrance seemed at once deeper and more tender.

Lady Adelaide was the last to join the loungers—although the idea of lounging was incompatible with anyone so corseted, so elaborately clothed and coifed; with so living a struggle, in short, between art and nature. She found a smile for Mr. Blaise, although her eyes were angry; turned the Poet out of his chair with a "Would you mind——?" that was the acme of fine-lady insolence. She informed Mrs. Mayne she was looking too ill for words, and that she ought not to have got up. She hoped—with a collective glance at the two other young men—

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that Magdalen would see that they did not miss the one good train, the poor child was so hopelessly careless. Having thus made herself agreeable all round, she put up her eyeglass to watch the open French window of the library—that room in which Magdalen had an appointment on "business" with Captain Denvers.

"Ah," she exclaimed presently, ruthlessly interrupting the forced conversation about her. "Here she is!" Then, in quite another tone, she cried: "What is the meaning of this?" and rose from her seat.

Magdalen was approaching. Beside her was Harry Denvers. The girl had clasped her hands round his arm and was almost leaning against him as she came, laughing happily and looking up into his face.

Lady Adelaide walked fiercely forward to meet them. A wave of discomfiture visibly passed over the others, who, with the exception of the purring Mrs. Spofforth, rose as with one movement and remained fixed on the spot, staring.

Blaise had flushed darkly. Clara Mayne, white as death, clutched the back of her chair. Dillwyn, after a moment, turned away and leaned both elbows on the terrace balustrade, to gaze discreetly out across the fields.

"What is the meaning of this?" repeated Lady Adelaide, in a voice now low and fierce, as she halted in front of the approaching couple.

"Tell her, Harry," said Miss Tempest.

Lady Adelaide recoiled as if she had been struck.

"Harry!" she repeated, under her breath.

The girl broke into laughter, her eyes on her lover's face.

But if her niece's attitude displeased Lady Adelaide because of its triumphant joy, Captain Denvers' quiet everyday aspect still more incensed the outraged lady.

Magdalen was "brazen"—but the agent was "shameless!"

"He dared to meet my gaze," she said, when subsequently talking the matter over with Blaise, "positively as if nothing had happened!—As if he had not been guilty of the basest breach of trust, of the most atrocious presumption! . . . Oh, a dangerous man! And as for what he said, I cannot bring myself to repeat his insolence, my dear friend, I cannot indeed."

What the dangerous man had said was this:

"Some time ago, Lady Adelaide, you remarked that I was not looking after Miss Tempest's interests for love. Well, in the future, I intend to."

"Yes, aunt," said Magdalen gaily, "Harry and I are engaged."

"Wretched child!" exclaimed Lady Adelaide; then she flung a glance of rage at Denvers, and said in biting tones: "For love!—You've played your game very well, sir."

At this the heiress flamed into one of her easy passions.

"Be careful what you say, Aunt Adelaide!" she cried in high excited tones. Then dropping her voice, she added meaningly: "Do not judge everyone by yourself——"

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before her generosity regretted them. The shot had told; Lady Adelaide winced. Clara intervened at this awkward moment. The situation had been patent to the watching group at the end of the terrace; and she felt that her only chance of bearing the blow with dignity lay in facing it at once. If she gave herself time for thought the intolerable anguish waiting for her must overcome her strength.

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"Am I indiscreet?" she said, and she could still smile. "I don't think so, you are not making much of a secret, are you, you two? Oh, I wish you joy, I wish you joy . . . Harry!" She hesitated, and then on a sudden movement, leant forward and kissed Magdalen. Her lips were cold on the girl's flushed cheek. "I foresaw this," she went on, extending a hand to her cousin, her dark eyes, haunted with misery, still fixed on Magdalen.

"Did you?" cried the heiress, pleased. "Did you know he was in love with me?"

"I knew he was trying not to be," said Clara playfully, "but the citadel has surrendered!"

Denvers took the hidden sting without resentment. He knew that his cousin was suffering, and that she was making a brave struggle not to show it. This made him sorry, and circumstances being what they were between them, a little ashamed—after the way of chivalrous manhood.

Lady Adelaide, her world tumbling about her, had returned to the others, who now stared inquiringly at her stricken countenance.

"My dear Adelaide," began Mrs. Spofforth, half hoisting herself out of her chair, "you are looking quite faint!"

She was about to add that she had noticed that kidneys for breakfast, delicious as they were, were sometimes apt to disagree, when Diana intervened. Stretching out her lusty hand to assist her mother, she called out at the top of her lusty voice:

"Why, mamma, don't you see what's happened? Magdalen's engaged to Captain Denver! Come, let's go and congratulate them!—Poor Teddy! It's an awful blow, ain't it? Poor Teddy! But . . . she couldn't

marry everybody, and there's no use being bow-wows in the manger—is there, my Chin-chin ? ”

“ My dear ! ” protested Mrs. Spofforth, flurried. “ My dear Diana, what are you saying ? ”

“ I'm saying that he's a good fellow,” pronounced Miss Spofforth in her clarion tone. “ Mag ”—she was dragging her reluctant mother after her as she spoke—“ Mag, I wish you joy ! Dear old Mag, with all my heart ! Though I can't help wishing it had been Teddy—can I, Captain Denver ? But I'm not saying that I don't think Mag-dalèn a very lucky girl. I do, my dear. And so does Chin-chin.” She squeezed the little ball of fluff under her arm, eliciting a diminutive growl. “ Never mind him, he doesn't mean it ! ” proceeded the girl cheerily. “ He was quite the first of us all to appreciate Captain Denver. He told me from the beginning ”— here she turned upon Harry the engaging frankness of her bright face—“ he told me what a welly nicee kindee man you were.”

“ Did he ? ” said Denver, and put out a hand to caress the head of the little dog—who instantly protruded an inch of roseleaf tongue and wagged his squirrel tail.

Lady Adelaide drew Mr. Blaise apart and the two disappeared together down the steps of the rose garden, the Philanthropist cursing audibly as he went.

As they passed him, Dillwyn caught sight of their unhappy and angry faces and felt ashamed of his own kindred emotions. He pulled himself together and caught Spofforth by the arm and propelling him forward :

“ Buck up, man,” he whispered. “ Don't let us play the sentimental ass, for heaven's sake ! ”

Thus stimulated, Teddy, with crimson countenance,

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blurted out what he intended for congratulations: "Oh, I say, you don't mean—— So that was your important business this morning! What a plant, Magdalen——"

He halted clumsily at the sound of his own words. Dillwyn came to the rescue with airy grace:

"Plant? Of course. Isn't that what Johnnies like him have to do? Plant—when they're not cutting out, all over the place? Lord, I wish I'd gone in for the agency business!" He fixed his blue eyes on Denvers: they were steel-cold, in spite of the friendliness of his tone. "I call it an unfair advantage," he went on, "to pretend to talk about farms and mortgages; and all the time the only lease in question is one that little Johnny draws up for people, Cupid—what?"

"It's a lease for life, anyhow," said Miss Tempest.

"My dear——" said Mrs. Spofforth, who had at last collected her scattered wits. She took Magdalen by both hands, the real good nature of her disposition struggling to the surface. "My dear, I hardly know what to say. I'm sure I trust you'll be very happy! Captain Denvers, you are a very lucky young man! I hope you'll deserve your happiness!"

The poet, with tightly folded arms, detached himself from the balustrade, and now, in his turn, stalked forward.

"Oh, my poet——" cried Magdalen, addressing him with the cruelty and selfishness which youth and beauty yet managed to render sweet, "Oh, my poet, come and wish me joy! You will have to find glowing verses for me to-day as never before!"

The poor little man flung a look of agony from his radiant lady's smile to the hated rival's compassionate face. He would have given worlds to be able to curse like the Reformer, to repudiate like Lady Adelaide, to banter

airily like Mr. Dillwyn. But it was in vain he struggled to speak ; his lips trembled, a sob broke in his throat. He turned and fled into the house.

Denvers felt a shadow stealing over the joy that all the difficulties of the situation had, up to this moment, not availed to cloud. And, as he glanced at his beloved's fair countenance, there to find no faintest trace of ruth or compassion, the shadow grew a little darker.

Shortly after this eventful hour, Isidore Blaise and Clara Mayne met unexpectedly in a secluded walk. Mr. Blaise had succeeded in shaking off the company of Lady Adelaide. Fate had stricken him with almost as severe a blow as he could endure. Now, as he paced up and down between the yew hedges, disappointed love and ambition raging within him, he was striving for self-control ; seeking for a moment of sufficient calmness to think, to discover what possible advantage to himself, however small, he might yet draw from the situation.

Clara, at sight of the massive figure advancing upon her, hastily wiped her eyes and stuffed her handkerchief under her belt. Then she opened her parasol and trusted to the semi-gloom and Blaise's evident preoccupation to save her from undue observation. But, as they met, the sight of his countenance startled her into an exclamation :

" How pale you look—are you ill ? "

He paid no heed to her words.

" You, Mrs. Mayne ? " he cried, laughing excitedly. " What, have you left the happy couple already ? It was a splendid scene, wasn't it ? Fit for the stage ! Sound the joy bells ! God bless the noble pair !—She thinks the world well lost for love. . . . And he, generous, dis-

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interested fellow, he would love her just as well had she never a farthing in the world!"

He broke off and reeled theatrically against the century-old yew wall that hemmed them in. She remained awhile gazing at him in silence, then laid her hand upon his arm. But he shook off her touch.

"For the matter of that, you look pale too," he snarled.

"What's wrong with you?"

She started and retreated. And, as she did so, the handkerchief fell from her waistband. He stooped to pick it up, and laughed uncontrollably again:

"Wet—wet through! So touched, eh?"

"Mr. Blaise—you are really not well! Had we not better go back to the house?"

"No, no, I tell you, I'm all right."

He made a fierce reach for his vanished self-control; and, after a pause, resumed, with such unmistakable anguish in his dense black eyes that Clara Mayne almost felt that her own sorrow here had met its match.

"And you," he said, "you with woman's eyes, reading in my very soul all the while! . . . Can a man deceive a woman if she does not love him? It's love that's blind.—Cant, but true!" Then the dithyrambic mood that had become a second nature returned. "I wonder," he cried, giving back the handkerchief with one hand, and dashing the other across his brow, "which is wrung from a bitterer anguish, your tears, Clara Mayne, or this—this sweat?" A passion of injury gathered within him, as the drama of his own words and actions struck him afresh: "You saw her, all these months, in Town and here, did you not? You saw her sweet looks, saw how she sought me out, hung on my words, read every line I wrote, moulded her very thought on mine! Good God, Clara Mayne, she ran me down, I tell you! She span a

web round me with her gold, and her kindness, her cursed sympathy—her altruism, her philanthropy and all the rest of it. And when I thought I had but to put out my hand—it's the ex-cavalry fool, the handsome ass, the bailiff . . . the servant ! ”

The colour rushed to the woman's cheek.

“ It's the man ! ” she said in a harsh whisper.

Oh, she could well have matched this rant with diatribes of her own ! Harry, who had once loved her, might have had in her such a helpmate, such a comrade, such a brain and such a heart to help him through life.—And it was the mere pretty face that had snared him, the frivolous coquette, the wilful child—aye—the heiress !

“ What did you say ? ” Blaise was asking her.

“ Nothing,” she answered him quickly. “ Nothing ! ” Then more gently : “ I am sorry, Isidore, believe me.”

“ Oh yes, I believe you.” The man laughed again. “ Have I not just held in my hand ten square inches impregnated with sorrow ? ” He paused. “ You and he were boy and girl lovers, were you not ? ” he asked in his cadenced voice.

Clara found an odd pleasure in this painful discussion, which brought—perhaps for the last time—her name and Harry's together with the hyphen of love.

“ Yes,” she said, with a faint smile.

“ And then you broke your youthful vows, dazzled by something more brilliant, more plausible. And you paid for it, didn't you ? ”

“ Yes,” she said again, and the smile faded from her face.

“ And when you were free again, you patched your broken heart together, and lived in the hopes of the old young-time coming back again, didn't you ? You built a—a cottage in the air . . . or an ancient manor-house,

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let us say, with roses and peace and love and rest. Rest, poor overworked woman! And you found, after all, that what is your tenderest memory was as much lost to him as the first dream of the tired man's sleep?"

The musical voice and its deepening accents brought the truth hidden behind the flowery words so cruelly home to the listener, that, heaving a deep sigh, she for the third time cried out: "Yes!" Then starting as if from a hypnotic spell, anger rushed upon her: "How do you know?" she exclaimed; and still more sharply: "How do you dare?"

"Dare?—Know?" Blaise laughed. She wished he would not laugh like that, it was odious! "Why, my dear girl," he went on, "it is so hackneyed! And you have, you won't mind my saying so, so completely given yourself away!"

Stung by the offensive familiarity, she would have left him. But his voice, raised once more, and in more sincere tones, arrested her.

"With me—with me," he was saying, "ah, there is a vast difference! Here there is at stake more than mere sentiment!" He struck his chest, then his forehead. "A man such as I am is not meant to be thrust on one side. You're a clever woman, Clara, you do feel, you do understand, do you not, all that such a—yes, I will say the word, for it is true—such a genius as mine could have reached with her help? I wanted it all, I wanted this wealth, this position, I wanted a woman like her to bring me to my highest possibilities. This is not a question of a broken flower, of a wounded dove, of a crushed heart: it is the death of a career, the death of a great promise, the fall of a planet! Mark my words, Clara Mayne, such catastrophes do not occur with impunity. Such

wanton disasters bring chaos in their train—chaos, retribution ! ”

“ Hush ! ” cried the woman. Her ear had caught a laugh, behind the bend of the yew-hedged path. The happiness of the sound stabbed her. She had recognized the silver of the note : Magdalen and her lover were coming towards them. In another moment they must meet.

At first sight of the two tall comely figures, Blaise clenched his hand. But, recovering himself, with a toss of the head and a proud carriage he went to meet the pair. He bowed low and ironically :

“ Miss Tempest—Captain Denver—I congratulate you ! ”

“ Thanks,” said Magdalen, with her sweet tilting smile.

“ Yet another one to whom I am bringing trouble,” thought Denver, as they passed on. And though, had it not been for such creatures as Blaise about her, he never would have known her danger, nor the rapture of saving her from it, it irked him to feel that there was not one of all her circle who could wish them joy with sincere heart.

Yet, there was one ! A little later in the day, when Smallwood heard the news, he forthwith, with the privilege of his long and faithful service, sought the pair in the library : and there was no mistaking the honesty of his rejoicing.

“ May I be allowed, Miss Magdalen,” he began, “ as one who had your father on my knee, and carried you about in these arms, miss, many a time, to offer you and Captain Denver—your good choice, Miss Magdalen—my humble good wishes ? ”

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He blinked, his face worked ; then a tear ran down into the wrinkles of his wide smile.

" Ah, it's the Squire would have been pleased ! " he went on. " It's my old master that would have been pleased ! He thought the world of the Captain here, he did that, Miss Magdalen. Yes, sir, he said to me the very night he died : ' It's my comfort to think the Captain will look after her. ' Captain Denver, sir, if I may make so bold, I wish you joy—Miss Magdalen, I approve ! "

" Oh, do you, Smallwood ? " cried Magdalen, with that grave innocence of accent which was not without its undercurrent of humour. " I'm so glad. "

" So am I, " said Denver, with perfect sincerity.

Both extended a hand to the old servant, whose face worked again as he shook them in silence. He turned hurriedly to the door, and was about to bolt into the hall, when, upon a new thought, he wheeled round :

" With your permission, Miss Magdalen, I'll bring up a couple of bottles of the '67 for this evening. The hoccasion"—Smallwood spoke with emphasis—" the hoccasion being what it is I think the Squire would have liked the Captain to drink the '67. "

" A couple of bottles ! " laughed Denver. " Good for our grandfathers, Smallwood. Nowadays—there are only two-glass men, I'm afraid. "

" Oh, " retorted the butler in scornful tones, " they'll all expect to be drinking of it too, no doubt—as many of them as are left. It's the two nicest of the young gentlemen that are going after lunch, I'm told—Mr. Blaise and Mr. Marvell they're hanging on, however hurt in their feelings. . . . "

" Smallwood—that will do, " said Magdalen. Though her words were rebuking, her tone was serene. Small-

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wood's sallies were upsetting to everyone except his mistress.

"Oh, never fear, Miss Magdalen," said the irrepressible old man, "they'll never quarrel with you for long—especially not her ladyship."

Upon this pronouncement, delivered with much regret, he closed the door.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN NIECE

IT was springtime, some eight months after Magdalen's marriage to Harry Denvers; and the young couple had just arrived in London, after the prolonged honeymoon *tête-à-tête* in the country that had succeeded the trip abroad. The bright May morning was full of summer promise. There were baskets of early lilac and starry narcissus at street corners; ladders of tender irises jostling frail roses from the South.

Lady Adelaide, who had walked across the Park from Knightsbridge, paused at Stanhope Gate to spend a shilling on a bunch of jonquils as an offering to her niece. She was stepping briskly, a smile on her lips, when, at sight of the familiar house with its fine grey stone front, her face clouded. Scarcely a year ago she used to pass the threshold of that door as its quasi-mistress. How smoothly existence had run then, how luxuriously! What delightful hospitality she had, vicariously, extended within those walls! What an important person Lady Adelaide Bruce-Walsingham had been, as chaperon, guardian, and adviser of Miss Tempest of Teyne!

And now, how horrible was the difference! Her heart swelled with a sense of injury. With the few hundreds

a year—which was all that Magdalen thought fit to allow her—she and Sir Simon could not afford other quarters than that "tiny, tiny flat" to which she almost hesitated to invite her friends. The ex-minister's pension was a very paltry affair, in the eyes of one of such large ideas as herself: and moreover, of that he kept a tight hold. She was essentially an extravagant woman; many debts still hung round her neck, which she had fondly dreamed it would be the chivalrous Isidore Blaise's joy—once master of Magdalen's revenue—to settle for his benefactress. She could not conceive it to be within human power to avoid fresh liabilities on the "pittance" to which she was reduced. And the cause of all this distress of mind, present penury and future trouble, was—Denvers!—Denvers, the agent, whom she had patronized, slighted, steadily regarded as an inferior, if not actually as a menial.

Her lips were pressed very tightly together as she stood upon the stone steps and pushed the electric bell. She had a resentful temper, but it must be kept under control: it would be the veriest folly not to remain on good terms with her golden niece.

As she stood waiting, it was an extra pang to her to note the wealth of flowers which filled the dining-room boxes. "A pretty penny those must have cost!" she said to herself sourly, and felt as if she had been cruelly mulcted of the amount.

The footman who opened the door—a lad from Teyne Court—gave her a welcoming smile: his face fell promptly under her haughty stare. She was in the mood to think even this ingenuous show of friendliness a deliberate impertinence. Many a time she had rated this same William for clumsiness or inattention, or even for the mere pleasure of rating. "Now that I am down, he thinks he can grin at me!" she thought.

"Your mistress expects me," she said. Flinging her parasol on the marble table, she would have passed him to go upstairs, just in the old way, had she not been intercepted by Smallwood. And, inconsistently, the old servant's unwonted ceremoniousness offended her even more deeply than his underling's cheeriness.

"This way, my lady," he said. "You will please to step this way.—I will see if Mrs. Denvers is at home."

Lady Adelaide was about to retort coldly that she would see for herself; but before Smallwood's inconceivable correctness and the respectful fixity of his gaze, she suddenly quailed and allowed herself to be conducted into the room which in the old days had been considered her own. She sank into a chair, threw one comprehensive glance about her; and, unable to contain her feelings overcharged by a fresh sense of injury, called back the butler, as he was about to close the door:

"Smallwood—Smallwood!"

"Did you speak, my lady?"

"Yes. Wait a minute, I should like to hear how Miss Magdalen is."

The old name slipped out quite unawares; the rebuke was prompt:

"Mrs. Denvers is in the enjoyment of excellent health.—Thank you, my lady."

She might have been warned; but she was irritably curious to find out all she could, and the plaint could not be checked:

"Ah, Smallwood—here are great changes."

"Yes, my lady. Great changes, for the better."

"I see she's turned my poor little room topsy-turvy. I thought," said Lady Adelaide chokingly, "I thought that girl had more heart."

Once again she gazed around. It was changed indeed from when she had reigned supreme in it. Gone were the *pomponnés* arm-chairs, so luxuriously padded, the pink frilly silk cushions, the myriad small tables, the doubtful Dresden; gone all the hundred showy trifles with which she had liked to surround herself. Lady Adelaide had what she was pleased to call French taste, and had made Magdalen pay for its gratification. The room looked now almost empty, she thought, not to say austere. The walls of pearl-white bore only a couple of misty Corots. There was but a single Persian rug for all that space of parquet floor; the chimney-piece she had crowded with "dear little Dresden figures," bore now a solitary bronze statue, delicately dark against a Venetian mirror; a long Venetian goblet held three mauve irises upon the old Italian table of golden lemon-wood: there were no other flowers to be seen.

Smallwood followed her glance complacently.

"Yes, my lady," he said, a twinkle of malice behind his imperturbable London manner, "the style of the room, as your ladyship had it, didn't 'armonize, Captain Denver thought. So he had it refurnished."

"Captain Denver had it refurnished!" cried she, temper flashing. The thought that had assailed her on the doorstep jumped into words: "It must have cost a mint of money. I suppose he manages everything."

"Everything," returned Smallwood, with dignity. Then, knowing by instinct how he could best annoy, he added: "Captain Denver is quite the master, my lady. Which is Mrs. Denver's wish."

He turned to go, but once again was recalled.

"One moment, Smallwood. I can't help feeling very anxious. She hardly writes to me, never tells me anything. Is she—is she happy?"

"As the day is long, my lady."

"Oh, what a relief to hear you say so!" cried the lady, with an ever more lowering countenance. "Then they are getting on well together?"

"Oh, yes, my lady." The old retainer for the first time relaxed into a smile. "We've been getting on very nicely, very nicely indeed, thank you, since the bride and bridegroom came back from foreign parts. As for Teyne, it's like the old days again. We've got the good country stock once more about the house, instead of those writing chaps, and all the rest of them, sniffin' round my mistress's money. They'll be finding us out here, though, I'm afraid. But," he went on meaningly, "the master will know how to put order to that."

"That will do!" cried the listener, tapping her foot. "Will you have the kindness to inform Mrs. Denvers that I have been waiting some time?"

Her tormentor bowed grimly; but, as he opened the door, there was a light step without.

"Here she is," he exclaimed, his eyes brightening; and then stepping aside with his new flourish, announced ceremoniously:

"Lady Adelaide to see you, ma'am."

"Dear aunt, how good of you! You are our very first visitor. I am delighted to see you!"

Magdalen gave the rather rigid lady an unusually affectionate kiss; then, as the latter held her by both hands and looked up at her searchingly, she stood submitting to the scrutiny with an amused smile. There was no mistaking the radiance in her eyes. Lady Adelaide suddenly grew pink about the eyelids.

"My poor child," she cried in lamentable tones, "my poor, poor child, is it possible?—are you really happy?"

"Aunt Adelaide," answered the bride solemnly,

"I'm dreadfully happy! I don't know if it's possible to be so happy, but I really am. I was happy at Teyne, with Harry. And I am happy in London, with Harry. I'm going to buy a lot of new clothes, and see all my old friends."

She slipped into a chair as she spoke, and though her manner was confiding there was a spice of malice behind it. The elder lady glanced at her doubtfully. One never quite knew whether Magdalen's ingenuousness did not hide an impertinence.

"Ah, my dear," she said at last, "these are still early days! I hope you may be as happy at the end of the season as you are at the beginning."

There was a pause.

"Thank you, dear Aunt Adelaide," said Mrs. Denvers demurely.

"I see," said Lady Adelaide, as conversation threatened to languish almost from the start, "that you have done up my poor little room again. It's very artistic, I suppose, but it does not look like a boudoir, my dear."

"Yes. Isn't it artistic?" said Mrs. Denvers. "Harry chose it all. And it isn't a boudoir. He's furnished the dearest little boudoir upstairs, for me. I must show it you. It's all white from floor to ceiling; I had a fancy for that. Harry said we'd more bedrooms as it is than we could possibly use. And so we have, you know."

"And so you have," agreed Lady Adelaide, with a sudden alacrity. "And that reminds me, dear child, I wonder if you could take me in, next week, for a few days. Simon could go to his club.—I must let the flat for the season, if I am to get on at all." She sighed profoundly. "I should not know where to lay my head." Pathos brimmed in look and voice. "I should be as

little in your way as possible. I think you can trust me for that."

"Oh, of course—" said Magdalen slowly, "of course you must come."

Lady Adelaide knew very well when she made this frontal attack, that her niece was constitutionally incapable of resisting any direct appeal to her generosity. But even as she spoke the words of consent, the young wife hesitated: "Of course, we shall be delighted.—I'll ask Harry, as soon as he comes in."

"Certainly, reserve your decision—if it is now necessary for you to have permission before you invite anyone into your own house."

Magdalen flushed.

"There is no question of permission," she retorted with some sharpness. "Harry would never think of interfering.—But I should like to mention it to him."

Lady Adelaide noted, with satisfaction, the rising tone of annoyance. Here was a chord which gave back a promising sound. She would strike it again.

"Be frank, Magdalen," she said, "and own that you are rather afraid of making the suggestion. Oh, I quite saw from the first that Captain Denvers would try to separate you from your family and friends. I wouldn't for the world——"

The other interrupted, all aflame.

"It's most untrue! Why, we only came last night. We are not settled. I——" she broke off. "To-day's Tuesday. Will you come Saturday?—We can put up Uncle Simon too."

Lady Adelaide was all blandness.

"No—no—no, I couldn't think of being so indiscreet. Simon can go to his club. Well, if you're sure——" She rose, went over to the girl and kissed her. "It would be

a great joy—like the dear old days—to be with you again."

Magdalen presented her fresh cheek to her aunt's handsomely made-up face, but gave no other response. The elder lady surveyed her for a second doubtfully; and then, rebuttoning a perfectly buttoned glove, proceeded with Machiavellian subtlety:

"Nevertheless, my dear, if your husband should be—ah—not inclined to visitors—if you feel yourself not quite justified—— Matrimony, dear child, teaches us all to give up our wilful ways, now and again—only drop me a line. I shall quite understand, quite understand.—God forbid," said the manoeuvrer piously, "that I should come between husband and wife!"

Magdalen fixed her eyes upon her reproachfully.

"If I invite you," she said, with a dignity that was new to her, "it is sufficient for my husband—and for you."

Lady Adelaide drew a breath of relief in which her well-braced figure faintly creaked.

"Well, darling, that's settled then. But I must be going—I'm lunching with the Spofforths."

Then the sight of the jonquils reminded her that she had not yet made her propitiatory offering.

"I brought you these, dear. So sweet they are! Not that I can hope to bring you anything of any value. But flowers—just a little fragrant token." Her voice trembled over the pathos of her words.

"Thank you," said the heiress. Then she kissed the elderly lady, spontaneously, a kind of compassion stirring in her, and said prettily: "Flowers are the dearest possible gift."

So unexpectedly successful had been this first interview, and so unused was Lady Adelaide to such demonstrations of good will—for Magdalen, even when most generous, had

always been cold and elusive—that she hesitated whether she should pursue her advantage. She had received a courteous but pressing communication this morning from a great firm, giving her to understand that a cheque on account would alone arrest a course of action which they would deeply regret. Dared she ask Magdalen for that little cheque—a paltry eighty pounds, the amount of the first account rendered in April year? She had been a fool not to have settled it when the heiress's purse had still been so freely at her disposition. But those odious solicitors had been quite tiresome at the end of the season. And who could have foreseen that the lean years would come with such appalling suddenness? Dared she speak of her trouble now? Eighty pounds—a mere nothing. She would!

"By the way, my dear, just before I go——"

Magdalen knew well the peculiar tone which heralded a demand upon her purse, the uneasy smile, the fleeting glance. She drew back with an involuntary movement of annoyance, of which, with that unreasonable generosity of hers, she was the next moment ashamed.

"I wonder," the other was proceeding airily, "I wonder if you could lend me—oh! only a trifle, just a few pounds—till my Irish rents come in? Of course, I shall let you have the cheque immediately. That tiresome Nugent woman keeps bothering me. Of course, dear, I had to be decent for your wedding, and there were so many expenses about that time. And Simon would have a fit if he knew that I have already overdrawn at the bank——" The shifting glance now fixed itself in a desperate appeal, against which the richer woman was not proof.

"How much do you want?" she asked uncomfortably.

"Oh, my dear, I dare say I could do with—with a

hundred pounds. And what is that to you, Magdalen ? " Even as she spoke she saw consent and thought, " Why did I not ask for a hundred and fifty—two hundred ? "

She expected an instant cheque: to her surprise, Magdalen said:

" I will post it to you, to-night—Harry is out just now."

" Magdalen——! "

" What is it ? "

" Magdalen—you don't mean to say that Captain Denvers has got hold of your banking account ? "

The young wife wheeled round with a flaming face and stamped her foot.

" I think you're perfectly horrible ! " she cried, and her special elusiveness of r's seemed to give an extra emphasis to the word—" Howible ! " she repeated.

" I asked Harry to be good enough to take charge of everything for me.—I hate writing cheques. I always do it wrong, it seems, and people cheat me and rob me as they please."

Lady Adelaide winced. But though she knew she had ventured on dangerous ground, her own vindictive temper was roused too. Moreover, those who deal in malice are well aware of its power; she had stung Magdalen to the quick, and her sting had not been wasted.

" I quite understand, dear child. I quite understand, my poor darling. God knows I can appreciate your generous, trusting nature. Give me a kiss, dear. Poor child ! Hush, not a word more : I must go ! "

And she went, indeed with a celerity quite unlike her usual stately self-conscious habit.

Magdalen sat down, her hands hanging by her side, thinking. The flush slowly faded from her face, but the

cloud remained. How odious Aunt Adelaide was! Odious!—sponging and insulting in the same breath! "Why do I mind?" she asked herself. "How can anything she says affect me? My own Harry!"

Then her thought wandered. She wished she had not allowed that invitation to be extracted from her. And she began to realize that she had been goaded to do so because of the pricking truth of her aunt's words: that Harry would expect to be consulted, and that it was very doubtful, if consulted, whether he would consent. And now she would have to tell him about the cheque, too! And she was amazed at herself to discover a shrinking, a discomfort, almost a little fear at the thought of doing so. "How ridiculous!" She scolded herself. Yet at the back of her mind, unacknowledged, a voice whispered small and subtle: "Is not all the money yours? Is not the house yours? Is not all yours? What right could he possibly have to object?"

The sound of a taxi stopping at the door, of Harry's voice in the hall, of Harry's step on the stair—these were enough to dispel the cloud. She sprang to her feet and ran to the door, calling. He came into the room, strong, serene, wholesome; came with such a steady light of happiness in his clear eyes; such fondness and pride as he looked at her, that the sunshine of joy blazed upon her once again.

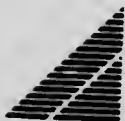
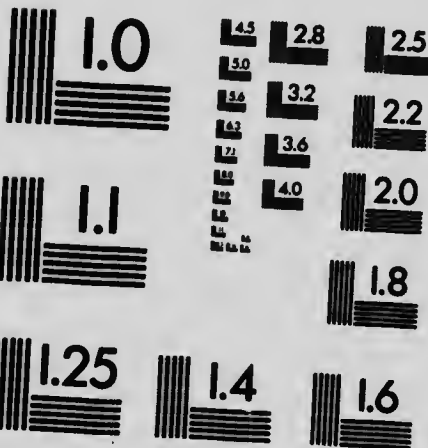
"Oh, Harry!" she cried. "I have missed you so horribly!" What a caress was now in that lisping intonation. "I've wanted you dreadfully!"

He laughed, the tender laugh of the utterly contented man; kissed her between the eyes, where he loved to kiss her for the look of innocence that dwelt on her sweet forehead. She leaned her head against his shoulder. "How ridiculous to mind telling him!" she thought



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again. And, just because she did mind—inexplicably—she defied her discomfort and began :

"Aunt Adelaide has been here this morning." His arm tightened about her. "She didn't wait to see you, I don't know why," the young wife proceeded, fingering the lapel of his coat.

"I didn't think she had so much sense."

Her heart echoed to the light scorn in his voice ; and yet his tone started a faint defiance in hers.

"She was very—very uncomfortable," she admitted. "I suppose she can't help it. Poor Aunt Adelaide ! Do you know, you ought to be sorry for her, Harry, our marriage has made such a difference." She raised her eyes, with her most childishly ingenuous expression. "I—I asked her to come here."

He drew back, loosening his clasp of her.

"What?—to stay?" There was dismay in the exclamation.

"Yes, to stay.—It's not my fault," cried Magdalen irritably. "She asked herself."

"Is that a reason?" His tone was dry. Resenting it, she was silent. Then he went on resignedly : "And for how long?"

"She only asked herself for a few days," Magdalen replied with some humour yet also with some displeasure. "I did not specify."

"My darling child——" he was smiling ruefully now—"that means . . ."

She sat down again in the great Italian chair and nodded wearily :

"Oh, the whole season, I dare say."

She spoke as if the matter were one of perfect indifference. He shot a keen look at her, walked to the window and looked out ; in a second or two he came back.

"Do you . . . do you want to have her for the whole season?" He asked the question in his usual indulgent voice, and lifted a stray tendril of hair from her forehead as he spoke. She moved, scarce perceptibly, from his touch.

"I don't want her for the season. I don't want her at all! I could not help it."

"Well, that's all I wanted to know. Then there's a very simple remedy. Drop her a line and tell her we shall be very glad to see her, for two or three days—that's what she suggested herself, isn't it?—say Thursday to Monday. I won't have you victimized."

"I think I'd rather not do that," said Magdalen slowly.

"A week—a fortnight then. Put a limit, for God's sake! You see there are two of us, now. Put it all on me, I don't mind. Anyhow, I think I ought to have a voice in the matter."

Magdalen shivered slightly. She was almost frightened at the sharpness of the anger that seized her. Instinctively she cast down her eyes. "It shall be as you wish," she said very low. "I shall write at once." She got up from her seat: "And by the way," she added in an uninflected voice, "I want a cheque for a hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds?—For yourself?"

"I want it," repeated she. "Can you let me have it now?"

"Well—it depends." An intangible hardness had come into his manner.

"Is it not enough that I want it?" Her lips trembled. He came close to her and took both her hands; she let them lie in his inertly.

"Tell me that you want it for yourself—for any whim, any nonsense of your own, and I'll write you out a dozen cheques. Ah, no, my dear love, you cannot tell me it is

for yourself, and I will not see your generosity abused now as shamelessly as in the old days. You shall give where it is right ; you shall give where it is only for the mere pleasure of giving—but it shall not be wrung from you merely because you have already given so much that it has become a mere matter of habit to expect you to go on giving."

The warmth and strength of his clasp, the tender inflection in his accents reserved for her only, the justice of his words, drove the senseless rebellion from her. She leaned her head against his shoulder, in the place where it felt so safe to rest. She felt his lips upon her hair, then he said, with a short laugh :

"So, Aunt Adelaide wants a hundred pounds."

She could not help laughing too, though she could more easily have wept.

"Only as a loan, Harry. Only as a loan.—And I promised."

"Promised—that settles it, of course. I'll write the cheque at once. But listen, darling, let this be the last . . . in that quarter.—Only a loan !" The hardness came back to his tone. "To ask for a loan is a delicate way of saving oneself the unpleasantness of begging . . . and the irksomeness of gratitude. Tell your aunt you make her a present of the money, and of all the other sums she already owes you—the other loans, Magdalen. Give her to understand that this is final. My dear, you are already making her a very generous allowance, and before you are in Town a day, she comes to you for house-room and cheques !"

Magdalen kept silence, her head still on her husband's shoulder. She seemed to be deeply reflecting.

"Would you prefer me to write for you," he asked, after a pause, "or to see her and make her understand ?—

My darling, what is it ? " He lifted her face and saw tears brimming under the downcast lids. " Magdalen, my heart ! "—He kissed the quivering eyelids, and then her lips. " Do you know that this is the first time you have cried since our marriage ? "

Her remnant of ill-humour, the sense of vague ill-usage, the lingering resentment against his control, fled from her. It was true ! Was she going to let Aunt Adelaide, whom she had disliked and with reason mistrusted, make mischief between her and her husband ? She gave him back his kiss with the spontaneity he adored in her.

" I'll write, I'll write ! " she exclaimed gaily, blinking, to dry her long lashes. " I'll send the cheque and fix the date of the visit, and be awfully innocent and kind. And she'll understand quite well. I can, you know, be awfully innocent, when I like."

He knew she could. Her character, with its seeming transparency, had odd depths and shallows which now and again perplexed him. It was the freakishness of young things, he told himself, of fawns and kittens, scared at the shadow, or rather playing at being scared : playing at the emotions of life with their own unexplored sensations. It was all part of youth itself, part of its appeal, its fascination and its mystery. He had never felt so full of protecting love towards her, as after this their first approach to a quarrel.

CHAPTER II

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

MAGDALEN wrote the "innocent" letter, in which Lady Adelaide's visit was limited from the Thursday of her arrival to that Saturday week, until which her niece "hoped so much she might be able to stay." That was certainly clear enough; even the lady's astute mind was unable to find any loophole, any excuse for interpreting the invitation as extending over the season. "Magdalen would never have thought of such churlishness," she said to herself angrily. "It's that beggar on horseback!"

The sentence which concerned the cheque annoyed her still more, since there, too, she found unmistakable finality. "I think you just wanted a hundred pounds," wrote Magdalen. "Here it is. Don't bother about it any more. I should hate you to. I hate money transactions myself, and am awfully glad that Harry's promised to look after everything, and that nobody need ever come to me about anything any more."

Lady Adelaide's breast heaved. Tears of fury sprang to her eyes. Could she have afforded it, how dearly she would have liked to tear up the cheque drawn by Harry Denvers, send it back to him, and tell him what she thought of him! . . .

She sat staring at the signature on that perfectly drawn out order to pay to Lady Adelaide Bruce-Walsing-

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ham: One hundred pounds. Her indignation began presently to assume a highly righteous trend. So, that was what it had come to already! The poor, trusting girl had been deluded—who knew? perhaps coerced—into handing over all her possessions to this fortune-hunter! Why, the very letter had been dictated! Magdalen was no longer free to ask her own relations to stay with her, to have the spending of her own money. Unhappy child, she was not free to write or receive her own correspondence!

In these horribly distressing circumstances what was Lady Adelaide's obvious duty? Was it not to stand by the orphan to whom she had so long acted a mother's part? If she, her only blood relation, were to abandon her now, who would befriend her? Once in the house—ah, he had not dared prevent altogether her coming, that would have been too open a game!—once in the house, if she found it necessary to remain for the protection of her own niece, why, she would do so. Let him, if cynical audacity went so far, incur the odium of evicting her!

This new, altruistic wind cleared the mists from Lady Adelaide's horizon surprisingly. "It is so much easier to work for another than for oneself!" thought she. The moisture in her eyes was no longer the tear of wrath, but the melting dew of self-sacrifice. She began to feel a natural longing to share her thoughts with a kindred soul, with one who could understand, sympathize, appreciate—aye, even support and help.

Isidore Blaise, the man whom she had destined for Magdalen, had loved the heiress—for that Lady Adelaide could vouch with absolute certainty—loved her with deep and unselfish ardour. He would have known where the poor foolish heiress's real interests lay, who were her

true friends. He would have drawn the bonds of family closer together, instead of severing them. He, with his chivalrous, high-minded, modern ideas of womanhood, would have blushed with shame at the mere thought of possessing himself of her cheque-book. If he had used his wife's money it would have been for her own benefit. And if, through her aid, he had risen to that place of eminence for which his talents fitted him, would not the motive spring of his effort have been her honour, her advantage?

But Magdalen had spurned Blaise, the man of heart and genius, for Denvers, the astute and grasping dependent! All that they could do now was to stand by her in the sad days of disillusion which were already setting in. All they could do . . . until the moment came when it might be their task and duty to strengthen her for the act that should give her back her freedom.

So far had Lady Adelaide's plans agreeably travelled when she sat down to write a friendly little note to the philanthropist.

Lady Adelaide duly arrived on the morning of the Thursday, with a radiant face handsomely made up under a new toque, two very large boxes, and a down-trodden maid.

The first sequel to her appearance was an insertion in Friday's *Morning Post* (dear Magdalen was so careless in all social matters) to the effect that Captain and Mrs. Denvers had arrived at 53 Berkeley Square from Teyne Court, for the season. A little further down the same column, a neat paragraph informed Society at large that Lady Adelaide Bruce-Walsingham was staying at 53 Berkeley Square with her niece, Mrs. Denvers.

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The next sequel was the little *tête-à-tête* meeting with Isidore Blaise for which his patroness had sighed.

Early after luncheon on Saturday, having been informed by her tactful aunt that there was no need to bother about her that afternoon—"I think one or two old friends might drop in to see me, dear. . . . Just let me have a cup of tea and a *petit pain fourré* at five—they are delicious at Gunter's opposite"—Magdalen had gone off to Hurlingham to watch her husband play polo for his old regiment. Lady Adelaide was able therefore to receive her guest undisturbed in the transformed boudoir which, quite naturally, she had again appropriated. If Harry Denvers had elevated his eyebrows at the sight of the Bruce-Walsingham luggage, and if the paragraph in the *Morning Post* had uncomfortably confirmed the impression produced by the boxes, he nevertheless received his inconvenient relative urbanely if not with cordiality. It was part of his creed to make the best of things; and a rule of his life not to fret the good passing moment with doubts or resentments. He had even a kind of pity for this woman of birth reduced to such undignified scrambling and subterfuges. Another consideration, moreover, kept him philosophically cheerful in circumstances that would have irritated most young husbands: his wilful bride had best discover for herself the discomfort of the inimical third in their midst.

Indeed, Lady Adelaide had not been long in the house before Magdalen had again experienced the "sand-paper" sensation she had described. Her aunt's comments and silences alike had a quality of irritation about them, hard to define yet unspeakably vexatious.

"Polo?—Your husband keeps polo ponies, now."

There had been nothing to catch hold of in such a

remark, or in the silence with which the affirmative answer had been received. Lady Adelaide's face was expressionless; she stared straight before her. Mrs. Denvers' tingled with exasperation; yet at the same time there was a stir, a murmur, a shadow within her—horrible—not to be acknowledged.

The spin down to Hurlingham, however, with jolly Diana Spofforth beside her, soon drove the impression away; and the bright afternoon, the sunshine, the tender leafage of the trees, the joyousness of the band, the swift interest of the game; her pride in her husband, in his clean good looks and the smart liveness which distinguished him, she thought, from the other players, all tended to make the heiress more than usually contented with her choice.

Harry came back with them, and Magdalen felt very much in love with her husband; happy to have him sit opposite to her; eager for the moment when they should be alone together.

She was in high spirits when they reached home, kissed Diana affectionately before sending her back to Kensington in the motor, and skipped up the steps, her hand in Harry's, like a joyous child.

Smallwood, waiting in the hall, arrested Denvers in the act of following his bride upstairs.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, in a low voice.

Denvers paused, then retraced his steps into the hall.

"Beg pardon, sir," the old man repeated, and his countenance was contracted to its bitterest expression.

"They've found us out!"

"How? Who?" asked his master, staring.

The butler jerked his thumb, first towards the marble table behind him, strewn with cards, then upwards, in the direction of the drawing-room.

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"The whole lot of them, sir. It's that announcement of her ladyship's in the paper. Books, and flowers, and letters—the same old game. All of them, one after the other! And that Mr. Blaise, closeted with her ladyship, and eating foygra sandwiches till past seven o'clock!"

Smallwood's tone was increasingly tragic. He wagged his head and added warningly: "You'll have to put a stop to it sometime, sir. Take my advice, put a stop to it at once!"

Denvers, when he began to understand, had frowned, but almost immediately laughed; and, to the butler's deep annoyance, laughed loud and heartily. Before any further words could be exchanged, Magdalen's voice rang down to them. She was calling her husband impatiently. He turned and took the stairs two steps at a time, leaving the old servant scandalized, still shaking his head and muttering ominous comments: "I knew how it would be, I knew how it would be: once her ladyship got her inch she was bound to have her hell."

"Oh, Harry, Harry!" cried Magdalen, "come and see! Isn't it touching?—They've all been here. My Poets, three of them! My Painters, two of them. No, not Mr. Derehall, you silly boy—though I really don't feel angry with him any more. And my Musician! You never met my Musician, did you?—Come and see. There's such flowers and poems! Two new volumes of poems, both dedicated to me.—And Teddy Spofforth has sent me the only chocolates I like. And my nice Diplomatist—you remember the Dillwyn boy—a box of special Russian cigarettes.—And Isidore Blaise, my Philanthropist, you know, oh he's been here to tea with Aunt Adelaide, and he's left for me some magazines, and such a basket of lilies of the valley!"

A bright spot of colour flamed on each usually pale cheek ; her eyes shone with excitement ; she waved an unopened letter in her hand.

Denvers paused in his quick advance towards her and took the last steps leisurely. The smile was still on his lips, but mirth was fading from his face.

"Come and look !" she cried, dragging him impatiently into the room with that childish irresponsibility which, suddenly and for the first time, grated upon him.

The severe cool room, deliberately uncrowded for the suitable display of rarely beautiful furniture—the pick of the Tempests' old-time treasures—was usually little beflowered, save for the spraying splendours that filled a couple of antique *jardinières*. But this evening the floral tributes of the heiress's faithful admirers obtruded themselves on every available space. Harry looked round disapprovingly ; but Magdalen's tongue ran on :

"My Poet !—My poor little Chief Poet ! Moss roses—do you see, Harry, he remembered that I loved their gummy scent !—And there's just a tiny bunch of wee forget-me-nots here." She bent and read : "He says the flowerets will have voice for his dumbness ! I think it's vewy touching !"

Denvers' glance sweeping the tribute, caught the affected headline : "*To my ever deare Ladye*," and swore softly under his breath.

"What did you say, dear Harry ?"

Magdalen had her most guileless air.

"I was expressing my opinion of minor poets——"

"Oh, do look at my lilies ! Did you ever see anything so exquisite !—They're from—from Isidore."

"What did you say ?" said the man sharply.

Magdalen became infantile in her expression.

"I said : 'They're from Isidore Blaise.' And, by the

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way, I haven't read his letter yet." She glanced down at the note in her hand, then tore it open. "He wants to come and see me.—How refreshing! I used so to enjoy a conversation with him. It widened one's horizons."

"I'm going up to dress," said the husband abruptly.

He felt he was being teased, delicately goaded, for some purpose as yet hidden to him. He was perhaps overtired by the violent exercise of the afternoon. Perhaps, too, if a man is very much in love, perpetual serenity is impossible to achieve when the beloved chooses to be wayward. Anyhow he felt he could not trust his temper, and that flight was the safer course.

"What is the matter?—why should you go away because I say I like talking to Mr. Blaise? Don't you like talking with Mr. Blaise? Don't you think he's clever?"

"Very clever."

Magdalen's eyes widened upon her husband.

"Harry, what is it? Don't you like Mr. Blaise?"

He made an effort over his exasperation and tried to turn the threat of disagreement into a joke:

"Well, my darling, I think I could support existence if I never saw Mr. Blaise again. Therefore, if you happened to think of inviting Mr. Blaise here—just for my enjoyment—don't."

He had caught her hands laughing; but there was an edge to his jest which displeased her mightily. She flung herself away from him. Her voice trembled upon rising tears:

"I don't think I like you at all just now!" she exclaimed. "It is kind of all my old friends to be glad to see me again and send me these pretty flowers and things! And you're horrid, you're jealous, and you want to drop a wet blanket over everything . . .!"

Denvers gave a heavy sigh. He stood gazing at her, an unreasonable apprehension upon him. He felt a sense of meddling and mischief at work about them; of creeping difficulties—little wisps of trouble, as intangible in themselves as spiders' webs, but spinning themselves from every side in the fair chamber of his new life. He knew that it was his duty to take the uncompromising broom and sweep clean at once; but hesitated upon this first exercise of mastership.

Then another aspect of his position struck him, with a slap of realization. Is a man really master in a house that does not belong to him? of a household fed and paid by money that is not his? of a wife whom circumstances have rendered completely independent? He could not give her anything which she could not have bought for herself—save his love, solicitude, and protection. What if she should no longer want these precious things, these things of which she stood so sadly in need, without which, in spite of all her riches, she had been so poor and forlorn? His heart turned sick within him. He might have spoken out then; he might have betrayed this sudden agony of doubt and reached the generous side of her nature before any real barrier had come between them. But, with a rustle of silks and a slow tapping of heels across the parquet floor, Lady Adelaide entered from the inner room.

Her face was pleasantly illumined by smiles, which became more radiant still after a glance from Magdalen's temper-shadowed face to her husband's troubled one.

"Why, I never heard you come in!" she exclaimed, ignoring their attitude, with the obvious tact so annoying to those upon whom it is practised. "Magdalen, this is like old days. How nice the room looks, filled with flowers!—Oh, those lilies—aha, I know who sent you

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those! A little bird told me." Lady Adelaide was arch. Then she added with a note of pathos: "He came to see me this afternoon, dear fellow!"

"Is Mr. Blaise your little bird?" said Denvers. He knew he was not agreeable, but he could not help it. He went to the window and stared out on the noble trees of the square.

Lady Adelaide shrugged her shoulders with an expression of good-natured contempt. If she could have spoken her thought aloud, it would have run thus: "Your husband is silly and vulgar, and not worth notice." Perhaps Magdalen read the thought, for the colour began to rise in her cheeks. She hardly knew with whom she felt most angry this moment—her aunt or her husband.

"Mr. Blaise hopes you will allow him to come and pay his devoirs to you. Poor fellow, he looks pale and altered, somehow—but handsomer than ever. So clever!—so interesting! He will be allowed to come and see you, won't he?"

She cast a meaning look at Harry's uncompromising silhouette as she uttered these last words.

"Of course!" Mrs. Denvers spoke with unnecessary emphasis. "Of course I shall hope to see Mr. Blaise, very often. I shall write to him this evening. I want my house to be the rendezvous of all my friends—just as in the old days . . ."

She broke off. Denvers had turned from the window and gone out of the room.

"My dear——!" Lady Adelaide stared at the closing door with innocent surprise—"What is the matter?"

"Oh—nothing." The young wife gave an excited laugh. "Harry does not like my seeing my friends—that's all."

"But, then?" The elder woman's voice had taken quite a natural tone of anxiety. "Perhaps, dear child, it would be better, wiser—there's no use going against your husband's wishes, Magdalen."

Lady Adelaide had rarely done a cleverer piece of acting in her long life of manoeuvre. Perhaps it is hardly fair to accuse such natures of altogether deliberate artifice; some people are so fundamentally insincere as to deceive themselves. Later, should anything so unfortunate occur as a breach between husband and wife, this woman's conscience would be blameless: no one could say she had not warned, had not done her best.

"I will not be disloyal to my old friends for anyone in the world!" Magdalen asserted grandiloquently, and walked out of the room.

It was clear, now, with whom she was most angry.

CHAPTER III

"LADY MÆCENAS"

THE husband did not take up the wife's glove of challenge: they went their way, as if nothing had happened, though each was acutely conscious that there it lay between them. Denvers, trying to be wise for two, strong for two, set himself to follow out the philosophical course of action he had decided upon from the beginning of Lady Adelaide's unwelcome visit. It would, plainly, be idle to attempt to thwart Magdalen just now. It was, after all, a loyal instinct, he told himself, which led her to demonstrate to her friends, however undesirable, that marriage had made no difference in her benevolent patronage. He determined to utter no further protest and to avoid the least sign of interference, unless forced to do so by some salient abuse of her inexperienced and impulsive generosity.

Magdalen was perhaps a little nonplussed to find herself left with so free a hand. The announcement she made on the day after their wordless disagreement, that she was going to ask all her court—every one of them—for the next Sunday afternoon, was received by Denvers with apparent cheerfulness.

"You needn't be there, you know," she added tauntingly.

He smiled at her, his good smile. There was so much toleration, indulgence, tenderness in it, that she felt

ashamed and suddenly aghast at the odd thoughts that had been stirring in her heart against him.

But she indited her invitations all the same.

She was looking cool and charming as she sat at the writing-table, in that wonderful boudoir—his gift—when he walked in upon her, next morning, to find her engaged upon the task. She laid down her pen.

"Oh, Harry, you're such a comfort to me!"

He looked down at her questioningly. She let her eyes roam over the bronze-tinted face, and the lean figure in its grey morning suit, then she said, with a sigh:

"You're so harmonious! Aunt Adelaide has been here, swearing dreadfully. . . ."

"Swearing?" he repeated, amused.

"Yes, in a purple foulard and spots, and a mauve complexion, and the most awful patent-leather shoes you ever saw—with steel buckles! She screams with everything in this house."

Harry laughed. So Magdalen was beginning to find that out! He came over to her and dropped a kiss on that white arch of forehead—the seat, so he loved to think, of so pure and candid a spirit. But as he kissed her he sighed in his turn. They had been a bare fortnight in London, and Magdalen was intangibly changed.

With all her folly and desire for admiration, the girl he had loved had seemed to him to have something deep in her nature; to have an earnest desire to make use of her life and her wealth for the welfare of others. The bride he had worshipped had been everything the most romantic and idealistic man could imagine in his fondest dream—tender and generous . . . exquisite! But the

wife of less than a year was now revealing herself in a new aspect. Even in this caressing mood of hers, he felt something at once hard and frivolous. He could have wished to think that the motive for the invitations she was still scribbling off with so much determination was the old mad extravagance of indiscriminate protection, but he could not feel, just now, that she wanted anything but the renewed excitement of varied adulation.

She glanced up at him again with the grave limpidity of gaze that might have befitted a Botticelli angel.

"I am asking Mr. Blaise to lunch to-morrow," she said, tapping the half-written sheet; "if you don't want to meet him, Harry, perhaps you'll lunch at the club or somewhere."

"It's very thoughtful of you to warn me," he said after a moment's pause. "I'll see how I feel, when the time comes."

He was moving towards the door, when he checked himself, came back and kissed her once more. Her lips tilted into a self-satisfied smile when she found herself alone. Dear old Harry—he was quite easy to manage, after all!

Mr. Blaise appeared next day, slightly before the appointed hour. Magdalen surveyed him with interest as he crossed the long space of parquet floor towards her chair. It was true he had grown thin, looked older, graver; almost saddened; yet never had she seen him so much to his advantage: the fault of his good looks had been their florid exuberance.

He rose steadily in Magdalen's estimation as he advanced. He took her hand, and after holding it a moment, kissed it reverently. Then he drew back a step to fix

her with his heavy eyes, shadowed and haunted as she had never seen them before, and she realized, with a thrill of gratified vanity, that, for the moment, he could not trust himself to speak.

"It's very nice to see you," she said gently. "Sit down."

He obeyed, still in silence. She clasped her hands round her knees and leaned forward. No one was such an adept at seeming to ignore the risky situation she really enjoyed.

"I want you to tell me all about everybody, all about everything! I feel such a country mouse, after the long winter at Teyne.—We never saw a cat, you know," she added quickly, lest he should have felt himself neglected. Then, realizing the absurd conjunction of her words, she laughed. "Not that any kind of mouse would want to invite a cat to come and stay!" She paused, malice bubbled in her: "We did not even have Aunt Adelaide."

Blaise was gazing at her with undiminished solemnity.

"Yes, it's been a long winter," he said at last, huskily. "A long, long winter."

She was agreeably moved at the sight of such deep feeling. It would have been extremely displeasing to Magdalen Denvers had the worship of her adorers lapsed on her marriage. She had, moreover, that cruel desire to play with the emotions of men which some young wives like to gratify from the midst of their own security. She went on, her pretty voice sinking to a softer note of sympathy:

"I am so sorry you found it a long winter, when I was so happy."

"Were you happy?" He spoke suddenly. "Or did you only think yourself happy?" Before, startled, she

could answer him, he proceeded: "After all—it comes to the same thing. You think you are happy, and you are happy. Believe me, I am glad from my heart that you think yourself happy!"

She turned on him with a flash; but he was staring at the floor and continued—his voice falling into the musical cadences that seemed to give significance and pathos to the most hackneyed phrases, weight to the cheapest sentiment:

"I thought of you. Oh! I thought of you during those short, bleak winter days; during those long evenings! Many a time, in my lonely fog-bound London rooms, I have seen Teyne Court rise before me, heard the wind whistle round the tall chimney stacks, and known how last year's leaves were flying away on the blast. Last year's leaves! Each with its own story of lost joy!"

Magdalen's momentary movement of anger became merged in a sense of discomfort. The joys of her first winter of married state, its rosy glow of home and love; its invigorating outdoor life, seemed unaccountably to wither and grow grey as he spoke. His voice ceasing, she started as from a hypnotic spell, and tried to drive the impression from her.

"Tell me about everyone," she cried. "About yourself first."

He raised his heavy eyes:

"I cannot talk to you about myself."

She twisted her rings, shifting her glance from the too significant eloquence of his.

"About whom do you still wish to hear?" he went on, after a pause, into the unquiet silence.

"But all of them! All of them—my poet, Jerrold Marvell. He sent me flowers too."

"Then he must have pawned his coat to pay for them," said Blaise brutally; and at her cry, he went on in tones of tragedy: "Oh, lady Mæcenæ, you have been missed! You, the inspiration of lyre, brush and tablet! Yes, Marvell is going about with a jacket buttoned up to the chin. It is rumoured that he is doing the advice column in the *Girls' Friend*! He, Jerrold, doesn't come to the Saturday lunches any more. Says he can't stand the cooking—aha! Quite a little joke at the Penmen's Club," he laughed with a bitterness that would have made the fortune of a new Hamlet.

Once more Magdalen cried out:

"My poor little poet!—Oh, don't, Mr. Blaise!"

"And Coulman, Coulman's ill, in hospital—infirmity, I dare say! And McFein's disappeared—vanished altogether! And Rosenbaum—he painted a portrait of you, did he not—the thing you had in the library at Teyne? Oh, full of talent but quite impossible—as yet! He's had to give up his studio. He's trying for a post in a secondary school! I gave him a fiver, poor fellow, to enable him to buy clothes and pass for respectable. Poverty, you know, dear lady, is the one unforgivable crime in our Society. Your smug guardians will take off their hats, bow to the earth before the South African Swindler; but let a man be shabby, hungry, hopeless—what matter if he be as soaring an artist as Michelangelo, as high-souled as Dante—away with him! down with him! obliterate him! He is penniless."

Claptrap, blatant, outrageously in bad taste as he was, Mr. Blaise was in earnest. His words flowed from the depths of a despair into which his own blighted hopes, his present difficulties, his apprehensions for the future, had rung him. Magdalen—with all her refinement singularly obtuse to the lack of it in those who

appealed to her soft-heartedness and love of power—
was completely carried away.

"But now I am here, I must help! Mr. Blaise, tell
me, how can I help?"

"Help?" he echoed in his deepest accent. "Sweet
lady, how can you *now* help? Will the old beautiful
converse be possible? How can you now be as before to
these aspiring souls, ideal, goal of all aims, star and
staff, source of courage, source of belief? You used to
be delicately generous of your own personality. The
shy genius was made welcome in your house; the artist
forgot his shabby coat; the poet the coldness of his
garret. Alas, what used to be——"

"Used!" Magdalen sprang to her feet, her cheeks
blazing. "Nothing is changed. My friends shall always
be welcome to my house!" Unconsciously she em-
phasized the personal pronoun.

He remained sitting; gazing up at her with his great,
black, melancholy eyes. Lady Adelaide's rustle and
jingle broke in upon the tense moment.

Mr. Blaise only then rose from the arm-chair, with a
deep sigh. He was not at all sorry for the interruption.

He had come at Magdalen's invitation necessarily
ignorant of her present attitude towards life. How far
the heiress would be changed from the Lady Mæcenass
of a few months ago had yet to be discovered. He now
found her impressionable beyond his wildest hopes;
but he had still to frame plans as to the surest way of
availing himself of this unexpected responsiveness.
Beneath all his real sentimentality, the wits of one born
of a race of bargainers remained keenly alive. He had
been told by Lady Adelaide, during that first intimate
visit at Berkeley Square, of what she called the iniquitous
state of affairs in the new *ménage*. How the penniless

husband—it pleased them both to consider Captain Denver as completely without means of his own—had obtained possession of the heiress's purse-strings, and how tightly they were to be drawn in the future against those with whom she had hitherto loved to share.

The first step towards a return to the old comfortable state of things was obviously to make Mrs. Denver realize the absurdity and inconvenience of such an abdication of her power. Fate had very well served Mr. Blaise in his little half-hour before lunch. He had no desire to pursue his advantage into imprudence; and during the meal he devoted all his energies to making his own company as interesting and entertaining as possible.

Denver joined them at the table; and between host and guest there circulated nothing but acceptable courtesies. Denver, indeed—rather to his own surprise—found himself interested in questioning the philanthropist and listening to his explanation upon some recent economic work, in which, though modestly disclaiming the value of his services, Mr. Blaise represented himself as having been the moving spirit.

When, two or three times, Lady Adelaide planted an innuendo, a hidden taunt, against the nephew-in-law she so intensely disliked, the most perfectly well-bred man could not have more tactfully feigned unconsciousness of any tension than Isidore. But when the irrepressible lady began to address Captain Denver upon the subject of his polo ponies, in tones and with sarcastic smiles that gave her remarks an unmistakable air of assault, Blaise's attitude of the complete gentleman became perhaps a little overdone. His interest in the sport and in the points of the animals, his questions and his "Quite so's" were too obviously intended to cover an awkward incident. He avoided looking at Magdalen, pointedly. She

felt that she was being spared, and for the first time she faced the thought that if Harry was taking up his polo again it must be on her money—that money which she had handed into his charge? At the same time she was conscious that once again she had been almost shy of asking him for her own: to help those who so sorely needed help!

Mr. Blaise's day had certainly not been unfruitful.

CHAPTER IV

GRUB STREET AND BERKELEY SQUARE

MRS. DENVERS' first "At Home" on Sunday afternoon saw a gathering about her which might have been a return to the "dear old days" so constantly and regretfully referred to by her aunt. There was a sprinkling of her own relatives, but a sparse one, most of smart London being week-ending. There were Mrs. Spofforth and Diana, early in the day; some cronies of Lady Adelaide's; Dillwyn and Teddy and a brother Guardsman; but there were, above all, many members of Magdalen's peculiarly chosen circle—the budding, but nipped, geniuses of the hour.

Into this group Mr. Marvell was announced by Smallwood—upon whose countenance angry disappointment was visibly written. The little poet had grown thin and looked ill enough to justify Blaise's flamboyant pathos. A flaring orange tie failed to draw attention away from the piteous shabbiness of the velvet coat. Layers of black ink could not conceal the cracks in the worn boots. He came in, however, with his usual air of defiance, jerked his shock head over Magdalen's hand, gave Diana a wan smile between two glares, and folded his arms in quite his normal manner as he took the chair his hostess pointed out to him, near her own sofa.

Tea was being got ready in the adjoining room; and the moment was that rather depressing one of sub-

expectation which precedes the move. Magdalen saw the poet's hollow eyes glance quickly in the direction whence the jingle of teacups issued, and her heart contracted.

"Do tell me, dear," whispered the pretty vapid cousin who had the place beside her on the sofa, "who is that? He looks as if he did something. Oh, I'm sure he must do something interesting!"

It was indeed the only explanation of anything so unkempt, so fierce and forlorn and hungry-looking as the face over the orange tie.

"He's a great poet," said Magdalen imperturbably.

Lady Moorhaven looked slightly disappointed when the name of Jerrold Marvell was breathed into her ear. She had never heard it before. But she brightened up when Mrs. Mayne was next announced.

"Is that *the* Mrs. Mayne?" she asked in an awe-struck whisper, and was gratified at being instantly introduced.

Clara, besides her unusually important position in the journalistic world, had now become further known to the public as a quiet, impressive speaker on the suffragist platforms. Like many another idle society woman, young Lady Moorhaven was intensely taken up by the movement, and was also prone, after the fashion of the day, to worshipping any distinguished example of her own sex that came her way.

"Look at Clara potentating!" said Diana maliciously to Dillwyn, in their distant corner. "Alice Moorhaven is offering incense!"

"And Mrs. Mayne receives it as piously as a saint—what?" said the F.O. youth.

"Christmas in the country—" the poet's grating voice suddenly filled the room. "Christmas in the

country, did you say?" He was addressing Magdalen and, feeling all eyes upon him, raised his accents to a louder pitch.

"Yes—a good old-fashioned proper country Christmas." Magdalen was smiling. She ran a glance, rather proudly, round the room, after her fashion, when one of her little lions was about to roar.

"The gods preserve us!" cried Mr. Marvell. "To a man like me—this horrible digging up, year after year, of an imperfectly embalmed corpse, decking it with mistletoe and holly, making believe that there is a spark of life still in those dead eyes, a drop of blood in those shrivelled veins, is absolutely revolting."

"Oh, but our corpse was very lively," replied Magdalen. "We made him go in for a tenants' ball and a village Christmas tree; everybody drank our health, and I opened the ball with Smallwood."

The little poet corrugated his brows for another sensational outbreak; but suddenly the room seemed to reel before him. He clutched the arms of his chair and closed his eyes. He had, in truth, been anxious, unsuccessful, not to say starved, for the last couple of months. Patronage for his work he might accept as a tribute to genius; but to have applied to his patroness for money in his necessities was a thing impossible to his pride.

Denvers, who now entered the room, saw the small, poverty-stricken *homunculus* seated near his wife, and his face darkened. They were gathering about her, as thickly as ever, those miserable hangers-on, from whom he had flattered himself he would have been able to protect her! And there was Lady Adelaide, important and self-assertive, receiving, as though she were mistress of the house, a select circle of personal friends, among

whom Blaise could not possibly fail presently to appear!

Clara's voice, beside him, woke him from a troubled reverie.

"Aren't you going to speak to me?"

"How are you, Clara?—I needn't ask. You look very prosperous."

"Do you think so?" she answered, a little bitterly. Yet she glanced down at her pretty black-and-white frock with some complacency. It was true. She was prosperous. She was even becoming a little famous, and she moved and looked and spoke with a certain new dignity, as of one aware of her own importance. But, gazing up into his face, her own changed.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked quickly. "Oh no, impossible! Magdalen looks radiant. Why, I've come here to-day just to feast my eyes on perfect happiness."

"Ah," he exclaimed, "have you forgotten the Indian theory? Anything perfect provokes the jealousy of the gods."

"What is it?" she repeated, scanning his countenance closely.

"What should it be?" He was smiling now.

"You are not yourself," she said gravely.

"Oh yes, I am. And so is Magdalen. Quite her old self.—Look round the room. Don't you see? It's full of people who are, as you express it, quite themselves."

"Mr. Blaise," growled Smallwood from the door.

Poor Isidore could not help looking fatuous. He came in as one weighted with the salvation of the world. Denvers gave a short laugh.

Feeling all eyes upon him, the philanthropist, after bending unduly long over Magdalen's hand, proceeded to bestow his elaborate greetings on such of her guests as

acknowledged his acquaintance. Stepping back from a likewise prolonged clasp of Lady Adelaide's fingers he had the misfortune to tread upon one of Sir Simon's gouty feet with all the weight of his handsome proportions.

The ex-diplomatist swore and sputtered like an angry cat and glared at the culprit, who was overwhelmed with the confusion any social contretemps however slight never failed to bring upon him.

"Ten thousand pardons!" he exclaimed, volubly apologetic, "I can't imagine how I came to be so awkward."

"Neither can I, sir," snapped the old man ruthlessly; his face was contorted with pain.

"I hope I did not hurt you?" the social reformer floundered on—"I am delighted to see you—looking so well——"

"Well!" echoed Sir Simon, forgetting his foot in this new offence. "Well! How can I possibly look well when I have this moment seven mortal diseases, any one of which might carry me off any day?—How can I look well, sir? Yah pah! . . . yah pah!—Adelaide, I must insist on your giving me your attention for a conversation apart——"

Just then there was a move towards the next room for tea; and the atmosphere was filled with the chatter peculiar to the occasion—when everyone seems to find it incumbent to make a remark, however inept, to the person nearest.

"There's tea in the next room," said Harry dryly, to Jerrold Marvell, who had remained dazedly seated, still clutching the arms of his chair.

"Tea," echoed the poor verse-maker, "did you say tea?"

Harry's irritable contempt of the sycophant suddenly gave way to compassion.

"Sit still and I'll bring you a cup," he said, averting his glance from that other glance that smote him with its misery of craving and pride.

The poet stiffened himself and rose jerkily.

"Thank you. There is no need for the trouble."

He swayed, recovered his balance, and marched away with a very fair assumption of his usual jerky self-importance.

Blaise was standing beside Magdalen in the window recess, cutting her off from the rest. He broke off in the middle of the speech that he was pouring into her ear!

"Look at Marvell," he said in lowered, dramatic accents. "Look at him!—I'll wager he's had nothing since the cup of tea his landlady may have given him of her charity this morning—perhaps no dinner last night. Look at the eyes of him you used to call your poet, dear lady. Have you ever seen eyes like that before? Ah, I have! I know what it means. Wolf's eyes for sheer hunger!"

Magdalen gave a low cry and nearly dropped the toy cup of iced coffee she was holding. The philanthropist deftly saved it: "Look at him over that plate of sandwiches . . . Or rather, don't look! Why should your tender heart be wrung? He's only one of a hundred others in this our merry London——"

She interrupted him, retreating behind the curtain of the recess and drawing him back with her, that she might speak unobserved.

He hesitated upon the impulse to kiss the white fingers on his coat-sleeve, but refrained. He felt that the personal note might jar. And Magdalen, the wife, was not an altogether known quantity. He only turned his ponderous gaze upon her.

"Alas!" he repeated, "what can you do?"

"I can and shall do something. Want! Heavens, want! Do you know that there are four people in the kitchen cooking—for us two—every day? You must help me to help. Let me give you the money——"

He interrupted her.

"Money?—No, no!" he exclaimed; and for the first time in all their intercourse there was rebuke in his voice. "Do you think that if a little money could have helped, I——" He paused to allow her to finish for herself a story of baffled generosity. "Ah, dear lady, the crust of charity is too bitter a morsel for friend to offer friend."

Tears were brimming in her eyes.

"I must and will do something!" she cried once more. She resented this intrusion of sordid and hopeless distress upon her joy of life. Her heart swelled. It was true there had been wolfish hunger in Jerrold Marvell's eyes—she had sickened to see his hand tremble as he clutched a sandwich. She looked up at the big figure of the man beside her, at the brooding face. He seemed to her all at once strong in mind and body; he understood, he had given brain and heart to this problem of struggle and suffering, which had for the first time, perhaps, really touched her.

Her husband was buying polo ponies, while Isidore Blaise was fighting to readjust the cruel inequalities of life! . . .

"And if you did succeed by some trap of kindness in helping that unhappy struggler against the dictates of his self-respect, the relief would last but for the amount of your bounty. He would have sold the best part of himself for a month's respite. Would it be worth it? Ah no!—No more than it would be worth paying the miserable debts of that other unsuccessful genius, McFein,

who is to be sold up next week, in Grub Street, for bills at which your chauffeur would smile. Or to start Rosenbaum again in the studio to which no one will ever come to be painted. Help does not lie in the mere writing of a cheque, most generous, most dear lady."

The rising tears brimmed over. Before her mental vision the image of the lean figure, flying past her at Hurlingham on the mettled brown pony; the image of the man who, only a few days ago, had ridden king of her heart, kept recurring: each time now with a sense as of something wrong and troubling.

"But if not by money—then by what way?"

Blaise's glance devoured her quivering face.

"There might be a way..." he said slowly. "But no, that cannot be for you. It would be futile even to speak of it."

Then, when she pressed him, would have him speak, ordered him to speak his thought at all hazard, he was elusive, answered her with his deep note: "Ah, have I not passed days and nights with the problem? Have I not worn out, as I may say, the very tissue of my brain, in planning, striving, wondering? There might be a way; but not now, not yet!"

During Magdalen's seemingly fruitless discussion with the Philanthropic Reformer, Denvers had drawn Clara aside in a corner of the drawing-room. It was empty save for Sir Simon and Lady Adelaide who were acridly wrangling at the further end. Harry's talk with his cousin was short, purposeful, and amicable.

"Let him understand that it is a loan," he said in conclusion—"a loan from you."

"You are good," she murmured, with a misting look.

"Not at all—practical." He was brusque to avert

sentiment. "I am sorry for the unhappy little wretch—but this is a bit of pure selfishness, of prudence too."

She nodded thoughtfully. They had now a harmless secret together—slight enough link between the woman who had wanted all and the man who had nothing but the merest friendliness to give—yet it had filled her sore heart with a sense of comfort.

While women are so made, in hidden clinging to the very shadow of love, after a fashion that no man will ever understand, suffrage platforms will be mounted in vain!

"Magdalen—hiding behind the curtain, with Mr. Blaise!—What are you two plotting?"

Clara came up to them, her brilliant eyes full of a light that had long been absent from them.

"Plotting?" echoed Isidore. "Alas, no, Mrs. Mayne! Hopelessly far from plotting."

He glanced in the direction of Marvell, who, apparently oblivious of the bantering Diana by his side, was still endeavouring to restore his starved frame with foie-gras sandwiches and farthing buns. Diana had inherited from her mother a never-failing appetite for good things, and was conscientiously keeping the little man in countenance throughout his ravages. Feeling the eyes of the group in the window recess upon him, however, the poet turned a savage glance in their direction, dropped a cake from his hand as if it had stung him, and turned away from the tea-table.

"Did you see that?" said Blaise to Magdalen. "Can you help that?"

Again Magdalen's eyes were full of tears. "I can try," she said, and swiftly walked after Marvell.

"Well, were you successful?" said Clara teasingly, as she bade Magdalen good-bye a little later on.

The other's face was flushed.

"No," she cried irritably. "He was absurd and ridiculous. It was quite horrid! I asked him to let me be his banker until he had published his next volume—I said it would be a privilege—he was dreadfully rude, said he hadn't anything to publish. And when I asked him to go to Teyne Court and catalogue the library there for me—he flew into a blue rage and said couldn't I see I was insulting him?"

"Poor little man!" said Clara in a soft, non-committal voice, and kissed Magdalen without further comment. She was to look in upon Harry Denvers in his study, for the cheque, out of which that loan which was to save Mr. Marvell's self-respect was to proceed. She had no doubt but she could negotiate it more tactfully than the heiress.

"I must wend, dear lady, in my turn," said Blaise, taking Magdalen's hand.

"It's quite early," said Mrs. Denvers. She was loth to let him "wend." The day had been most unsatisfactory. He, Isidore, had been unsatisfactory. It did not suit her to be put on one side, herself and her money and her desire to help.

"Nay, let me go," said he earnestly. "I must be alone to think. Ah, I see you cannot rest on failure. Believe me, neither can I rest on failure. Give me a little while to grapple with difficulties; to mature my plan."

"Then you have a plan?" she cried. He smiled mysteriously. "Come soon again," she pleaded.

"Three days, give me but three days——"

"Come and dine, then, on Wednesday," she insisted. Rapidly she was reflecting. Harry was going to Teyne.

He would not be back till late the next day. She would be free to talk, to discuss.

"What are you two plotting?" exclaimed Lady Adelaide, unconsciously using Clara's words, as she sailed across the room smiling sweetly upon the pair.

Isidore gave her his sweetest smile in return.

"That I am to dine with you both on Wednesday," he said.

"Capital," cried the Dowager; "it will be like old days."

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CHAPTER V

MR. BLAISE'S "POT-BOILER"

ON his marriage with the heiress, Denvers had resolved to keep as much of the estate management in his own hands as was compatible with the new claims. He intended to remain manager and general supervisor, merely appointing some trusted underling to look after details. Periodical visits to Teyne Court were therefore a necessity.

And in spite of Magdalen's complaints at his absence, her tempers or her pleadings, he had held firm; following these lines, after the way of tender firmness he had laid down for himself in his dealings with his spoilt child of a wife.

On the particular day on which his absence was to coincide with Mr. Blaise's appearance at dinner, Harry had started for the station with a heavy heart and a gathering sense of trouble.

Magdalen had let him go without the usual protest; with an indifference into which there seemed to have entered a freakish sense of resentment, even hostility. She had appeared at breakfast, it was true—an exception to her habitual lazy custom—in compliment to his early start. But he asked himself whether her company had not been bestowed on him for the mere naughty purpose of waving her little flag of defiance.

She was, at first, dreamily unconscious of any attempt

at conversation on his side ; then plunging into animated discussion with her aunt, the master of the house was made to realize that the visit he had so urgently desired to limit was to be prolonged without any reference to himself.

Next the ladies indulged in the following mysterious interchange of remarks :

"What time," inquired Lady Adelaide, "did you mention for dinner to-night ?"

"I did not say any time," Magdalen replied. "I merely said, 'Come and dine.'"

"Vell," said the elder lady, with a pleased smile, "it will not matter if he comes early. I will arrange to be down."

"I hope he will come early," said her niece gravely, "for I have a great deal to talk over with him."

Denvers pushed away his plate. He had no intention of asking who the guest might be ; and, indeed, there was only one of "Magdalen's crew" for whom Lady Adelaide had such smiles !

While he drank his tea, and thought, with a certain ache of the heart, of the peace of his ill-cooked solitary breakfasts in the Old Place, with Judy's inconvenient greed at his elbow, and the blind hound at his feet, Magdalen stripped a magazine of its cover and became absorbed in its contents.

The husband glanced at his watch.

"I must go !" he exclaimed, jumping up. He came round the table to kiss his wife. She looked up at him ; and it was then he marked the look, as of resentment, in her eyes.

"I suppose you will be back to-morrow," she murmured, keeping the magazine open with her hand.

"Usual train," he answered, with an attempt at everyday cheerfulness.

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Lady Adelaide's eyes were upon them with a gimlet stare, beneath which any demonstrativeness was out of the question. He had once told himself that Magdalen could only be chidden between kisses. He would have given a great deal to have been able to kiss and chide her, just then, with all the yearning that was in his heart.

"You'll miss your train," said Lady Adelaide in her trenchant voice.

"Good-bye," said her nephew-in-law quietly.

She gave him her hand with a sidelong gesture, as contemptuous as she dared make it. When the door had closed upon him she exclaimed: "He is sure to miss his train!"

Her tone conveyed the inconvenience and annoyance that his presence in the house that night would be in view of their "little dinner."

"You've said that twice already," said Magdalen, with her impish air of gravity. If she too desired to be free of Harry for the occasion, she was not going to admit as much to Lady Adelaide.

"What are you so absorbed in?" cried that lady irritably. These snubs were none the less unpleasant because she could not afford to resent them. And they had been alarmingly frequent of late; and it almost seemed as if, when Magdalen's conscience reproached her with regard to her husband, its pricking could best be allayed by making her guest feel uncomfortable.

"It's a short story by Mr. Blaise," said Mrs. Denvers, after a pause. Then, as the other began to exclaim, she rose and went away, carrying the magazine still open in her hand.

"Magdalen is certainly very odd of late," said Lady Adelaide to the empty room. And Magdalen was certainly very odd for the rest of the day.

Mr. Blaise was the author of a series of poignant sketches illustrative of certain aspects of woman's life, contributed to a periodical in which what was held by the editor to be "the problems of the day" were discussed and anatomized, by writers of the newest school of thought and style, with horrible cleverness and perverse sympathy.

There had already appeared, over the Philanthropist's signature, three such "deep-toned etchings"—as a member of the clique had sympathetically described them. Magdalen was reading No. 4 of the series, with a painful absorption. All at once she flung the magazine from her and sprang to her feet. There were tears in her eyes, her hands were clenched.

"How dared he, how dared he send her that thing! How dared he have written it!" Anger and misery fought in her soul. She looked round her white room, every detail of which had been her husband's choice and offering to her; and the thought came, as humiliating as it was base: who has paid for all this? The thought was an echo of a phrase in the sketch she had just flung from her: "*He loaded her with presents bought with her own money—presents for which she always thanked him, very gratefully.*" How she had thanked Harry for the beauty of her unique room!

After a moment, misery got the upper hand of anger; cold misery settling down upon her, numbing all feeling, yet leaving the brain alert, eager to think, to know, to judge. She picked up the magazine again.

Mrs. Mayne and Miss Spofforth, arriving by appointment for a stroll in the Park, previous to lunching, found their hostess still in her elaborate breakfast-gown of yellow silk and lace, lost apparently to the flight of time, staring

at the wall opposite to her, across the pages of an open magazine.

She turned her eyes dazedly upon the two, as they entered unannounced with the familiarity of close friendship.

"My goodness, Mag," cried Diana, "you don't mean to come and walk down the Park in a yellow satin sacquel!"

"It isn't satin," said Magdalen. "It's *crêpe mâtore*." But her voice rang spiritlessly, and there was a dull weight of trouble in the listlessness with which she rose and let the book slip from her lap.

Clara picked it up, glanced at it and dropped it contemptuously out of her hand on to the writing-table—a marvel of ivory and mother-of-pearl inlay.

"So that's what you've been spending your morning over!"

"Have you read it?" asked Magdalen in the same dull tone.

"Yes, my dear, I have.—A very poor thing it is. One of Isidore's most obvious 'pot-boilers.' I may say it, since my principles are now public property: if there is one thing more than another that makes me realize how unfit men are to legislate for women, it is the way they write about them!"

"I think," said Mrs. Denvers slowly, "that Mr. Blaise has understood very well what he has written about there."

"You don't mean," cried Clara, struck by a sudden thought, "that he has had the audacity, the shameless audacity to send it to you!"

"Then you do think it's meant for me?" said Magdalen slowly.

For a second the other woman looked taken aback. Then with more irritation than she usually betrayed, she exclaimed:

"Yes, if you want to know, I think it was written—at you. A gross impertinence: but not for you to notice! Why, Magdalen—Good heavens—you don't mean to say——"

"What on earth are you two talking about?" broke in Diana, cheerily intent on diverting what appeared to be a squabble. "Aren't you coming out? There's my best young man, for all I know, cooling his heels by Achilles' statue, or the fountain, or somewhere, and all the lovely morning wasted!"

"You had better go without me to-day." Magdalen lay back in her white arm-chair and closed her eyes.

"What is the matter with her?" mouthed Diana voicelessly to Mrs. Mayne.

"Oh—a silly story of Blaise's," answered the latter still in her high tone of exasperation. "He's been writing a set of them, in that magazine. 'Dramas of Womanhood,' he calls it. 'Studies from Life!' My dear, you know nothing of that kind of writing. I'm sure Mrs. Spofforth would not have *The Pioneer* inside her doors. And if she did," added Clara, with a short laugh, "she wouldn't understand in the least what it was all about."

"What is it all about?" cried Diana, with her healthy, indiscriminate curiosity. "Shockin' is it?" She went across to the writing-table and began to turn over the pages. "'The Dupe'—by Isidore Blaise," she read aloud.

Clara saw Magdalen shudder, and her anger deepened. She had felt wounded and bitter enough when the hope of years, the romance so long tended in the secret garden of her heart had had to be uprooted. It had been a hard task, but Clara was in every fibre of her being what the French call *honnête femme*. She could more easily, perhaps, have given up life itself than this dream which had been stronger than reality. But the desire to

attack the happiness which had been built upon her own misery was not in her. She had none of the spitefulness that ran hand in hand with Lady Adelaide's self-interest, nor the illicit hopes that lay at the back of Isidore's schemes of self-advancement. The wish that Harry's wedded bliss might be wrecked in order that he might turn, in his disillusion, to the woman he had first loved, could never have dawned upon the horizon of a soul which fate had stricken but not debased.

" 'The Dupe,' " she repeated scornfully. " One would be dupe indeed to be taken in by such blatant rubbish! Why, you know as well as I do, Magdalen, the man is in love with you. How can you pay any attention to this outpouring of spleen? "

" It looks very dull, anyhow, " said Diana, dropping the book. But her bright face was clouded. She hated ill-temper, worry, unhappiness—and there was all this in the atmosphere.

" It is dull, " asserted Clara. " And what's worse, it's false. Oh, how intensely I dislike that pretended insight into our feelings. What can Blaise possibly know of woman's life?—As much of that Dupe, that *Lydia in Grosvenor Square*, as of the poor tramp, in his odious 'The Maternity Ward.' "

Magdalen still reclined with closed eyes.

" But what—— " began Diana again.

Mrs. Mayne turned some of her irritation upon her.

" If you want to know—I'm sure Mrs. Spofforth wouldn't like you to—Blaise is writing a set of, yes, I can't call them anything else, a set of revolting sketches by way of being from the inside of a woman's mind. The first was about—well, a tramp in the maternity ward of a country infirmary. The next was called 'Your Sister,' "

and was about—no, I don't think I can tell you what it was about ! The third was called ' This Bijou Residence,' and was about—well, the tenant of the Bijou residence ! And the last is about an heiress who lives in Grosvenor Square—much poor Isidore knows about Grosvenor Square ! ”

“ He knows about Berkeley Square,” said Magdalen suddenly. She opened her eyes and looked straight at Diana. “ Mr. Blaise's stories are all of poor women whom love has betrayed.”

“ Oh ! ” said Miss Spofforth. She grew scarlet. Clara had been right : the Bishop's daughter had been kept in a middle-Victorian atmosphere of innocence. But the most innocent have inklings of the world's wrongs, even if they have been taught that the mere mention of them is unbecoming. “ I'm very glad,” said the young lady, trying to turn her sense of discomfort into a joke : “ I'm glad I didn't bring Chin-chin : he's very particular. He never did like Mr. Blaise.”

“ It's all most dreadfully true,” said Magdalen, speaking in a dreary, uninflected tone that matched her blank gaze. “ The poor betrayed servant-girl, the poor betrayed heiress—the poor, poor creature cursed with a great fortune ! Everybody makes up to her for her money, everybody wants her money—even the man she loves, the man who has made her believe that he loves her for herself alone ! You say, Clara, that Mr. Blaise does not know what women feel in Grosvenor Square : listen to this.” She reached out for the magazine and sought the place—“ It's on the first day her husband leaves her after their marriage,” she explained, and then started reading in a crooning voice : “ *Lydia was alone. For the first time in her life, she knew what it was to be alone. He was gone. The sun was dark in her sky. She felt like some poor*

bird with a broken wing that can only drag itself from place to place——"

Clara sat down with a resigned expression. Diana said: "Oh, I say!" looked out of the window at the bright day, and sighed audibly.

"Oh, how often I have felt like that!" Magdalen's eyes were still fixed. She still spoke as if addressing a far-away listener: "*Then this poor woman, who loves this man so much and gives herself to him; and with herself gives everything, everything, finds out that she has been married for her money. She will not believe, at first. But it grows, it grows upon her; an awful, irrefutable fact.—Listen, Clara.*" This time emotion gathered as she read: "*She was beautiful and might have been worshipped for her beauty alone. She was tender, desirable and precious: one whom any man might have gathered to his heart for his life's joy. She was witty, fresh as an April wind, sparkling as a mountain stream—a companion for the gods among men. . . . But she was rich, poor woman! And because she was rich, she had been sought, not for herself but for her gold! Every kiss her husband gave her, and he was prodigal of kisses, she had bought in bare coin.*"

Mrs. Mayne snatched the magazine out of her friend's hand and dashed it on the floor. Then she sat a moment or two, gazing at the young wife, trying to turn her own thoughts from their turmoil of wrath to a rational survey of the situation.

She was quite aware that Magdalen's moods had never been things to be seriously reckoned with; especially since the foolish girl had found so many admirers of these same moods that they were no longer quite spontaneous. But she was appalled at the revelation of her state of mind; appalled at the openness with which the revela-

tion had been made. Harry's wife—generous, loyal, high-minded Harry! If he could guess, if he could know! Then, with a stab of remorse, she remembered that it was at her own little parties that Magdalen had met this Blaise, and those others, to draw them into her circle. True, she could scarce have prevented the girl's fond exercise of patronage, nor could she have thought that the man whom she herself regarded merely as a clever, pushing young writer should turn out so unscrupulous a 'chermer. She recognized the coarse slyness of the appeal to Magdalen's vanity—that vulnerable point!—and despised both in her heart.

"I suppose," she said at last, "fresh, sparkling, fit for the gods—(it sounds like an advertisement for champagne)—are adjectives that could only apply to yourself, you think."

Magdalen turned sharply, touched by the shaft of irony.

"Oh, do let us go for our walk!" cried Diana, once more interposing. "Won't it be much nicer to be walking under the trees, than talking about Mr. Blaise and his nasty little tales? I always thought him rather like one of those plump, shiny brown slugs that come out after rain, myself. Oh, Mag, think of my best young man!"

Thus adjured Magdalen got up, stretched her nymph-like limbs and went silently into the adjoining room, where the only sign of exasperation she permitted herself was the reiterated pressing of the electric bell. Diana followed; and, in a minute or two, Clara heard an amiable interchange of conversation between the friends on subjects quite safe and wholesome, such as the comparative merits of white cloth and blue *moiré*. Presently Magdalen's voice arose, asking, in accents of real solicitude:

"Are you sure you like the one with the feathers best? What do you think? Céline, fetch me the hat

with the black-and-white wings. Wouldn't wings look best for the morning?"

The listener smiled, relieved and satirical. What folly to attach importance to the April storms of a nature like Magdalen's! As she smiled, she sighed. Had not the man she loved put all his treasure, all his hopes in this frail barque!

But clever woman as Clara was, she was far from correct in her estimate of Magdalen's character. It was true that she was interested in the choice of a hat, and that she found even deeper interest in the choice of a gown, later on, for the dinner at which she expected Mr. Blaise. But beneath these surface emotions a storm was brewing. And it was with a pale face and darkened eyes that she turned to greet her guest that evening, when, true to Lady Adelaide's prognostication, he arrived shortly before eight o'clock.

"I wish to see Mr. Blaise alone," she had said to her aunt, with an air before which Lady Adelaide submitted without question.

As the Philanthropist bowed over the inert hand, Magdalen, who had not greeted him otherwise than by extending it, asked him:

"Why did you send me that magazine?"

Her voice was low, her accent measured. The man flung a startled look at her. He had seen her in a hundred charming and disconcerting moods; he had never known her in one so little meant to charm, so deliberately intended to disconcert.

"What magazine?" he stammered; while a second glance guiltily showed him its grey-blue covers on the table.

It was true that, as Clara had said, he had written the

story with a pen dipped in gall—the gall which in certain natures runs out of the wounds of life. It was true, also, that in a moment of false confidence in her present favour he had, according to his habit, sent Magdalen a copy of the periodical which contained his lucubration. Even if she did not admit that the cap fitted, it would, he told himself, give her “furiously to think,” as the French have it. It had given her to think, apparently; but in a direction scarcely favourable to himself.

He suddenly realized his own gross breach of taste; the horrible social solecism, the tactical mistake he had committed. If he were to retrieve the situation there was nothing for it but to lie.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed, and the genuine consternation in his empurpled countenance, his distraught look and gesture, lent conviction to his words. “You don’t mean to say you have read—that?”

“Did you not send it to me?”

Her tone was still cold; but there was a faint sound of doubt, almost of relief, in it that he was quick to catch. He remembered, with a spasm of gratitude, that it was from the bookseller that the thing had been dispatched, and that it bore no writing of his.

“Send it?—I, send it to you?—Ten thousand times no! I would give half my life not to have written the thing!”

Magdalen sat down, feeling suddenly weak. The venue of her wrath was changed; yet she was conscious of having quite as great, if not greater, reason for anger. “Why should he not wish her to read it? How dared he thus admit to having written this horrible story *at* her, as Clara had said?”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” cried he, his always acute senses sharpened to an uncanny perceptiveness, “try

and understand ! I wrote it in a moment of madness. I had ceased to hope that I should ever see you again ! Try and understand, for you know there are things I cannot say to you now. How could I have thought that you, rich, puissante, happy, beloved—yes, beloved, for I defy anyone to be near you and not adore you—how could I have dreamed that you would ever even come to hear of this cry of a man's agony ? The cry of a man in agony is always an ugly sound. How could I guess that you should imagine, that you could think——? "

He broke off. He was making the best of an unpromising situation. But it was his suppression of the obvious question : why should you apply the parable to yourself ? that did more for him than even his most passionate pleading, his most persuasive inflection of voice.

From pale that she had been, she turned scarlet. All at once her own attitude appeared to her undignified, indefensible, disloyal. She forgot Blaise's sin in her own ; or rather she realized—for she had shrewdness enough, when she chose to exercise it—that to admit the offence was to share it.

Besides this common-sense point of view, the man's agitation had its effect on her easily stirred vanity. Poor fellow ! He had loved her—he loved her still, even now that he could hope for nothing. That was touching. And, unpardonable as it had been to draw " Lydia " from her, had he not drawn her exquisitely ? Had there not been a wonderful insight into her character, whatever Clara might say ?

And then there was not—the thought struck her for the first time with genuine satisfaction—there was not the smallest resemblance to Harry in the shadowy silhouette of the " man of pleasure," who was Lydia's mistaken choice.

She raised her eyes and looked thoughtfully at her companion ; noticing with further relenting that his face had grown haggard since his entrance. She spoke at last, with the innocent gravity which concealed her most disingenuous utterances.

"I am glad you've told me the truth, Mr. Blaise—because there would have been no use pretending you hadn't meant Lydia to look like me. You've made her have Chinese corners to her eyes—you see, just as I have. You did not call them Chinese: you said they 'tilted slightly upwards in a fascinating Eastern way.' Of course, as soon as I read that, I knew at once. And of course I was a little annoyed because it's dreadfully hard to be an heiress, with everybody telling you you're married for your money. But now, of course, I quite understand you only meant your heroine to look like me because—because——" she faltered prettily, "because you happened to be thinking of me—just then—a great deal. I quite understand."

Her infantile air, the artful inarticulateness of her speech, emphasized by repetition and incoherency, defined the position she wished to take. The incident was to be dropped as one of no importance. The story was no longer to be regarded as an outrage upon the intimacy of her married life. The resemblance of Lydia in Grosvenor Square to Magdalen in Berkeley Square consisted merely in such surface details as a fascinating Chinese tilt in the setting of the eyes. Any other possible interpretation was to be passed over as delicately as Isidore Blaise's recent passionate declaration of attachment. Magdalen was past mistress in the art of ignoring a too fervent declaration of worship, where it suited her to retain the worshipper. She gave him an unexpected smile.

CHAPTER VI

A PROSPECTUS

"**I** HAD the fire lit though it's supposed to be summer," she said. "Don't you like a sea-wood flame, all mauve and blue? I wish I could get a blue like that for a dress!—It's raining and horrid outside, isn't it? Draw in your chair—we still have half an hour. How clever of you to have come early! I told Aunt Adelaide to leave us alone. You know——" she turned those long, oddly set eyes, with their deepest expression of solemnity, upon him, "we have to talk about vewy important things."

For a moment longer the bewildered man still stared at her, unable to find words. His world had been shaken, turned upside down and righted again in the space of a few minutes. He tried to look as if he were not still giddy and breathless, as he obeyed the injunction to draw nearer the fire. But for the life of him he could find nothing better to say than an inept repetition of her own phrase:

"Of course we must have our talk.—Yes, very important."

"I can't get my poor poet's face out of my head," said Magdalen, giving the lead.

The Philanthropist fell promptly into his paces.

"Ah yes, yes, indeed. Do you know that in spite of what I said to you, I went after him to his lodgings and

tried to induce him to accept a little help. 'From one struggling man to another,' I said to him, 'dear comrade, why this folly of pride?' But it was merely adding pain to pain. His tortured face, his anger with me! . . . The poverty, oh, my dear lady, the abject poverty of that room, and his fierce watching of me, lest I dared notice it! I assure you, I have scarce slept since, thinking of him—aye and thinking of all those others—all lads of talent, of genius. McFein, for instance. I verily think if that boy's play is not produced he will kill himself! Yet can he struggle, unarmed genius, against the panoply of greed that faces his every effort? Do you think there's an actor-manager will look at the work of a new author, unless he can put money in it? A man may put wit, spirit, the very essence of life into his work, his brain, his blood, his soul, but if he put not money, it availeth nothing."

Mr. Blaise was now quite himself; or rather a little beyond himself. His words flowed with more than their usual exuberance. His voice rose and fell with ever richer harmonies. But he was making now for a definite goal, towards which the way seemed to have become unexpectedly cleared for him.

Magdalen's face clouded at the mention of McFein. The memory of the cheque transaction was not a pleasant one—none the more so because of Harry's swift success in the matter of the return of the illicit hundred pounds. She had had a vague if absurd sense of having been mean. And though Harry had grimly refused her any details of the interview, she knew that he had not spared the dramatist's feelings.

Blaise, misinterpreting the cause of her changed expression, made haste to add:

"Do not think that I'm advocating that anyone should

risk his money on McFein's success, highly as I think of the dear fellow, and remarkable as I know his work to be. The world is scarcely ripe for it. No more than it is ripe for the delicate impressionism of Marvell's song, which I compare, in verse, to that of Debussy and Foret in music. No more than it is ripe for Derehall's or Coulman's canvases, no more than it is ripe"—here he smiled sadly—"no more than it is ripe, if you will permit me to mention myself, for my psychological-economic schemes for the treatment of the hideous problems, moral and social, that meet us on all sides.—The world prefers to go its old way, clapping, laughing at the old joke, weeping at the old sentimentalities, turning its eyes away from the old festering sores——"

He paused, and Magdalen asked, a little peevishly—for in these pessimistic generalizations Mr. Blaise seemed to be drifting ever further from her important personality—

"But what is to be done? You are making me feel dreadfully hopeless and uncomfortable. And if there is nothing to be done, what is the good of doing it?"

"Ah, but my dear lady, there is much to be done!" Blaise took a deep breath and exhaled these words of promise in a resonant voice. "There is, on the contrary, everything to be done.—If the world doesn't see, it can be made to see. And the world is not all stupid, not all composed of blind, deaf, heartless people. The great part of it is anxious, waiting to be taught! But there is only one voice that can reach all, one hand whose pointing finger all will heed—the voice, the hand of the Press."

Magdalen still stared, uncomprehending and annoyed. And Mr. Blaise, dropping metaphor, dragged his chair a fraction nearer and said in slow impressive tone:

"We want a new important weekly paper; edited by one who not only knows what he wants, but knows how

to make others think they want it too. An editor who will admit new writers to his pages, their only passport being ability ; who will welcome new ideas and not be content to serve up day after day the old, outworn, commonplaces.—A paper which will appoint honest critics instead of log-rollers or conventionalists, or those failures who cannot bear that another should rise. A paper, above all, devoted to the elucidation of those social problems that press daily more and more upon the thinking, feeling man. A paper not restrained to any side in politics, not bound by convention, not hemmed in by tradition—above party—straight, fearless, acute, large-minded, the kind of paper to which people would refer as arbiter on every momentous occasion. While keeping its editorials strictly anonymous, the best intellects of the day would be free to air their opinions in its columns. On the other hand, the name of any worker of genius, be he found starving in his garret, would be brought to the world's knowledge. To be approved by such a paper would be a hall-mark ! To be admitted in its pages a passport to success ! If poems signed Jerrold Marvell found their way a few weeks running into my ideal review, there would be no need for Jerrold Marvell to choose between sordid penury and humiliation. If my paper drew the attention of its readers to the brushwork of a Coulman, to the pulsing realism and the mordant dialogue of a McFein, their young talent would become a strength in the market. The public, so long eager for novelties in every other walk of life, would begin to realize how it has been duped year in year out by the effete, the conventional, the false, the hackneyed——”

Words never failed Isidore Blaise, but he was literally out of breath. And Magdalen, though not yet realizing where, in slang parlance, “she came in,” was excited,

carried away by his enthusiasm. Isidore might be straining every nerve towards journalistic influence, there was no doubt his true vocation was the platform.

"It sounds very wonderful," she said, as the man paused white-faced, his black eyes filled with a fire she had never seen in them before. "Why doesn't someone start it at once?—Why don't you start it?"

The light seemed to go out of his face as he dropped his glance.

"Why do I not start it?" Tragedy vibrated in his voice. "Because I am a poor man, dear lady. Because no one will trust a poor man with a big scheme. Why have I not started it?—It has been my dream day and night to found, to edit such an undertaking, for I have heard—oh ever since I was a lad!—the call of those who needed help, and felt the power within me to answer. When you asked me the other day: 'Is there no way?' I dared not answer: 'Yes, there is a way,' though I could have shouted it with the sense of strength and power within me. Now, since Sunday I have been seeking, inquiring, planning, and, as if to my call, there has arisen an opportunity—unique, glorious! One of our best-known weeklies, mismanaged to idiocy, is to be sold, sold for a song."

"Oh, Mr. Blaise!" exclaimed Magdalen, with a startled catch in her voice. She knew what was coming now, and her first movement was one of shrinking. He shifted his glance upon her. The fire had gone out of it. It was weighted with calculation.

"Forgive me," he said, "for troubling you with my schemes and my ideals in this preposterous manner. I forget, I think, when I am in your sweet presence, how changed everything has necessarily become now." He passed his hand over his brow and glanced at the clock.

There were still some minutes before the half-hour. Would he be able to come to the point in the time? or would it be more prudent to leave it till later?

"But I want to hear!" cried Magdalen, already ashamed of her inner reluctance. Then she added hesitatingly, "I tell you I want to help. How can I help?"

"I will be frank," said he earnestly. "A little while ago, this time last year, I should not have hesitated. I should have come to you and said: Dearest lady, by a stroke of your pen you can do the noblest work that is possible to humanity in this world. You can keep the sacred fire of the century's genius from premature extinction, you can be instrumental in lifting the great universal burden of misery. But now—you are no longer free. It is a dream—it is an impossibility!"

Magdalen got up. Standing before the hearth, one hand on the high mantelshelf leaning her forehead upon it, she stared down at the beautiful driftwood fire, as if lost in its shifting hues. Then she pushed one log into a new place with a sudden decisive little kick, wheeled round and faced Blaise, who slowly rose in his turn.

"You mean," she said, "that you want me to buy the paper . . . for you."

He flung his hands outward, with his Eastern gesture.

"For me, no, no, dear lady. For you. The paper would be yours. Yours would be the great work, not mine. I should be merely the instrument, the minister of your far-seeing generosity. There is no woman in the world, no man indeed, no one but yourself who could so nobly trust or so splendidly be trusted. Besides—though this is paltry to you—it is no bad investment. For it is the greatest of our weekly papers that is privately in the market—the paper that has had, and still has the

greatest influence on literature, art, and politics—and it is going, going for a song ! ”

“ Tell me the price,” she said, “ tell me quickly, for here is Aunt Adelaide.”

He measured her profoundly a moment, before answering ; then he said almost in a whisper—Lady Adelaide’s voice was indeed heard on the stairs objurgating with her maid : “ The goodwill is worth practically nothing.—They ask a couple of thousand for it. Then there’s the plant, the fresh start and promotion——” he seemed to be calculating aloud, honestly enough, whilst two questions wildly revolved in his brain—How much dare I ask ?—How little can I make a start with ?

His courage failed him, now it came to the point, to carry through the scene as he had been glibly rehearsing it for the last three days. The words, “ For you a trifle, a mere thirty thousand pounds,” stuck in the throat.

“ Two thousand for goodwill,” he repeated, then he plunged, “ say eight thousand more——”

“ Are we never to have dinner to-night, Magdalen ? ” said Lady Adelaide irritably from the threshold.

Clad in her most becoming gown, the lady had been sitting upstairs, impatiently waiting for the gong which should summon her to interrupt the private conclave. The more she thought of it the more displeased and insulted she felt. She had been bidden to keep aloof—made to feel her position as dependent ; slighted. She did not easily forgive a slight. Yet everything must be forgiven Magdalen. There was the rub !

She sailed into the room, trying to smooth the fretful lines of her face. She was struck by something unusual in the atmosphere, and momentarily forgot her own grievances to stare from one to the other.

“ What is the matter ?—Have you two been quarrelling ? ”

"Oh no," said Magdalen coolly, "Mr. Blaise has been most interesting."

"And is not Mr. Blaise to say how-do-you-do to me?" inquired Lady Adelaide archly.

The man started, dabbed his forehead furtively and came forward with a deeply apologetic air.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Adelaide." He felt flustered and unready.

As he bent over the aunt's hand he flung a look of swift inquiry at the niece. Magdalen had never seemed to him so mistress of herself, so aloof, so baffling. One thing he understood, however, from her next speech, and knew not whether it boded well or ill: Lady Adelaide was not to be taken into their confidence. For Magdalen proceeded in an explanatory tone; "We've been talking about poor Mr. Marvell.—Dinner is late. I'll ring the bell."

All during the dinner the young hostess maintained her attitude of distance and silence. And Isidore had hard work to keep up, with any show of his usual brilliancy, the necessary conversation with Lady Adelaide.

Smallwood, disapproval personified, grimly directed his satellites, his eye wandering from one hated guest to the other, as if he longed to pour posion instead of champagne into their beakers.

But while she sat, abstracted, and seemingly indifferent, Magdalen's mind was more intensely active than it had perhaps ever been before. She was revolving Mr. Blaise's scheme, scarcely indeed from that high altruistic interest he so effusively assigned to her, but from an intimate, personal, very feminine point of view.

It would certainly be very interesting and amusing to be the proprietress of a paper—such a paper as Mr. Blaise described. It would make of her a power in the land, a much greater power than that silly Clara Mayne.

How eager Alice Moorhaven had been to be introduced to Clara! Clara was beginning quite to pontify. . . .

It had always been a regret to Magdalen that she had no special talent to bring her into prominence, nowadays when everyone was talented or famous. She had tried her hand in vain at verse-making, painting, the harp—she had even ventured on the first scene of a tragedy. But she had had sense enough to realize her limitations. She had been wont to say of herself prettily: "My talent is to help talent." And when those others called her their "inspiration" it had been always pleasant hearing.

Now, were she to accede to this momentous proposal, she would, as Blaise said, be help and inspiration indeed. She could dispense her favours where she chose, uplift or cast down—no wonder a young mind, always peculiarly ambitious of influence, should begin to be dazzled by the glowing tints and the vastness of the prospect! . . . Then, very soon, others besides minor poets and unmade artists would begin to flock to her house. It was, of course, all very well—and she earnestly desired to help the poor beginners—but others, whose fame was already established, would find that she was worth knowing, worth courting! . . . When she had allowed so many of the lesser constellations to shine in her orbit, it was after all because the great fixed stars were as yet unattainable. Mrs. Denvers' *salon* should become notable. As for the money . . . Ten thousand pounds? she had no very concrete notion of what that represented, but she knew that there was plenty of money. The old Squire had never lived up to his income, and large sums had accumulated.

Then the thought struck her: Harry would never have spent such large sums upon the doing up of the town

house, or encouraged so lavish a style of living, if there had not been a good reserve somewhere. And upon this thought a concatenation of ideas was started which more inclined the heiress to that "stroke of the pen"—which Mr. Blaise referred to with such a noble contempt of other people's money—than even her unnatural generosity or the whisperings of her vanity. The voice that now spoke in her ear was one to which she had listened frequently enough of late, and yet never with the consent of her better self. It was the voice of distrust. It perturbed and demoralized her. It said to her now: "Surely you need not hesitate to give, in a noble cause, when he has been drawing upon your exchequer for his pastimes."

From the moment when her husband had demurred at her gift to Lady Adelaide and, by so doing, had made her feel uncomfortable whenever she wanted to bestow money in quarters of which she knew he would disapprove, she had repented time and again the completeness of her surrender. Until that first day in London it had worked very well. She had had a delightful sense of immunity from care. She was relieved from even the trouble of writing a draft, yet there was always gold in her hand when she wanted it.

Magdalen liked to feel herself a princess, and she had basked in the sensation that all the ways of life were being made smooth, beautiful, easy for her, since marriage, as never before. But the first check to her independence had put her out of conceit with the system. It rankled in her mind that she should feel a difficulty in applying for her own. She told herself that she had been over-generous, and that her husband had not met her in the same spirit. Yet she hesitated. It went against the grain formally to take back the charge she had so formally begged him to undertake. Gradually, after the fashion

in which such decisions form themselves, she found herself resolving to make a test case of this—what was it Mr. Blaise had called it?—this “investment” for some of her loose capital.

As the meal progressed, conversation languished more and more. Lady Adelaide had a puzzled impression of not understanding her niece to-night. She felt vaguely that “things were happening” of which she had no idea. Mr. Blaise was unlike himself, restless, nervous, and—yes, unwillingly she had to admit it—scarcely as assiduous as she had a right to expect.

He too was puzzled, and more and more apprehensively uncertain of the result of his daring. After the move upstairs Magdalen became increasingly detached and inattentive, and presently yawned two or three times so ostentatiously that her guest had no choice but to rise and announce his departure. Then, however, she vouchsafed him a ray of hope. She put her hand in his, with a sweet smile.

“Come and see me the day after to-morrow, at six o’clock,” she said regally, “I shall have something to tell you.”

When Denvers paid his flying visits to Teyne Court, he preferred putting up at the “Old Place.” And at the moment when Magdalen, in London, was dragging herself upstairs to bed, warding off with further yawns Lady Adelaide’s pertinacious curiosity, he was sitting in the well-worn leather arm-chair, smoking a reflective pipe, thinking of her. He had indeed been thinking all day.

The Old Place had received him with the calm atmosphere of unchangeableness peculiar to such antique

dwelling. He might never have left it. Mrs. Green had sent him up a dinner of chops as smoked as in the best days ; there was the same dessert of Albert biscuits at which Clara had laughed, with last year's walnuts to keep them company.

His dogs lay each in the accustomed fashion ; Rollo, the old blind hound, at his master's feet, Judy lolling across the arm-chair which since puppyhood she had made her own. How peaceful it was after the roar of London ! How sweet all those well-remembered May odours from his dishevelled garden—from the jonquils, the half-wild hyacinths, the sweetbriar hedge !

He felt his mind rest, with relief, on the external placidity and homely charm after the fret of the Town. But there was an inner trouble for which there was no balm, a trouble accentuated rather than lulled by these hours of solitude and freedom. He thought, almost with a kind of longing, of those evenings, not a year ago, when the trouble had been something quite different—an unattainable longing, a battle to be fought alone. Now that a single turn of Fortune's wheel had put the unattainable into his grasp, he found himself asking whether he had not made the most irretrievable of all mistakes. A little while ago the question had been : " If he could not guard her, what right had he beside her ? " Now, suggested by an indefinably sinister impression of her attitude that morning, another question arose, more profoundly disturbing still : " If he could not make her happy, what then ? "

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CHAPTER VII

THE WORD BEYOND RECALL

ON the morning after his return from Devonshire, Harry was sitting at his writing-table immersed in matters of trivial business, when his wife put her head in at the door. He stood up quickly.

"Can I do anything for you, darling?"

She came slowly forward.

"I just wanted to talk to you," she said, in accents that matched her manner of approach.

He gave her a searching look; some instinct within him warned him of the crisis.

With downcast eyes she stood by his writing-table. Her glance wandered from the open cheque-book to the sheaf of bills beside it. The ink, still wet on the slip, entitled Madame Radegonde Ltd. to the sum of thirty guineas. Harry was in the act of pulling an arm-chair forward for her, when she hitched herself sideways on to the table. Then she leaned forward and began to turn over the stumps of the cheque-book. His eyes widened upon her with surprise, mixed with an inexplicable apprehension. He came back to his desk-chair and sat down without speaking.

Magdalen had little definite purpose beyond a vague curiosity in this examination. But as she glanced, her interest deepened. How methodical Harry was! Every cheque had been connected with her own expenditure—as each stump notified. The whole of her extravagances

for the six weeks in London were here set forth.—What a lot she was spending! The fat book was nearly exhausted. She remembered what a reckoning there had been for her—and Aunt Adelaide—last year, and how tiresome and inquisitive the solicitors had been.

There came a sense of relief upon her at the sight of this careful ready-money management: succeeded, in an odd way, by a swift revulsion of feeling. How absurd that she should be paid for, like a child!

"Harry," she said abruptly, "do you keep different cheque-books for different things? I mean, one for the house, one for me, one for——" she hesitated, and proceeded with heightened colour, "one for yourself?"

His gaze was still upon her searchingly.

"Are you beginning to take an interest in business?" he said, with a little smile.—"Yes, as a matter of fact."

He motioned towards the drawers each side of the table. "Household, stables and garage, personal expenditure, each account has its cell in here, on the right. On the left the books and papers concerning Teyne Court."

"Do you keep separate funds at the bank?" she asked then. Her tone was that of innocence informing itself. He drew his brows sharply together, and sat for a moment very still.

"To a certain extent?" he answered at last. With an effort he kept from his voice any betrayal of the trouble that was stirring within him. "It was your grandfather's custom to keep a fairly large sum at the County Bank to meet the weekly drain."

She interrupted him.

"After all, I don't want to know, it does not matter.—I am very rich, am I not?"

"You have a great deal of money," he answered dryly. He reached for a vellum-bound book. "I will

give you the exact figures of your last year's income if you'll wait a minute, together with the detail of how much you—and your aunt—overstepped it, and what stock was sold out to meet the deficit. It's all set down here." He smiled suddenly at her downcast face. "It would not be unprofitable reading," he added.

She pushed the book from her. She was frowning in her turn.

"Oh, I know—Mr. Pawle made fuss enough about it. —Shall we have spent more than our income this year?"

"I hope not," he answered, glancing at the cheque-book she was still fingering. Then he added, and once more his kind, good smile flashed out at her: "There's only one extravagant lady to provide for, now."

She dropped the book from her hands and was silent a moment, swinging her foot. A horrible little voice within her was saying: "But what about you and your expenses? Am I not still paying for two?" While she was trying to stifle the unworthy whisper, he went on:

"Of course, for the refurnishing of the house we drew upon stock again."

She raised her eyes, and staring at him, inquired:

"What do you mean by stock?"

"My dear Magdalen"—for the first time a tinge of impatience crept into his voice—"I think I have explained the whole state of your money affairs to you more than once. Besides the normal sources of revenue belonging to the estate, your grandfather left a very large accumulation of savings from income, invested in different quarters. That is the stock to which I refer."

"How much of it is there now?"

He controlled the resentment which the growing imperiousness of her tone roused within him, and answered her in a dry, slightly satirical manner:

"There is, as near as I can tell you, something like sixty-three thousand pounds. Would you care to see the list of the investments?"

"No," she said, slipping off the table briskly, and coming up to him, "but I would like to have ten thousand pounds out of it, at once."

She stretched out her hand. He laughed. What a child she was!

"My dear little girl, do you expect me to write out a cheque for ten thousand pounds straight off?"

"Can't you?"

"There are such little preliminaries as realizing, selling, broker's business—not to speak of another preliminary——" he laughed again: "What might you want ten thousand pounds before luncheon for?" The look of humorous tenderness which was generally in his eyes when he regarded his child wife had come back to them. He felt as if a weight had been lifted from his heart. What absurd, what horrible fancies had not her unexpected cross-examination started! And it was only, after all, to introduce a more than usually irresponsible bit of folly—some extravagant quixotism, he would go warrant. "Ten thousand pounds," he repeated. "It's rather a lot of money, you know."

The retort: "It happens to be my money," was rising to her lips when the sight of his face turned towards her so unsuspectingly filled her with a sudden remorse. She had told herself that she would make this a test. She must give him a fair chance. She sat down on the table again, this time so close to his chair that she was able to lay her hand on his shoulder.

"Harry dear," she said earnestly, "I know I've a lot of money. I know I spend it in a dreadfully selfish way, that I'm horribly extravagant. I am ashamed to think

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of all those bills. I've always wanted to do a little good with my money——"

She paused. He bent his head and kissed the hand that rested on his arm. He was touched; but his words were still half mocking.

"My darling—no one can accuse you of not spending on others, even if you do spend on yourself; but it is not always the best way to do good, to shy money about indiscriminately."

"You don't understand," she said, and drew her hand away. "You have not let me explain. I don't want to shy money about. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings by indiscriminate charity." A phrase of Isidore Blaise came to her mind and she repeated it, pleased with the sound of it. "The crust bought with charity is so bitter a morsel that many prefer independent starvation. . . . Harry!" The pettishness now gave place to sincerity: "You remember, perhaps you did not notice poor Mr. Marvell the other day. He was starving, faint with hunger." The man opened his lips, as if to answer her. But they were folded upon silence again. He looked down, his face had become almost expressionless. "Those are the kind of people I want to help. And I have found a way."

Here, as she paused, expecting comment, he gave her a fugitive glance.

"Have you?" he asked.

"Yes." In spite of her determination it was an effort to speak, and therefore defiance rang in the word. "Yes, a very good, interesting, delightful way. The night you were away, Mr. Blaise dined——"

"It is Mr. Blaise's plan," said Denvers. She resented the studied quiet of his manner more than the outcry she had expected.

"Yes, it is Mr. Blaise's plan," she repeated, with increasing defiance. "The . . . something Review is to be sold. I have decided to buy it. Mr. Blaise has promised to be my editor. He is going to manage everything for me. It will be——" She strove to remember the philanthropist's glowing description of the undertaking and its far-reaching scopes; but, finding that they did not present themselves with their former convincingness, gave it up petulantly. What need of so much explanation for the spending of her own?—"Mr. Blaise will give you every detail—if you want it."

She did not realize herself the offensiveness of this last sentence, and proceeded:

"He will come and talk business with you, whenever you like——" She paused once more, for her husband again failed to answer. He seemed to be absorbed in idly drawing some fortification lines on the blotter. "Besides," she went on, "it's a splendid investment. I should regret it all my life if such an opportunity were to slip by."

Denvers finished his bastion trace with precision, but a smile flickered on his lips. It was that smile that suddenly enraged her. She got off the table.

"So you will kindly give instructions for the selling of that stock, or whatever you call it. I wish to have the money as soon as possible."

Only once before in her life had she spoken to him like that: when, on the steps leading down to the lake, she had reminded him of their respective positions—hers as mistress and his as servant. Now the facts of life had singularly been altered for them both.

"Stay, Magdalen," he said, as she turned away. "The matter cannot be dismissed in this manner. With my consent you shall not spend ten thousand pounds, or ten

thousand pence, on Mr. Blaise's schemes. If the opportunity is such a magnificent one as he has evidently described, he will find plenty of people willing to take advantage of it. And if I might suggest"—the smile she found so unbearable returned to his lips—"it would be more fitting in that gentleman to apply to someone who might be supposed to have some slight knowledge of business matters—not to say of journalism."

"Am I to understand——" she choked. "Do you refuse—do you mean to say that you refuse to let me have my own money?"

"I shall certainly take every step in my power to prevent your squandering it on such folly."

She stood staring at him with angry eyes. It had been always her poetical pose to be bored by money matters; to play the Lady Bountiful as one drawing on a fairy store. As a result she was profoundly ignorant of her rights over her own fortune. Could marriage have given him really a control over her? A sudden doubt seized her lest she should not now be able to take back the powers she had yielded.

For a little while there was silence, and then he got up. The sight of her angry face pained him. He would have put his arm about her but she drew back with a low cry:

"Don't touch me!"

"Magdalen!"

"Don't touch me, oh, never again. Your kiss would freeze me."

"Magdalen!"

"Oh, never again—I absolve you from the duty of such demonstrations."

"I don't know what you mean," said Denver. He stood motionless.

"Oh, it's all so clear, so simple!" she gave herself

deliberately now to the passion that possessed her. It is the penalty to be paid by all undisciplined natures, that they are often betrayed into outrages foreign to their better sense and their real feelings. "The commonest story in all the world! It happens every day!" Hysterical laughter shook her. "The poor fool of a girl, with money, who is married for—for love!"

He stood like one turned to stone, fixing his wife with eyes darkened in a countenance that had grown livid under its tan.

"Take care!" he said at last. "What are you going to say?—Think before you speak! Magdalen, take care!" He had begun almost in a whisper. His voice gathered strength as he went on. It now rang out warningly: "God himself cannot recall a word once spoken."

"God cannot obliterate a truth once realized!" she cried. "Oh, I know, I know—now. It is not your fault perhaps, after all, it is the curse of my gold!" Tears strangled her. She had always known that she was "Lydia of Grosvenor Square," only that she had tried to blind herself to what others saw so clearly. "Oh, to have given everything, everything—to find that everything has been bought, paid for! Every kiss, every tender word!—The shame of it, the irredeemable horror!"

He stepped back from her at that, flung himself into his chair, and buried his face in his hands. The high-pitched accusing tones, broken with sobs, torn with anger and self-pity, went on:

"I am beautiful, I might have been loved for my beauty. I have a faithful woman's heart, God help me, in which a man might have gathered his life's joy! But I am rich, and because I am rich, I am never to be loved for myself, never to be sought but for what is not myself! I might be as fair as Helen, as tender as Cordelia, but my

money would still be my most precious attribute——” She broke off in the middle of Blaise’s choicest phrases, to stare at him with wild eyes. “Harry, Harry!” she cried, in sudden terror at his silence. “You don’t speak! You don’t deny!”

He looked up at her then, dropping his hands from his face. It was but a passing glance, as if he disdained to let it rest upon her. He leaned back in his chair:

“Deny?—No!”

The contempt in his voice whipped her to a fresh outburst. Perhaps she was glad to clamour against the inner misgivings. She broke into that jarring laughter:

“Oh, of course, you have nothing to reproach yourself with. You’re an honourable man. You’re a man of business. You would not stint me of what I have bought—you would deliver it of the best quality possible, your attentions, your caresses . . .”

“Stop!”

The single word seemed to fill the room with its sound. He had sprung to his feet. Before the wrath that fulminated from him, her own was crumpled up; it withered away, a mere kindling of straw before a great fire. The tears still standing on her cheeks, her mouth still parted upon an insult, she stared, and her heart knew terror. It seemed to her that she had never seen anger before. She recalled his face in the lantern glimmer, as he had flung Derehall out of the boat: it had not looked like this!

For what appeared to her a long time, there was no sound in the room but that of his quick breathing. He leant with one clenched hand on the writing-table, and she saw, as he did so, the tremor run from his arm to his shoulder. He spoke at last; his voice, though hoarse, was controlled:

“What am I to understand by all this? That you believe I married you for your money?”

She tried to answer, to stir up within herself afresh the passion that should justify her ; but she could find nothing but blankness, a dusty whirl, a few miserable, futile, scattered thoughts.

"Everyone has seen it—all the world thinks so," she stammered.

"All the world !" He caught the words and flung them back at her. "I thought those fine phrases were not of your invention. All the world ! That is, I suppose, Lady Adelaide, Mr. Blaise, a couple of common schemers ! It is natural they should think according to their minds ! . . . But you, you, Magdalen, my wife !"

He turned quickly from her, and stood with his back to her, staring out at the strip of fair blue sky above the courtyard walls.

"Why, why do you refuse me my own money then ? Why do you treat me as if I had no right to anything ? Oh, when I think I asked you for it ! I asked you for it !" She choked, and then went on, with injury renewed : "Why am I not to spend my own money upon others, to try and help others, when you——" a sob caught her in the throat, "when you don't mind buying yourself polo ponies with it ?"

He wheeled upon her. There was a lightning flash of amazement in his eyes, succeeded by the extreme of scorn. The passion that had leaped in such splendid fire before her had given place to coldness again—coldness behind which she vaguely divined something implacable, something terrible. He sat down at the table, drew a drawer and from it took another cheque-book which he laid before her. His movements were all very quiet.

"Come over here." He did not even raise his eyes. She would have liked to resist the peremptory order, yet she obeyed. She could not have done otherwise.

She was frightened. "Do you see this?—Look at the name inside, Cox and Company—my own bankers. Take it up, look at the stumps.—You will not? Come closer then, I will show you. See here: when I married you I had eight hundred pounds in that bank. I am poor compared to you; yes certainly; but I am not destitute, Magdalen, I need depend on no one. I have an income of my own. I lived on my salary—the salary you gave me—I have been economizing, investing all these years. I sold stock to buy those ponies. Read this: 'Captain Fortescue, Three hundred and thirty pounds.' I had a fancy to have a little play in my life again, after so much work. I have always liked a deal in horseflesh—I know I shall turn over a little money on them after I have ridden them—I choose to explain all this to you—Oh, but you must look."

She bent over the yellow cheque-book, cowed by his tone and look as he slowly turned over the stumps with his forefinger. They were docketed as methodically as those she had investigated for herself a little while ago.

"Hurlingham Club (stable expenses). Morris and Barnard (cigars). Cogswell and Harrison (cartridges). Then, with an indescribable sinking of shame, she read: "Christie, Manson and Co. (Italian writing-table), ninety guineas. And then again, "Warings (white bearskin rug)."

"Oh, Harry!" she cried.

He closed the half-empty cheque-book suddenly; drew the other towards himself and tore the written cheque out of it.

"That is the last cheque I shall write out for you," he said, as he pushed it across the table.

She stared at him, uncertainly. She had gained her point, she supposed, and he was giving her back, thus ungraciously, the control of her own. But she was not so

sure that it was going to be comfortable. Suddenly something she saw in his face brought back the sensation of unreasoning fear. He answered the look.

"I warned you," he said. "I warned you, Magdalen.—Hush, you have spoken, it is for me to speak now.—You have accused me of marrying you for your money. That is what you think I married you for."

She interrupted him :

"Harry, no, no ! I did not mean it. You married me for love, of course I know that."

"You are wrong. I loved you, oh yes, I loved you ! But I did not marry you because of that. I married you because I pitied you." He rose as he spoke and went on, his voice deepening : "That is my way. It has been my folly and my bane all my life, that I cannot bear to see a helpless creature in danger and not try and help it. I married you because I was sorry for you, afraid for you ; because your vanity and your money and your foolish youth made you a prey to every schemer, every glib adventurer."

The blood rushed to her face. She had a vision of him, in the Old Place, with the blind hound and the one-legged jackdaw. She thought of his stableful of sorry beasts ; of Mrs. Green, so stupid and cross that no one else would employ her ; of the half-witted garden boy, who never could be taught the difference between flowers and weeds. It was true : that was his way ! Humiliation seized her ; anger rushed back upon her. She, Magdalen, to be married out of pity !

"It is not true ! " she cried.

"It is true," he answered her steadily. "You have not often heard the truth, since your grandfather died ; you have not liked to hear the truth ; but you must hear it to-day, from me. I did not marry you because of my

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love. I would never have married you for that. When I married you I made a sacrifice——”

“Sacrifice!” she exclaimed shrilly.

“Yes, the sacrifice of my pride, of my independence.— And I made a mistake—I made a mistake,” he repeated heavily. “I thought to save you from those about you, who were working your ruin. I have failed: I cannot save you from yourself.” The fire began to glow in him again. “What did I want with your money? Ask yourself that. Do you think this luxury with which you are surrounded appeals to me? Do you think that I have bartered my life to you for the better brand of wine that I can drink out of your cellar, the grandeur of living in Berkeley Square, of having twenty servants about when I can do with one? You were so sure that I must be like the rest of your chosen friends, and making my profit out of you, that you did not even take the trouble to find out.—Hush, Magdalen, I say it is my time to speak now! You shall understand what it is you have accused me of. What greater shame can you cast at a woman, than to say she has sold her love? Why, you would draw your skirts together from the contaminating touch of any such poor creature, who had sold herself, were it for bread, were it for life! How much greater is the shame cast upon a man! You have dared accuse me of selling my manhood, of trafficking in caresses! You have dared think that any of the love I gave you with so lavish a heart, could be bought—bought with your miserable money!”

“Oh, Harry, don’t, don’t——”

She was thoroughly ashamed. She would have given years to have blotted out this hour of folly. Tears were running down her cheeks; she felt her lips quivering; she knew that she was a piteous and appealing spectacle,

and yet—wonder!—there was no movement in him towards her, no softening of his glance, or of his voice. She supposed that he wished to humiliate her still further make her apologize, sue for pardon. He might be more generous, more understanding.

After he had stopped speaking there was a long silence. She pulled a handkerchief out of her belt, wept into it. But so far from coming to her he turned to those odious cheque-books again and began sorting and selecting from different drawers. The sense of tension grew unbearable.

"Harry—don't let us quarrel!"

"Quarrel!" He cast down his eyes as she bent towards him, for it was true that the sight of her tear-stained face filled him with indescribable misery. "Is that all you see in what you have done—a quarrel?"

"Oh, Harry, don't go on like that!"—She had not the faintest realization of what was passing in his mind. Her fit of temper was over, she thought it was high time that his should be over too. She was tired, she wanted to make up. She could not conceive anyone resisting her, if she wanted to make up.—"What does it matter who said what? I was cross; but you were cross too. Dear old Harry——"

She wanted to sit on his knee and put her arms round his neck. A moment he sat, as if turned to stone, while she pressed against him; then he got up and put her from him—put her from him almost roughly.

"You don't understand," he said. "You have poisoned the wells."

He went out of the room, without another word. She stood, staring after him. Her lips began to tremble, her eyes to fill again. A wave of self-pity overwhelmed her. He had pushed her away from him . . . ! He had pushed her away when she wanted to kiss him! Nothing could

excuse that—no impulsive word of hers could ever have justified that! . . . The hall door clanged. She knew he had gone out. At the bottom of her heart there was miserable apprehension, and this increased it. He was dreadfully angry! She remembered his white face, and the haggard odd look he had given her; and the odd words he had spoken: "You have poisoned the wells!" What had he meant? She glanced at the table and saw the scattered papers lying about it and the half-pulled-out drawer. That he should have left this disorder was so unlike him that the creeping anguish of fear within her mounted a little higher still.

"He is most dreadfully angry," she said to herself again.

But as she looked at the cheque-books a new thought struck her: Mr. Blaise would be coming to receive his answer, and she had not after all drawn the matter clear. She lifted the cheque to Madame Radegonde and folded it, pondering. The last, Harry had said, he would ever write for her. . . .

Of course, he could only have meant that she must in future manage her own affairs and do as she liked with her own—that was because he was so angry. Would it make him quite, quite furious if she were to proceed without further consulting him? A moment she wavered. She took a step towards the chair, meaning to sit down and write a line putting off the philanthropist's visit, but the next moment her capricious mind veered to a fresh wind.

Harry had said that he had married her out of pity—Pity! He regarded her as a child, as a fool, the prey to every schemer! Were she to give in to him now it would be to admit the truth of every slighting accusation. . . . No, no! She would show him that she intended to manage her own affairs and choose her own friends.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MASTER GOES

DENVERS did not return for lunch. It was the first time that he had failed at a meal without letting her know. Magdalen, after vainly trying to cheat the discomfort that hung about her by extravagant shopping, came home and attired herself in her latest rest-gown for the dazzling of Mr. Blaise. She was irritable with her maid ; and, looking in the glass, became discontented with her own appearance. On the landing she crossed a footman laden with bandboxes, and remembered with loathing the unnecessary hats she had just ordered, which, on second thoughts, she was sure were hideous. There was one, at twenty guineas, with a feather so immense that it was destined to act as a boa. She could not conceive how she could have chosen anything so stupid and ostentatious.

When she went down to the morning-room, where she intended to receive Mr. Blaise, she was further annoyed to find that the four standard wistarias had not arrived. The room appeared to her unendurable without them. And when the visitor was announced, she turned a bored, not to say inhospitable face upon him.

At the sight of it, his heart sank. "It's all up," he said to himself ; and as he took hold of a light chair to sit down near her, his hand trembled so much that he feared she would notice it. But Magdalen was all ab-

sorbed in her own grievances. She turned her discontented eyes to stare at the blank space where a wistaria should have stood.

"Everything is going wrong to-day!" she was saying to herself. And, under the surface of vexation, there was the horrid gnawing anxiety. Harry had not returned.

Mr. Blaise, whose fortunes—never at lower ebb—hung upon this rich woman's whim, had here one of those inspirations which Fate, or some subtle intuition, not infrequently vouchsafed him in his moments of need.

"Dear lady," he said, "there is no need for you to speak. In very truth I am here to-day to say to you that I have come to realize that I have asked of you too much.—Too much of your generosity, too much of your trust in me! Forgive me. I was led away by your—your incomparable sweetness, your wonderful understanding. I had a sudden vision of what you, you alone, would achieve as the Queen, the moving spirit of so great a scheme. Common sense has been at work upon me since; I have sadly fallen from my soaring heights of enthusiasm."

He smiled indeed sadly, while the dense black eyes which no ray of light ever kindled, were watching with a desperation every shade passing upon her face.

She sat gazing down at her folded hands, listening. He saw the bored, almost sullen, expression give way; saw that his words at first surprised, then touched her; that sympathy for him, even pleasure in his company, was coming back to her.—Clearly he was on the right track. He drew the quick breath of a man who feels the relief from oppression, and proceeded:

"I have been taking myself to task very seriously, I assure you. 'It is almost,' I said to myself, 'as if you, Isidore Blaise, had been taking advantage of this most

gracious and disinterested lady, of her wonderful thought for others, her wonderful forgetfulness of self.'—Oh, I know that you would exonerate me, but I must not, I cannot let you put yourself in a position which so many might blame! I will bring my scheme to some hard business man"—his smile became accentuated in pathos—"who may think of the profit, whose keen money-making glance may see that the chances outweigh the risks! . . . For it is useless to deny that there are risks."

He paused. This was his utmost stretch of daring: were she to take him at his word, now, he had indeed burnt his ships.

But with this last phrase, Mr. Blaise had very successfully baited the trap. Never had his astuteness better served him. He was humble and straightforward; he did not hint at the restraint of marriage, nor obliquely taunt her, as on former occasions, with the difference between Mrs. Denvers and Miss Tempest. Already his attitude of deference, his words of admiration, as reverential as they were ardent, had been as balm to her wounded spirit. Now this withdrawal of his appeal, the admission of possible risk, seemed to her so strong a guarantee of good faith, that she flushed with a sense of triumph. "If Harry were here," she thought, "he would see that all my friends are not schemers."

"Mr. Blaise," she said nobly, "I have told you that my great desire was to help. I have not changed. You have shown me the way. If there is risk, I will take the risk."

The solemnity of this utterance was slightly marred by the fact that she said: "If there is wisk, I will take the wisk."

Mr. Blaise fell on his knee, caught her hand and kissed

it. It was perhaps, in spite of its flourish, one of the most spontaneous actions of his life.

"I worship you," he said with fervour.

Magdalen had been wishing, a moment before, for her husband's presence: had Denvers been on the scene, there was little doubt that Mr. Blaise would have gone downstairs with as much celerity as, a year ago, Mr. Derehall had gone overboard.—But Magdalen's instincts were quite acute enough to perceive that the philanthropist had very accurately described his own feelings at the moment. She had no objection to being worshipped.

As she went up to dress for dinner, life appeared to her distinctly more pleasant and interesting than a few hours before. Isidore had long remained discussing the details of "their plan"; and every phrase of his seemed to place her more securely on her pedestal. She was to be the leader of a great work, the centre of a thrilling society, the adored patroness of every genius in the kingdom. Her quarrel with her husband had receded into the background. It is astonishing how, according to our moods, the event which had seemed about to crush us will suddenly become unimportant. She had arranged a theatre party for that evening, and Clara, the two Spofforths and Mr. Dillwyn were dining with her early first.

Among her many faults, Magdalen could not count that of inconstancy; she was faithful to old friends, and in a society avid of perpetual change, feverish with emulation, she was content to keep to her own circle and preferred her familiars to any stranger, however high-placed.

She had just finished dressing when Harry's clean,

quick tread caught her ear from the adjoining room. It confirmed her optimistic mood that he should have remembered and returned in time for her early dinner. She dismissed her maid, and still seated at the dressing-table where she had been selecting jewels, she called out to him to come to her.

After a perceptible pause, he opened the door and entered. He was still in his grey morning suit. She turned, smiling. She was conscious of looking particularly attractive: the misty blue of her draperies and the green enamel band studded with pale sapphires in her hair, she knew, became her.—But the smile froze on her lips.

He was looking at her, not harshly, but with an air of great sadness, and as from a distance. And, behind the sadness, she felt something of decision, of relentlessness, of finality. Terror sprang upon her.

"What is it?" she said.

"I had forgotten the theatre to-night."

Her spirit rebounded at the everyday words.

"You have plenty of time," she said eagerly—"they won't be here for another half-hour."

"Half an hour——" he pondered. "Can you give me half an hour? Well, it ought to be enough. There is not much left to say: everything, really, was said this morning."

Her heart began to beat faintly.

"Aren't you going to dress?"

"Is it possible," he said, "that you think things can go on as usual between us?" He came a step nearer.

"Have you not given another thought to what passed to-day?"

"I don't know what you mean," she faltered. Then, like a child: "Don't frighten me, Harry!"

It was to touch him on his weak side. He drew a sharp breath; when she spoke like that, his anger died in him, and her need of him, his tenderness for her, threatened to overwhelm everything else. But he had spent the whole day facing the problem, and he had to come to a decision, not in resentment, not in wounded pride, but slowly, inevitably, tragically, out of his knowledge of her. If ever there was to be a chance for their joint happiness, now was the moment to fight for it.

"And did you think," he said at last, and he spoke pityingly, "that you could have your say and keep your husband?—When you taunted me with having married you for money, with having sold my love, you made it impossible for me to live under your roof, to be served by your servants, to eat the food you pay for—you made it impossible for me to hold you in my arms, to kiss you again."

She grew scarlet. That was why he had pushed her away!

"Do you mean that you are going to leave me?" Astonishment, incredulity drowned every other emotion.

"How can I stay with you? The facts remain unchanged.—You are rich and I am poor!"

Stammeringly she began to protest. He bore her down, catching up each halting phrase:

"Yes, now—now you say you did not mean it.—Now, you say that you had not understood—that you imagined. . . . Now, you say you trust me. But the next time you want something and I think it my duty to prevent your having it, the next time one of your . . . your sycophants makes an insinuation, the doubt will come back.—Oh, I say it will!" he lifted his hand as, once more, she interrupted in violent protestation, "I say it will, since such a doubt could once enter your thoughts."

Next time I opposed you—and if I remained I should oppose you—it would come again. Why, the very first moment I ever thwarted you, the day of our arrival here, the rift began: it has gone on widening. You do not care for your aunt, her presence is anything but a pleasure to you, yet you deliberately encourage her to remain on, against my wishes, in the house where I am supposed, after all, to be master—lest she, or anyone, should say that you were not as free as before your marriage! And that is the root of the matter: you are not as free. No man or woman can be as free after marriage as before. There can be no peace where there is a clashing of wills. For myself, I will not live, a cypher, beside a woman who expects her husband to be but the chief of her courtiers.”

She sprang to her feet.

“You mean to abandon me then?” she panted.

Her soul was whirled in a storm of contrary passions. She was hurt, insulted, terrified and made furious all at once by this man whom she loved.

“Abandon you? No.” Then steadily fixing her he spoke the words that he had rehearsed a hundred times that day: “Live with you now, sharing your riches, that I will not do. But wherever I go there will be a home for you. It will be a poor one, compared to this. You will have to give up your luxuries, you will have to depend on what I can give you—but it will not be penury. If you will come and live with me under my own roof, my wife——”

“You are mad—you are mad—you are mad!” She repeated the words with an ever increasing excitement.

He had made a movement as if to stretch out both his hands to her, but dropped them by his side and turned away, saying slowly:

“Good-bye, then, Magdalen.”

She swayed. A cry broke from her, wrung from that wayward heart which yet loved him.

"Oh, Harry, Harry!"

He stopped, and wheeled round quickly. There was a light in his eyes:

"I took your riches for love of you.—Now, if you love me, take my poverty!"

For one moment he thought that she would fling herself on his heart. But the next, he saw her stiffen herself, could almost, so intensely was his spirit seeking hers, see the cloud rise within her, darkening her thoughts, enveloping her and shutting her out from him. Her young face grew hard.

"You're too silly!" she said, shrugged her shoulders, and reseated herself at the dressing-table. From the threshold he spoke again.

"I shall write to you," he said, "as soon as I have found our home. And when you come to it, Magdalen, I shall be——" he paused again, "you will find me . . . waiting!"

As the dressing-room door closed, Magdalen, staring at herself unseeingly in the glass, said between her clenched teeth:

"I hate him!—Let him go!"

The next moment, a knock at the door and Diana's cheery voice demanding admittance, brought her to a vivid sense of the situation—the horrible, odious, insulting situation. The first thing, the only thing to think of was the safeguarding of her pride. Let no one imagine that she cared, let no one guess she was humiliated! The whole world must soon learn that he had left her; then the whole world should see how little this desertion touched her.

"Come in!" she cried. And, as the girl obeyed the summons, stood up smiling.

"My goodness——!" Diana stopped and stared.

"What is the matter?" Magdalen's voice was harsh.

"You're not painted, are you?" cried the frank Miss Spofforth. "I say, Mag, you know, you're looking too splendid! It's not fair on the rest of the world."

"Come along," said Magdalen, laughing.—She hoped Harry heard how gay and natural was that laugh.—"It's rather late, isn't it?"

She slipped her hand over Diana's plump bare arm, and ran with her, still laughing, out of the room. It was astonishing how much it helped her in her burning sense of injury, to know that she was "looking splendid."

Clara and Teddy Spofforth were waiting in the drawing-room; both were struck, even as Diana had been, by their hostess's brilliant looks. But Clara, with an intuition which the jovial brother and sister did not possess, glanced uneasily and anxiously at the over-scarlet cheeks and over-brilliant eyes. Magdalen was noisy too, laughing at nothing; unlike herself. The special charm of her personality had always been its delicacy, its subtlety, its almost shadowy loveliness, a nymph-like quality which gave something ethereal even to her naughtiest freaks. Magdalen, this evening, all chatter and dazzle like the most advanced of her modern sisters, presented a new and disquieting problem. Clara felt calamity in the air, and kept watching the door for her cousin's appearance.

The long June day was falling to its loveliest hour of rosy sunshine. The open windows of the vast room gave pleasantly upon the great trees of the square, and the very sound of the traffic that poured in seemed to have gathered into itself some gay element of summer, some joy of life.

Mr. Dillwyn was announced—by a footman—and, in the little clamour with which Magdalen, efficiently aided

by Diana, surrounded his arrival, the call of a cab-whistle rose piercingly from the doorstep below. Magdalen broke off in a sentence, and turned quickly.

"What was that?"

Clara alone noticed the haggard look of the eyes, the quivering lip.

"Sounds like somebody wanting a taxi," said Diana, moving briskly to the window. "I say! It's Smallwood!—You haven't forgotten you've asked us to dinner, have you, Mag?"

"I expect somebody's going out." Magdalen tried to speak in her most indifferent voice. But her heart was beating so fast it seemed to take her breath away.

"One portmanteau—two portmanteaux," announced the girl from her post of observation. And then, in a changed voice: "Why, it's Captain Denvers!" she exclaimed. "You never told us Captain Denvers was going away."

"Didn't I?" said Magdalen. "How stupid of me! Yes, he's going. I don't know where. I don't know for how long."

Clara rose involuntarily. Both the young men looked at the tips of their immaculate pumps. Then Dillwyn turned airily to Diana, who still stood open-mouthed, staring at her hostess.

"Jolly evening, isn't it?" For the life of him he could think of nothing else to say.

"You will have to put up with me alone this evening," Magdalen cried. "Oh, I forgot," as the door opened and Lady Adelaide appeared in splendour, "and Aunt Adelaide, of course.—How tiresome, we shall be a woman too many! We shall have to draw lots, or something——"

She hardly knew what she was saying. Anything to keep the sobs that were rising in her throat from breaking

out and disgracing her. Why did Clara look at her like that? Why did those stupid boys turn their eyes away?

The throbbing of the taxi at the door seemed to beat into her brain. It was moving away now, growing fainter and fainter, lost in the London roar. She put her hand out to clutch the side of the great Florentine table behind her.

"Aunt Adelaide!" she cried wildly, while the room swayed round with her, "we've a ticket to spare, do you think Uncle Simon—— Do, somebody, ring the bell!—Are we never to have anything to eat to-night?"

Smallwood appeared before Spofforth's finger had reached the wall. His wrinkled face was twisted into its most forbidding expression.

"Dinner is served, ma'am," he announced, fixing upon his mistress a gaze that had something piteous in its deep reproach.

"But where is Captain Denvers?" asked Lady Adelaide, bewildered.

It was the old servant who answered:

"The master is gone."

"Yes," echoed Magdalen in a high clear voice. "The—master—is gone!" She felt giddy no longer; fierce and desolate no longer; only hard and cold.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

A NOOK IN OLD GRAY'S INN

LARA MAYNE dismissed her cab at the Holborn gate and, stepping through its arched passage into Gray's Inn, left behind her, with almost startling suddenness, the roar, the rush and turmoil of the crowded highway. She walked slowly and gazed about her with curiosity, for it was the first time that she had penetrated into any of these peaceful backwaters of London's mighty stream—the ancient Inns.

The October sun, towards the setting hour, lay coldly yellow on old brick and stone. Life's fever, she thought, seemed to have forsaken this place; and then, with a pang, she asked herself why Harry, of all men she knew the most instinct with vitality, had chosen it for his solitary dwelling.

Since that June night of the theatre party—a night she could not think on without horror—she had seen next to nothing of Magdalen, and what she had seen was disconcerting. Harry she had not met again. But she had had two letters from him; the one briefly announcing that he would be away for some time and that he would let her know his permanent address, the other (received the day before) inviting her to come and see him.

"I have found," he wrote, "a funny old set of rooms and would like you to inspect them. Also, for other reasons, I want to see you."

Anxious as she was about him, and deeply disturbed by the disaster to his happiness, she had longed for this meeting. Yet, as the moment approached, she half dreaded it. Pensively she crossed the old-world courts, where little companies of pecking and strutting pigeons hardly fluttered from her advance and closed again behind her; traversed silent passages with here and there a glimpse of some immemorial tree, rising high and wide in an adjacent walk, till she reached the designated square.

On the western side, still slowly pacing, she came at length to the open stairway he had named in his letter; and here she hesitated a moment, gazing at the different names on the wall, until the words: "CAPTAIN DENVERS," newly painted in fresher white upon a denser black than the rest, seemed to leap at her. As she went up the wide stairs, each tread sounding unusually loud on the bare boards, she strove to get herself well under control.—Above all she must show no emotion, she told herself: Harry was proud and would resent sympathy.

On the topmost landing she stopped to breathe a moment, then pulled the old-fashioned bell.

This was an attic set, she noted, and wondered if his were direly tightened purse-strings. . . . Could that be why he had drifted hither? Poor Harry!

He opened the door himself, and, at first sight of him, all her tremors vanished. He looked so natural, somehow, strong and self-confident as ever; his greeting was so cordial! The good smile of old warmed her heart.

"Come in, come in!" he cried. "I am glad to see you." The clasp of his hands told her he spoke truth, and so did the ring of pleasure in his voice.

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He drew her through the brown lobby, already full of the dusk of the sinking day; then into a long room, low-ceiled with deep windows overlooking the gardens.

"Oh, Harry! . . ." she cried, and stopping, stared in delight and astonishment. The room was oak panelled from floor to ceiling; it had window-seats and an antique hearth blue-tiled; the air was fragrant with the scent of burning wood and the wholesome aromatic cleanliness of beeswax and turpentine—that polish that had given so incomparable a gleam to the age-dark woodwork. The heads of the century-old plane trees rose half-way across the purview of the windows. They were golden brown, bathed in the evening light against the autumn sky.

"Oh, Harry!" cried she again, "what an adorable old, unlikely place!—How airy! Why, you are living in the tree-tops, like Wendy! . . . And how good it smells!"

She paused, and her glance appraised more closely. Here stood revealed bits of furniture she knew well. They came from the old house—salvage from the ship that had gone down with Harry's fortunes on his father's death. She could, even further back in memory, have placed them again in the spacious rooms of that house of her race which had been the real home of her childhood. A swift melancholy fell upon her at the thought that it should be his fate to have this second wreck in his life; and quickly upon this came the realization, full of surprise, that he had settled himself here, with as much deliberation as if a return to his young wife were out of the question, and he were determined to make for himself a permanent dwelling.

Disconcerted, she sought vainly for some pleasant yet indifferent phrase to break the silence which had fallen between them. Then the sight of a sheaf of chrysanthem-

mums and beech leaves, flaming in a copper vase, gave yet another swing to her mind. How he had prepared for her coming! Her heart began to beat quickly. She felt almost faint, and put out her hand for a chair.

"No, don't sit down yet," he said, man-like all un-noticing. "I want to show you the rest before the light goes down.—This is my bedroom—not much to see here. But I like a camp-bed and barrack furniture: it puts me in mind of the old days. I should always use the big room for dining—kind of living-room, you know, but—" They were back in it as he spoke; he crossed it and hesitated a moment, his hand on the handle of another door. "I have got two sets of chambers, really—the whole third-pair, you know, as they call it. So I've been able—" he paused again and flung open the door.

Clara gave a gasp as she crossed the threshold. Her first impression was as if from this London haunt, she had walked into the bedroom of a country manor-house.

It took her an appreciable moment to realize that it was the twin room of that which she had just left; the same green trees looking in over the same deep window-seats; the same ancient panelling, the same carved chimney. But here all was white. Even the boarded floor had been enamelled white, and was strewn with white fur rugs. The only notes of colour were in the faintly tinted brocade of curtains and bed-spread and in the bowls and vases of flowers lavishly set on dressing-tables or chimney-piece—an exquisite casket awaiting the jewel it was to shelter!

While some outer sense was noticing every detail, Clara's innermost self was struggling to control the keenness of the pain that had seized her after her brief moment of illicit joy. No, the flowers had not been for her! Her coming or going was nothing to him. Her

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lonely life was to gain no hint of sweetness in helping the man she loved to bear his loneliness—as comrades may. She had no place in his scheme of life. A moment she wondered whether there had been a secret reconciliation, and this mad young couple had taken to meeting in the way of those who should not meet. It would be quite in Magdalen's vein. But no, to associate such childish and undignified doings with Harry was impossible. Even as she rejected the absurdity, he enlightened her.

"I know," his voice said behind her, "that she has been in Berkeley Square since Saturday."

Clara forgot her own trouble. She wheeled quickly upon him.

"Harry, you don't mean——" she exclaimed, as a glimmering of his extraordinary plan began to break upon her.

He answered her astonishment.

"Yes—I mean her to come and live with me here, sooner or later," he said quietly. "I wrote to her a week ago."

"Well?"

Clara was glad for the moment to speak in monosyllables.

"She has not answered. She probably will not answer—yet."

He led the way back into the living-room, and pushed a chair towards the hearth for his guest. The tea was laid on a low table near at hand; a copper kettle was singing on a tripod before the fire; he put it on the logs.

In silence Clara watched him kneeling by the fire, methodically rinse out the teapot, measure the tea and pour in the bubbling water. Then she broke out:

"Harry, you're mad! Mad to think of such a thing!"

He sat back on his heels and glanced up at her with a

transient look of trouble : those had been Magdalen's very words on the day of their quarrel. Then he put the lid on the teapot, the kettle back on the tripod.

"It's the only solution," he said.

She felt the finality in his tone, even while she objected :

"But it's no solution, my poor dear boy ! How could you think such an absurd plan could work ? "

He now sat down in the arm-chair opposite to her.

"Of course, I can't expect you to see things as I do," he said thoughtfully. Then, in another tone, quickly, as if more to himself than to her : "It's got to work ! "

"But, Harry ! "

He was on his feet again :

"How do you like your tea ?—No sugar, I think ? "

"Harry——" she said again. His hand trembled as she took the cup from him. Something in her look moved him to a confidence he had not thought possible to make to anyone, but he still hesitated.

"You're a good woman, Clara," he said, with seeming irrelevance, and then : "One of us has got to give way," he went on, and added after a pause, "and I can't."

Clara absently sipped her tea, her mind working at fever heat. This quarrel must indeed have been grave to have driven her practical, level-headed cousin to such extremes. Unexpectedly, he answered her unspoken thought :

"It's the cursed money ! They've turned her head over it. She suspected me, accused me——"

He broke off. Clara stared up at him, her eyes filled with a softness that very few ever saw there. This was scarcely news to her—well did she remember the scene in the white boudoir ; but Magdalen's tempers and moods, they were part of herself, it was folly to notice them. Beneath it all there was in the child a good heart

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and a loyal one. She said as much aloud ; he interrupted her :

" I cannot be doubted by my wife—even as a mood. I must never find myself in such a position again."

Clara placed the cup on the floor and, rising, came to stand beside him, the better to emphasize her remonstrance :

" But, Harry—this is—what shall I say ?—the theme of a ballad, not of practical life. This is medieval ! " She laughed in spite of herself. " Magdalen owes a duty to her position, to her estate as well as to you. You do not expect her to dispossess herself surely ? My dear boy, Lady Adelaide would instigate a lunacy inquiry——! "

" Sit down, Clara. No, I'm not a lunatic. There is nothing extravagant in my intentions. Magdalen's estate shall not suffer. But it comes to this——" he straightened himself and gazed beyond her, almost, she thought, as if the vision of his wife had risen before him. " For her sake I consented to share her riches. But after what has occurred she has to share my poverty." He smiled and made a gesture towards the surrounding—" this sort of poverty—for the present. Afterwards——" he paused.

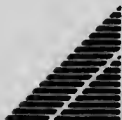
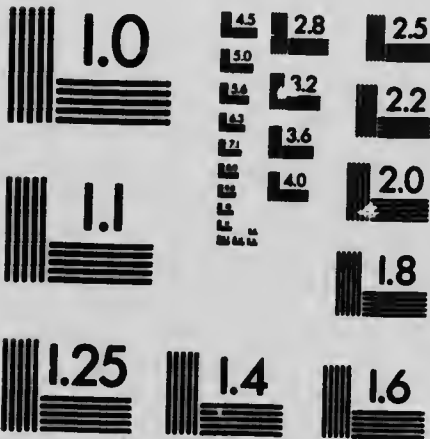
" Yes, afterwards, Harry. After this lesson, this—forgive me, dear boy—this comedy, how will you be any better off ? "

" I shall be immensely better off. In the first place, I shall be so in a sense you do not mean by your words. I am already very much better off pecuniarily since I took this decision. I never was in such abject poverty, you know, as Lady Adelaide and that poor girl of mine believed." His voice took an indulgent not to say a tender inflection. " I had a little capital left, after the smash up, and had more put by, at the time of our marriage ;



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and there's a fellow or two who believe in me, and between us we have started an enterprise—yes, Clara, you behold in me the promoter, the manager of the 'Ceres'—an agricultural insurance firm built on up-to-date lines. It's going to be a success. In fact it is already a success."

"In three months," she said doubtfully. He corrected her :

"No, it's older than that—I started it the day after our engagement—and now it's begun to pay." And meeting the fresh amazement in her gaze, he proceeded, in the same quiet manner : "Why, surely you ought to know me better by this time ! Did you think I should ever be content to be dependent on—on anybody ? In a little while, a very little while I think," his eyes brightened as he spoke, "if things continue as they promise, I shall be able to meet my wife's inconvenient riches with, oh, not wealth to match hers, but sufficient," he paused again and his voice dropped, "sufficient," he said slowly and almost reluctantly, "for no one ever to be able to tell me again that I find profit where I love."

Here he fell into silence ; and the firelight, leaping on his set face, showed her, who watched him, that, after all, he had changed. In this moment of deep thought, the animation, the look of determined vigour had vanished. She saw that the fine-cut face she loved was thinner, looked older ; that the lines of endurance had deepened, that there was a new sadness about the mouth. "Oh, he has suffered !" she said to herself, and anger against the flighty, irresponsible spoilt child of fortune who had brought havoc in this strong life, seized upon her almost with a sense of physical burning.

"So you see I'm not so mad," he resumed, breaking in upon her tumultuous emotions. As he smiled he looked young again and full of hope. A pang seized her,

lest he should fail ; yet at the same time, deep down in the recesses of her soul, was there not a mean, unacknowledged wish lurking ? No, no, she could not admit that. If such a thought could rise it was something to walk over, to stamp out of life. Impulsively she cried :

" If I can help——! "

" Perhaps you might," he pondered. " But above all, *pas de zèle*, Clara !—But I'm neglecting you shamefully. What—no muffin ? A cake, then."

He had provided a collection of that kind of confectionery which revolts the soul of woman, however it might delight the schoolboy. She took the smallest pink-sugared atrocity—she would have eaten a plateful, had she thought to please him. He pulled the tawny curtains across the now misting window ; lit a shaded electric lamp and came back to the arm-chair opposite to her. The talk drifted pleasantly, vaguely. But just towards the end of her stay, he reverted to the question always uppermost in both their minds.

" There's a good deal in my favour, just now. I am building on that paper, that thing of Blaise's, you know, *Men and the Hour*."—She stared at him a second, not understanding. " I mean," he laughed, " it's bound to go smash. And before that happens, Magdalen will want someone to help her."

" But Blaise may ruin her ! " she exclaimed, practical.

He retorted coolly :

" Oh, her fortune will take a good deal of ruining. There's too much money, anyway."

She shifted to another objection.

" Magdalen's very proud. Do you think she would come because of failure ? "

" So am I, very proud," he said. The words had a hard ring.

She did not answer, but sat watching his face once more as he stared into the fire. All at once she saw a change, and an expression of extraordinary tenderness spread over it.

"There will be another reason," he said, "besides the outside troubles, that will bring her to me. She will come to me in the end, because she wants me——" he paused again, "wants me everyway."

As later on, when she had risen to go, they stood together on the stair landing. "I am glad you like my rooms," he said. "It was old Mr. Pawle who gave me the idea of Gray's Inn. He believes I want them as offices for the 'Ceres.'"—Denvers gave a little laugh. "Certainly he did not realize it was for that." As he spoke he pointed to the lintel of the door, where Clara read with astonishment the inscription—which she had failed to notice on entering, and which was more explicit than the one at the stair entrance: "CAPTAIN AND MRS. DENVERS."

"My dear Harry!" she exclaimed involuntarily, while to herself, "How sure he is of her, in spite of everything!" she thought.

His last words as he took leave of her at the gate were wistful yet still secure:

"She won't find it such a bad place, will she?—Not Mayfair, of course, but there can be nothing trivial or depressing in an old-world haunt like this. I think it's the kind of funny old nook she could be happy in."

Clara Mayne, safe in the cab, cried all the way back to her lonely flat in Victoria Street. My God, my God! How happy could she have been, in "that funny old nest"—with him!

CHAPTER II

FRIENDLY PLOTS

"WELL, I call it just dreadful, and so does Chin-chin.—Chin-chin says he would not let any little wifey of his behave like that! But then——" Miss Spofforth rose from her seat by the tea-table, mechanically handed her mother another quarter muffin, and possessed herself of that lady's empty cup, pursuing the argument as she did so: "But then Chin-chin isn't such a silly fool of a little doggy as to go on like Harry! He wouldn't abandon a beautiful Chinese Plinness spousie, if he had one. (He hasn't, you know, he's a little bachelor!)"

Diana was fond of conveying her meaning thus vicariously through Chin-chin, an irresponsible mouth-piece which allowed her a freedom of utterance she could not have enjoyed in any other manner. She now, however, dropped her bantering tone to continue with unwonted earnestness: "Harry's just as bad as she is, if not worse, I think."

"I quite agree," said Mrs. Spofforth comfortably, from the depths of her special arm-chair.

"Can't you make him hear reason, Clara? You're his cousin.—If he were my cousin," announced Diana, "I'd give him no peace, never leave him alone! In fact I am not sure," she pondered, "that Chin-chin and I will not have a lilly talkee with him, soon.—I say, Clara, it's not even as if she were a suffragette."

" Shockin', shockin' ! " interposed the Bishop's widow. If anything could rouse the placid, benevolent, easy-loving lady, it was the burning question of female emancipation. She shook her head and looked more extraordinarily like the late Queen Victoria than ever.

" Mag isn't a bit of a ' gette,' you know," her daughter's high-pitched tones were proclaiming. " She's a real old-fashioned kind is Mag. Can't get on without a man without lots of men. Wants to be worshipped all the while, like a medieval lady.—No harm, mamma!—She's awfully in love with Harry, you know. She liked awfully having him to take care of her and all that ; and, if you ask *me*, she is just pining for him, now. And I'm sure he is badly wanted in Berkeley Square.—Ready for number three, mamma ? "

" With a little more sugar in it, my dear "

Mrs. Mayne sat silent. Her face was troubled. She had come for no other reason than to consult upon the very topic under discussion with these kind, everyday, common-sense people, who were not only Magdalen's relatives, but among the few disinterested friends the heiress possessed ; and yet now that she was here, she was at a loss what to say.

It was a month since her first visit to Harry's " nook in the tree-tops—she had been there many a time there after—and events, though moving round Magdalen with a rapidity that was startling enough, so far seemed to foreshadow nothing in the shape of the desired solution. Magdalen, feverishly engaged in endless futilities, now excited hostess of extravagant entertainment, now deeply concerned patroness of necessitous unrecognized genius ; harassed, wrangled over, almost bullied at times by those who the next moment were ready to

fall at her feet in hysterical worship Magdalen showed no disposition to seek her natural refuge.

Clara's heart had felt heavier each time she had crossed the threshold of her cousin's rooms under the eaves—swept, garnished, firelit, flower-decked every day . . . in vain expectation!

"Dear me," said Mrs. Spofforth, "it's a very sad state of affairs, I'm sure. I quite agree with Diana, somethin' ought to be done. Have you any idea what it's all about, Mrs. Mayne?"

Clara hesitated. To discuss the wound to Harry's pride, and the singular resolution it had brought about, was an impossibility—above all in this Mid-Victorian atmosphere. Poor Harry would instantly and irretrievably have been classed as a dangerous eccentric. But Diana came to the rescue.

"Why, ma, what a question! As if Mr. Blaise and Lady Adelaide, between them, were not enough to drive anyone out of the house! Ain't that it, Clara? Not to speak of all the lesser fry.—Oh my goodness, Chin-chin, you and I won't forget that last 'At Home' day in a hurry, shall we, my Plincee? Chin-Chin says he'd never been in such a rabble in his life, he never did!—There was a creature called McFein, Clara. My dear Clara, he had the whole front of his frock-coat stuffed with violets—fact, I assure you! He's got a play coming out, it seems. We know who's paying for that—don't we, Chin-chin? And there was that Blaise walking about, and shaking hands as if he were the master of the house, and introducing such odd people to Magdalen—and the other queer young men glaring at him as if they could tear him in pieces. My belief is—and Chin-chin's too—they're

quarrelling over her, just like common low doggies over a bone. Then think of Lady Adelaide—did ever anybody see anything like her new clothes?—and her little theatre parties, and her little suppers at the Carlton, and—well, we know who pays for that also, don't we, Chin-chin! Mag's money must be just pouring out—what with her and Mr. Blaise—have you noticed his new fur-lined coat? Clara?—and his new philanthropic-literary what's-his-name . . . the paper, you know."

"I won't allow it in the house," said Diana's mother with great severity. "Teddy brought in a copy one evening, and I was shocked. Quite shocked. There was an article in it—er—er—about marriage and the—the race—(the children, you know, dear) most indelicate—most impious!"

"That's Eugenics, ma," chuckled Diana.

"I don't know what they call it, my dear," proceeded the Victorian lady with increased severity. "But all I can say is, that I really felt it an effort to shake hands with Mr. Blaise the other day."

"Ah, you didn't read the leader on Divorce," Diana winked at Clara. "That was—oh yes it was, you know!"

Mrs. Spofforth grew flustered.

"I strongly object to your even glancing at such things, Diana."

"But it's Mag's own paper, ma! And, as far as I can make out——" Miss Spofforth took a sweet biscuit from the table and squatted on the hearth to tempt her pampered dog: "Come, Chin-chin, we needn't trouble about divorce, till we are married, need we, my little bachelor Plincee; as far as I can make out," she proceeded, glancing up with shrewd eyes at her visitor.

"very few people do read it, anyway. Teddy says the

look at it, as a joke, occasionally at the clubs, but that he believes it's a rotten failure."

"Diana—rotten!"

"Well, Teddy says so, ma.—I say, Clara, will they leave Mag a penny between them all?"

"Couldn't you interfere, my dear?" suggested the matron again. "Magdalen might listen to you, because you're littery and all that? Couldn't you make her understand how unbecomin' it is of her, to keep her husband out of the house, by this sort of thing. She was bent on marryin' him, you remember, and I'm sure, from all Di tells me, he's made her a very good husband."

"Oh, I tried, in vain, to speak," said Clara. She laughed a little at the recollection. "Being his cousin, I thought I might venture, you know. I told her I had been to see his rooms. And she said: 'How vewy, vewy intewesting. Tell me all about them.' After that, of course, I couldn't say another word. She had her most elfish, not-human look."

"Oh, I know," interrupted Miss Spofforth, "like Andersen's Ell-Maiden—charming in front, all hollow at the back."

"Diana," said her mother uneasily, "you do say the most extraordinary things!—Though it's quite true, Mrs. Mayne, Magdalen is growing very thin."

"The next time I tried to make her hear reason," pursued Clara, "it was on the head of this wild venture of hers.—As you say, Diana, her money is flowing out like water to keep this silly paper afloat. I asked her if she did not see how right Harry had been about it. She looked at me as if she were two years old——"

"We know that look too," put in Diana, dancing Chin-chin on her lap, "and we always feel as if we could do a little biting when she puts it on.—And what did she say?"

"She said"—again the rueful laugh shook Clara—"Oh, but we are doing such wonderful good! What does it matter about money, so long as one can help, just a little—in this sad, sad world of struggle and failure!"

Mrs. Mayne took off Magdalen's lisp very cleverly much to Diana's delight. But Mrs. Spofforth remained with corrugated forehead, in distressful mental contemplation.

"And then, yesterday," Clara resumed, "I spoke again. I thought it might be a good moment, for I'd heard there had been considerable disagreement between Isidore Blaise and some of his staff. And I felt sure that Magdalen was finding out that newspaper proprietorship was not all joy. But at my first word, she got up and walked out of the room."

"My!—That was a clincher," said Diana.

"My dear," murmured Mrs. Spofforth, leaning across her daughter to address her visitor in horror-stricken, hesitating tones, "do you think there is any reason, really—I mean any dreadful cause—for your cousin's having left his wife? Do you think there's anything between the unhappy child and that—that abominable Mr. Blaise?"

"Ma——!" screamed Diana. "Chin-chin is a moral little dog, and he says he can't possibly listen to such improper conversation. *He'll* have to leave the room."

"My dear Diana!" Mrs. Spofforth was much agitated. "I'm sure I'd be the last—I'm sure, Mrs. Mayne understands, I'd never say anything indelicate. But, just between ourselves, it's all so odd, and uncomfortable. And Adelaide's no use."

"If you ask me," cried the irrepressible Diana, "I think it's Lady Adelaide that's gone on Mr. Blaise——"

"Diana, do be quiet!" said Mrs. Spofforth irritably.

Clara smiled, rather wanly; the conversation touched on points affecting her too deeply for her to share Diana's jocular outlook.

"Magdalen just looks on Mr. Blaise as she does on the rest of them. He ministers to her vanity, that is all," she said, with a certain rebuke in her manner. "But——" she paused and went on slowly: "I'm not so sure about him. I don't trust Isidore Blaise." She paused again and added: "I don't trust Lady Adelaide either."

"My dear!—She's my dear husband's cousin. And I was at school with her. I'm sure——"

Diana interrupted this testimony to Lady Adelaide's character with cheerful ruthlessness:

"I always liked Captain Denvers, and I think it's a shame. But I don't believe Magdalen's as bad as she seems. I think, if you ask me, she's just burning for a reconciliation. Something must be done, as ma says. Look here, we'll have to make them meet. I know! Let's give a dinner, and ask them both. Oh yes, they'll come."

"He'll come," said Clara. "But she's capable of walking out of the room as soon as she sees him."

"Not a bit of it," said Diana decisively. "None of you know how to manage Mag. It's the easiest thing in the world. I'll ask him first, and ask her to come and meet him; and when she refuses I'll just tell her she's afraid and that, anyhow, perhaps it is all for the best, as it might look very odd. Then see if she does not come like a shot! Oh, of course, we shall expect you, Clara. And I'll ask Sir Simon—for you, ma! That will be nice," she mocked. "Of course we won't have Lady Adelaide."

"I shall be very, very glad to see poor Simon," said Mrs. Spofforth reproachfully. "I think Adelaide is

treating him most unkindly. I hear he's gone to live in chambers."

"Not that Magdalen hasn't asked him to stay too," Diana assured her. "But, like Captain Denvers, he can't stand the company—Yah, pah!"

Having elicited a prompt and, as Clara had foreseen, a favourable answer from Harry Denvers, to the invitation to meet his wife at dinner, Diana proceeded to her task of securing Magdalen's presence. She determined to undertake it in person, but to her surprise, found that there was no need for any of the diplomacy she had planned.

Magdalen was pale and heavy-eyed; greeted her listlessly and allowed all Diana's preliminary attempts at cheerful conversation to drop. Then, in her own brisk way, the girl plunged into her errand.

"I say, Mag, we've asked your husband to dine on Thursday, and we want you to come too. It's a long time since you've met, ain't it?" she added ingenuously.

A tide of colour rushed to Magdalen's face. Diana held her breath, awaiting the explosion. But then, as she told herself afterwards, it was always the unexpected that happened with Mag.

"I will come. Oh, I will come!"—And, as Diana rose, anxious to depart, lest any further words should spoil such a satisfactory state of affairs, the heiress flung her arms round her, and pressed a kiss upon her fresh cheek.

By special request, on the night of the dinner, Clara arrived early. Miss Spofforth, with a flushed face, alone

in the drawing-room, was busily engaged in moving furniture: so intent upon her occupation was she that, without other greeting, she seized her guest by the arm and dragged her across the room.

"I say, Clara, look here—is that a cosy corner? That's where I intend the reconciliation to take place. On that very spot. Come and sit down for a moment.—Quite screened off, you see.—Aren't the chairs soft! And that cushion—melting! It's Chin-chin's favourite. And, look, just a bunch of roses on the little table. And, behind, on the easel—Clara, you're not looking!—the easel with 'Wedded' on it! They can't help looking at it. Don't think they can resist that, do you? And you—do you know what you've got to do? You've got to be at the piano, and play something—something very lovey-dovey. And Teddy and I, and Sir Simon and mamma will start a game of bridge. Don't you think I've thought out everything?"

"I think you're a dear girl," said Clara, and patted the plump arm. Diana chuckled excitedly.

"Oh, you don't know all. Come to the fire. I say, isn't it horribly cold? Don't mind Chin-chin's growling, he's only afraid we shall move him away.—Naughty little stew-boy!" This address was merely parenthetical, even the importance of Chin-chin paled before his mistress's benevolent preoccupation. "I say—do you know," proceeded the young lady confidentially, "I believe Magdalen's getting a little bit sick of things. She seemed awfully keen to come, and she didn't ask me to invite her horrid Aunt Adelaide. In fact I think," said Diana, winking with both eyes, "she's precious glad to come without her!—And I've ordered such a nice little dinner! Look here, I've got the menu. I always keep one to gum in the book. It amuses mamma, on a wet day.

There's just time, I think, to read it to you. Now, attention! *Potage à la Bonne Femme*. One for Mag!—*Sole à la Concorde*—eh? *Pigeons aux olives*! What do you think ma wanted? a *Vol-au-Vent*, because the cook does them so well. But I said: 'No, ma, there's been too much *vol-au-vent* about the whole business already. And then the cook said—oh, my goodness, you'd never guess: 'Why not 'ave them *Tournedos à la Financière*, you liked so much the other night, mum?' I yelled. Poor thing, she thought I had gone mad. '*Tournedos à la Financière*'—such an allusion!"

Although Diana joked, it was clear that, characteristically, she was convinced of the importance of each item in her reconciliation feast.

Clara laughed, and the girl went on eagerly:

"Wait till you see the *Ortolans sur Canapé* go round. A little couple on each piece of toast, so cosy and confiding!"

The ponderous appearance of Mrs. Spofforth, and simultaneously a ring of the bell, put an end to any further private conversation. Diana smuggled her menu out of sight and, when Magdalen presently entered, turned with an air of elaborate detachment to greet her.

Magdalen came in with slow step, her eyes fixed as if on some distant object. She was all in white and looked unusually slender; rather frail, indeed, with a vivid spot of colour on each cheek which gave her almost a hectic look. Clara saw nevertheless, how, in spite of her deliberately dreamy gaze, the young wife was instantly aware that her husband was not yet present; she marked the quick breath of relief, followed by a shadow of anxiety. "She's afraid, yet longing, to meet him," was her thought. In the little fuss which Sir Simon's entrance now occasioned, Diana pulled her fiercely by the sleeve, whispering:

"Clara, Clara, look! Do you see what she's got on? My dear, it's her wedding-gown!"

Mrs. Mayne gazed at Diana's smiling face, while she was conscious of a stab at her own heart. Yet she wanted Harry's happiness—oh, she wanted it with all her strength, in spite of that traitor in the camp!

"How de do—How de do—How de do?" Sir Simon was distributing impatient greetings until he suddenly recognized his niece, when he drew back his two extended fingers and glared at her for a moment without speaking. "So, it's you, is it?" he snapped at length. "Where's Adelaide, hey?"

"Aunt Adelaide's gone to a rehearsal with Mr. Blaise, uncle."

"Ah, yah pah, yah pah! I am extremely displeased. I have not seen Adelaide for four days. I might be dead and buried for all anybody cares."

"Captain Denvers," announced the neat parlour-maid.

CHAPTER III

A FRUITLESS ARMISTICE

"MY dear," said Diana after dinner, as she and Clara paused on the landing, before following Magdalen and Mrs. Spofforth into the drawing room, "wasn't Sir Simon a blessing? There he stood sputtering and yah-pahing, and it quite covered up that dreadful moment when Captain Denvers came in the room.—Did you see how he stood in the door, as if he had been brought up short, and just devoured Magdalen with his eyes?"

Clara nodded. She had seen.

"He looked as white as a sheet," proceeded Diana unctuously, "I could have shaken Magdalen, when, with that kind of struck-silly, wondering air of hers, she just said: 'How do you do?' and turned and did just the same to Teddy! But still, she did put on her wedding gown—that must mean something, don't you think?"

"I don't know what she means," said Clara slowly. Nobody could ever quite gauge the intention underlying Magdalen's actions. She was capable, the elder woman thought bitterly, of having donned that bridal finery just to taunt the man to whom she had vowed herself in it.

"And how do you think the dinner went off?" inquired Diana wistfully, after a little pause. Her menu had fallen flat, she thought. Captain Denvers, who had been sitting between her and Clara, had eaten scarcely

anything, and Magdalen had not, as far as Diana could perceive, uttered one single spontaneous word, in spite of Teddy's unwonted efforts.

"Oh, my dear," said Clara kindly, "it won't be your fault if things don't go right. And, after all, I don't think it looks so unpromising. We must manoeuvre them into that *tête-à-tête*. I'd better go in and draw Magdalen into her corner, hadn't I? so as to be ready for Harry."

Magdalen allowed herself listlessly enough to be piloted to the desired spot. She sat down and stared at the picture on the easel, and then said, with an air of indifference, that it was just what the dear Spofforths would have had! That she was sure that there must be a "Huguenot" and a "Black Brunswicker" somewhere about.

On this unpromising beginning the parlourmaid handed coffee, and Magdalen's refusal afforded a better opening.

"No coffee?" asked Clara, stirring her fragrant cup.

Magdalen let her head drop wearily back against the vaunted cushions. "No, it keeps me awake.—I've been sleeping so badly."

"You?—Oh, that's horrid!"

With one of her abrupt changes of mood, Magdalen sat up and fixed her companion with feverish eyes:

"I don't know what's the matter with me!—Do you know, this dress is simply falling off me. I haven't worn it since Christmas. Don't you think I look like a scarecrow?"

"I think, my dear, you're a very foolish woman."

But fate again intervened between Mrs. Mayne and

her well-meant endeavour. The trim parlourmaid came flouncing up behind the screen with a letter on a tray which she presented to Mrs. Denvers.

"A messenger boy has just brought this for you, ma'am. They've sent him on from Berkeley Square, because his order to wait for an answer, he says."

Magdalen seized the letter from the salver, and without attempting to open it: "There's no answer," she said irritably. "You can tell him so."

"You are accustomed to this kind of thing, I see," said Mrs. Mayne pointedly, as the maid withdrew.

"They leave me no peace!" cried Magdalen. She tore open the envelope, glanced at its contents and dropped the sheet from her fingers.

"Can I be of any help?" suggested Clara after a pause. "I've been long in the profession, and I have got good experience of its worries."

"Oh, read it if you like." Magdalen leaned back again and watched her companion pick up the note.

Clara glanced first at the signature—Herbert Rosenbaum—and then at the last sheet.

"'I am quite sure,'" she read under her voice, skimming the words, "'it is not with your approval, or even with your cognizance, that the editor of *Men and the Hour* should treat me in this unfair, ungentlemanly manner. . . . I will call on you to-morrow at one o'clock. . . . I recognize no authority but yours. . . . I'd no idea," said Clara at last, laying the missive on Magdalen's knee, "that you had anything to do with that little man."

"He's making an etching of me," said Magdalen faintly. "And he's Art Critic on my—on the paper, and he will drop in at lunch-time—and criticizes my wine and objects to meeting Mr. McFein."

"I see." Clara could not restrain a note of sarcasm. "And Mr. McFein drops in at dinner-time, and criticizes the cooking. And Isidore Blaise drops in at all hours and criticizes—your husband."

Magdalen sat erect.

"How dare you?"

But Clara, smiling, laid a hand on her arm.

"Oh, my dear—there are a thousand ways of criticism. Don't *I* know! It is my profession. Dear Magdalen, you have let these people get beyond you. They presume on your youth, and your inexperience and——" she paused and proceeded, in a lower voice, but emphatically, "on your unprotected situation."

Magdalen had listened with downcast eyes. Presuming on your youth and inexperience! Was it not in some such words that Harry had warned her? But at the last phrase the anger and desolation which had haunted her in secret ever since the breach came over her with fresh anguish. It was by her husband's own deed that she was left thus unprotected.

"I can't imagine——" Clara's voice broke in on her troubled thought. "I cannot understand, of all the mad schemes in the whole world, what bewitched you to want to own a paper."

Magdalen turned sharply:

"I don't expect you to understand. My desire was to help, without inflicting the insult of charity, those unrecognized intellects—and——"

"You need not finish, my dear," interrupted Clara. "I recognize the phrase. Isidore's doing from beginning to end—for——"

"I beg your pardon!" Magdalen interrupted in her turn, hotly. "It was I—I, myself, and if you want to know what started me, it was the sight—shall I ever

forget it?—of Jerrold Marvell's famished face that day——" She broke off; in the defence of her wounded vanity, she had forgotten for the moment that the man who had been the initial reason of her philanthropic enterprise, had been the one of all her protégés whom she had failed to benefit. In vain she had written. In vain Blaise had, at her order, hunted up his old haunts and his few associates. Marvell had evaporated like a morning mist. The Editor of *Men and the Hour* had not slipped so good an opportunity and darkly hinted at "Tragedy of too late!"

Clara supplemented the pause, saying with a smile

"I think Harry's method was the best."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, my dear, that while you are spending thousands unsuccessfully—except in so far as Mr. Blaise and a few others are concerned—Harry, with twenty pounds discreetly administered through me, has been the instrument of mending the rift in the lute and the fortune of your poet—as you were fond of calling him."

"But—but——" the other stammered. The blush rushed over her face in waves. "Harry? How did Harry come to have dealings with Jerrold Marvell?"

"Oh—he just saw the little creature wanted help and he helped him, the right way. And what's more, we found out Jerrold's relations—quite nice, respectable, prosperous shopkeepers in Cardiff—and he's been prevailed upon to go back to them. And now he is living in position of affluence, is taking up national politics, has written sonnets on the Spirit of Old Cymru, which is going round of the Chapels."

"I never heard a word of it," said Magdalen faintly.

"Of course not, it was all in the halfpenny press, but you'd never have recognized 'Little Davy Evans'."

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Wales' new singer ! ' Jerrold Marvell was a poetical licence—Harry and I had a good laugh over it."

" Harry and you——" repeated Magdalen slowly. Their eyes met. In Clara's a sombre fire began to burn.

" Yes, Harry and I," she repeated.

" You see a good deal of my husband, then."

" I see my cousin from time to time——" Clara paused and then went on, in the clear rather sententious way characteristic of the woman who had long had to win her daily bread out of words : " Yes, I run in of an afternoon sometimes and we have a chat ; and when I think he's working too hard, I coax him to come with me to the play—I have endless tickets, you know. We are two lonely people——"

Magdalen suffocated.

" How touching ! " she sneered.

All at once the suppressed passion rose overwhelmingly in Clara.

" Oh, Magdalen," she exclaimed, and the fact that she still spoke in lowered accents, almost in a whisper, seemed only to increase the fierce emphasis in her voice, " Oh, Magdalen, you fool ! Shame on you to have had such treasures to your hand and cast them from you !—Sit down—Magdalen, you are tearing the lace of your wedding-dress—sit down, you shall listen. Shame on you, I say, for the way you have treated the most loyal, the most disinterested of men ! Oh, Magdalen, you fool, to have had love like that and have let it go out of your life !—Hush ! "

She pressed her hand on Magdalen's knee to keep her seated, even as she rose herself ; the door had opened to admit Sir Simon, followed by Denvers and their young host.

Instantly Diana filled the room with her cheerful bustle :

" Here you are, at last ! Ma is dying for her bridge—

aren't you, ma? You needn't despise us, Sir Simon. We play quite nicely, we never revoke—do we, Teddy? No, Captain Denvers, we won't victimize you, I know you hate bridge—so does Clara, so does Mag. Can we do play us that lovely thing—the what-you-call-'em from Hoffman's Tales, or something. What, Sir Simon? Not like music to your bridge? That shows you never tried it. It is so stimulating."

"Yah—pah!" Sir Simon stood on the hearth rug, muttering: "Set me down to play bridge with the women!—Bridge to, music! Never heard such a thing. Then, rubbing his head, his mind slipped away to another grievance. "That parlourmaid brushed me with the frill of her bib every single time she passed! Yah—pah!—Petticoats!"

"Don't mind him, ma," murmured Diana, as she drew the bridge-table before her parent's chair. "He's getting just a bit dotty and doesn't know he's thinking aloud. Chairs, Teddy!—Now, Sir Simon, it's not true, you know petticoats are quite nice."

She outdid her usual noisy leadership, trying to draw attention away from the husband and wife in the screened-off corner. Denvers had given one deliberate look round and crossed the room to Magdalen.

"May I sit down beside you?" he asked.

"Why, of course." Her detached manner matched the formal question.

Clara struck the first chords of a dreamy Schumann piece.

For a time there was silence between the two whose minds were so full of each other. Then, under cover of the music, the man said:

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"This time last year we were in Paris, Magdalen. Do you remember?"

She turned her eyes upon him, without speaking. Did she remember? Ah, yes.—It was trying to forget that made life so tiring.

"We went to the Odéon and we had a little supper afterwards, we two alone—and we walked home back to the hotel. Do you remember the lights upon the water, and how we stood upon the bridge, in the keen, frosting air?"

"Don't—Harry!" said Magdalen, with a trembling lip. "What's the good?"

"It's just such another night. There's a moon, and an air like champagne. Why shouldn't we, you and I, walk home together?"

Magdalen started and sat erect.

"Home!" she echoed.

But he was looking straight before him, and went on dreamily, as if setting his words to the stealing music:

"We could take across Kensington Gardens and stop on the bridge and see the moon again and the dancing lights on the waters—just as we did last year. And then, if you were tired we could take a cab at Lancaster Gate—I can afford a cab now and again, you know—and we should be whisked down Holborn——"

Holborn! Magdalen coloured violently, she flung herself back against the cushions. He broke off at her movement, and looked at her piercingly a moment or two without speaking again. Through the turmoil of emotions that shook her she suddenly became aware of the pallor of his face, the burning ardour of his eyes. "He does care! He cares dreadfully!" she said to herself, and the old sense of power rose triumphant. A smile began to tremble about her lips.

Then he spoke again :

" Listen. In the heart of London there stands an ancient building between an old square and an old garden, and it is as quiet as Teyne. The rooks build in the trees. There is a set of rooms, high up, where a man has built a kind of nest—and there, day after day, night after night, he sits alone, waiting for someone—someone who has not yet come—waiting."

Never, not in the first days of their courtship, not even in those first days of their happy marriage, had he looked at her with look and voice as he did now. Her heart beat violently. The yearning for him that she had never been able to stifle came over her, almost to faintness. He went on, traitorously backed by Clara's passionate harmonies.

" Listen, Magdalen ! There are panelled rooms, there, and deep window-seats from which you can look right into the tops of the trees. And London and its roar, the fever of it, seem miles away. And there's a room, all white—and the other is all tawny in the sunlight. And every day this man, this dreamer, this watcher, fills these rooms with flowers. To-day there are yellow roses in the white room—waiting for you."

" Oh, Harry—— ! " She could not speak another word, afraid of bursting into tears. He bent closer to her from the low chair.

" Of course, there's not much time for dreaming to-day, I'm working very hard. But hard work never spoils anyone's life. It's the coming home, just only waiting—that's hard. You know what a cold thing an empty nest is. Oh, that nest of mine would be so warm—warm as love could make it, if love would come to it ! "

She felt her will weakening, felt herself drifting away on the tide of his passion. But the music, falling silent for a moment, and the loud wrangle among the birds

players, awoke her to reality, to the claims of her own pride, to the conventions of her world.

"Magdalen——" His voice had the note of pleading.

The conviction of all she meant to him washed over her, and, at the same time, came an overpowering sense of all he meant to her. They loved each other; they could not get on without each other. She felt strangely as if they stood on a pinnacle together, all minor considerations having fallen away about them; and that, pride against pride, love against love, it was a life-in-death struggle between them. It would have been sweet to have just closed her eyes and let herself sink into his arms and be dragged whither he would. But, something stronger than this yearning revolted. She clung to that bare rock of pride. She could not face the fall into those depths of humiliation. What he demanded of her could not be accomplished sacredly and quietly between them. It was a public act, a sensational surrender.—She thought of Lady Adelaide; she thought of Blaise; she heard the clamour of voices, mocking, wondering, condemning. . . .

"Magdalen——" he said again. Ah, it was unfair of him. He was using the weapon of love to deal her a cruel wound. Then, as in spite of herself her whole being quivered to his call, the thought arose, Why should she not turn the tables upon him? Why should she not, in her turn, use the cry of that tenderness that filled her, the argument of the tears so hard to keep back? It was no sacrifice she wanted of him, unless to forgive where one worships be a sacrifice.

"Listen you, Harry," she cried, and now Clara's music, like some mercenary, changed sides and came to support the pathos that trembled in her voice. "Do you not think that I too suffer, being alone? My big house is gaping for you! I have been too proud to ask

you to come back to it, but I do now! Listen, Ha—
It has been so empty, since you left! There are s—
echoes in it!—No matter how I try to fill it with peo—
it's always me, me alone! Sometimes in the even—
I feel quite frightened—I'm so alone!"

In the shadowy half-light of their corner, she s—
through the mists that spread over her own gaze, l—
his eyes suddenly lightened upon her, much as t—
had lightened on that afternoon when Lady Adela—
had taunted him with not working for love and he—
betrayed himself in a single glance of fire. She tremb—
upon a conviction of triumph; but his next act f—
amazed her, then dashed her panting joy. He d—
from his pocket a small gilt key tied with a ribbon, a—
held it towards her.

"Take it," he said.

She let him put it into her hand and unresistingly f—
her fingers over it.

"What is it?"

"Can't you guess?" he whispered. "The key—
love! The key of home! That home high up am—
the trees and lost in the heart of London, where—
Do you know what is going to happen to the watche—
those rooms—to happen very soon, Magdalen? O—
evening he will hear, as he sits listening and waiting
the footfalls on the wooden stairs—the beloved footfa—
at last, at last! The steps will come out of the sile—
and hesitate before the door, falter and stop, and t—
there will be the sound of that little key, trying to f—
the lock, the key will turn and the old oak will groan a—
the man will start to his feet. And there he will sta—
perhaps, rooted to the spot, in an agony of expectatio—
and she will cross her husband's threshold—his lo—
his wife! He will open his arms to her, and take

into them and hold her, never to let her go from them again."

He was leaning close to her, speaking these words into her ear, in broken sentences. It seemed to her as if the low, urgent accents were falling upon her soul. Unconsciously clutching the key, she sat, unable to do more than hold herself back from him. She knew that if she turned her head by a fraction, he would kiss her, and that if he kissed her—— The insidious voice went on:

"Magdalen—come back with me to-night! Come to your husband's home, love, and let everything else go by——"

"Oh, Harry!" she interrupted him, pleading against his pleading, crying out against him to her own heart—"Come you home with me! How can I go away to you? Harry, Harry, forgive me! Don't let me go back again alone! Oh, Harry, it's so dreadful to go into the empty house, alone; to go up the stairs alone; to hear everything shut up and the door chained and to know that I am shut in alone! And, Harry, to go into our room—alone!"

She thought her heart would break as she said this, so hard a thing was it for her woman's pride to say. The tears overflowed; and from what seemed to her the depths of her humiliation, she made her supreme appeal:

"Harry—the house is waiting for the . . . master!"

She dropped the key and held out her hand. But he did not take her hand: only stooping, he picked up the key and once more laid it in her palm.

"That is my answer!"

His voice choked, the sense of his own hardness catching him by the throat. She turned cold as if an icy wave had broken over her.

"Does that mean," she said with stiff lips, "that will never come back to me?"

"Not until you have lived with me, in my-poverty. Not until I have earned enough for myself live beside you in your wealth."

"Then you have *not* forgiven me! Ah, you are generous enough to forgive! For one moment of f——" She stopped. From cold she had begun to bl

It seemed to her that the shame of her rejected app was burning like live coals in her soul. With the bl in her ears, she heard his reply as from a great distan

"Forgive?—Forgive—there was never any quest of that. It was the honour of my love that you attained. Would you not be the first to despise me if I did r vindicate it?"

He fell silent, as the music abruptly ceased, and the with a dismal à propos, Diana's voice from the card-ta rang jeeringly:

"Now it's all up—we're done for!"

Magdalen sprang to her feet. The tears had dried o her hot cheeks.

"You've played a heartless game with me!" she said through the squabbling and the laughter which immediately ensued among the players. "You're a cruel man!" She drew a gasping breath. "You want to slap my face before the world."

She walked away from him, out into the lights, her head high, and going straight to Mrs. Spofforth, held out her hand, saying:

"Good-bye."

Diana's teasing speech of sympathy to Sir Simon was cut short as if by a knife. She flung one shrewd glance at Magdalen, and then exchanged a signal of distress with Clara. Denvers had not emerged from behind the screen.

"You're not going, my dear? It's quite early!" said Mrs. Spofforth, vaguely discomfited.

"I must go." Magdalen spoke in that sleep-walking manner which so greatly irritated Diana. And then she added, waking up to emphasis: "I've promised to meet Aunt Adelaide and Mr. Blaise at the Carlton."

"Yah-pah-yah!" exclaimed Sir Simon. "Supper! Poison! At her time of life, Adelaide should not have supper!"

"Good-bye, Uncle Simon.—Good-bye, Diana." Magdalen presented her forehead indifferently to her relatives, and then swept out of the room with Teddy, who wore the sheepish expression of the young Englishman in face of matrimonial dissension.

"Don't go, Sir Simon, we'll have another rubber when Teddy comes up again," Diana turned gallantly to reanimate her stricken party.—"Ma's very sorry she's made that little mistake, aren't you, ma?"

"I'm sure, Diana. . . . I'm sure, Sir Simon——" Mrs. Spofforth was ruthlessly interrupted by the ex-diplomatist:

"Don't apologize, mam. I've put up with a good deal, but I won't stand that."

"Don't you mind him, ma. He does not mean it—Do you, Sir Simon? It's just a twinge of one of those twelve mortal diseases he's always telling us about!"

Clara, unable to bear the tension of her anxiety any more, had risen from the piano and glided round the screen. She found Denvers sitting, his hands locked between his knees, staring into space. He did not turn his head as she sat down beside him; for a moment she hesitated to speak, so set and stern was his face. She stretched out her hand, but drew it back. Suddenly he looked at her.

"Some things are better not discussed," he forestalling her unspoken words. He got up then. "I am going. I have a bit of work to finish to-night."

The tears flashed to her eyes. Whether he were happy or desolate, she must stand outside. Misunderstanding the expression of sorrow on her face he paused and added, very gently:

"Don't worry about me. I can wait."

As he moved away, his foot struck against the latchkey with the green ribbon. He picked it up and stood a moment gazing at it, lost in thought. Then he went over to Diana.

"Magdalen has dropped this," he said, handing it to her. "Will you be so good as to see that it is returned to her?"

"Oh, I say, her latchkey—poor Mag! Hadn't you better send somebody round with it after her?"

"No, don't do that. Lady Adelaide is sure to have hers. Or, more likely, is sure to have ordered some to wait up for her. I think if you post it, Miss Diana will be all that's necessary. Good night, and thank you."

"Chin-chin and I do love Captain Denver, and think Magdalen a very silly, silly young woman." Diana summed up her impression of the evening.

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CHAPTER IV

FOOD FOR REFLECTION

MAGDALEN had in reality by no means promised to go on to the Carlton ; Lady Adelaide, charmed to have been invited alone, had unmistakably shown her wish to remain *en partie fine* with Mr. Blaise.

When, however, after what seemed to Magdalen an unconscionable time of waiting in the ante-room, she saw her aunt's massive and richly beaded form advancing between the double doors, it was in the company of two swains. She had a faint smile of amusement on marking the cloud on the lady's brow ; it was evident that the invitation had been issued against her will ; the undesired guest was Ambrose McFein. Her smile became accentuated as she addressed her relative :

" Aren't you glad I was able to get away, Aunt Adelaide ? — You did ask me, didn't you, Mr. Blaise ? — How delightful to meet you, Mr. McFein ! How did it all go off ? I'm frightfully interested."

The dramatist gave her a pale smile.

" I think it promises. — Yes, I think it promises fair."

He passed his degenerate hand over his flaxen brushed-back hair, hanging to the soft muslin stock and heavy roll-back collar, with which it was his pleasure to emphasize his " futurist " appearance. It was one of the odd results of Mr. Blaise and Magdalen's wonderful scheme that Ambrose McFein should have become a dandy of the most offensive description.

"It's very fine," said Blaise in his deep tone, still held Magdalen's hand, and she let it lie in his. His gaze brooded over her anxiously: there was an alteration in her since they had met a few hours her house.

"I wish I'd gone with you," she was saying, forced airiness. "The dear Spofforths were more usually—well, Spofforthy. Oh, Uncle Simon was Aunt Adelaide. He says he's going to bring an action against you for restitution of conjugal rights!—do you say, Mr. McFein?—Why did I not come there? Because, for the world, I would not have spoilt my night impression of our play. I want it all to burn me."

Here she broke off and snatched her hand from Blaise's pressure. He saw with chagrin that she had only become aware of his holding it. Something had happened.—What?

He pondered uneasily over the problem as they moved into the music-filled supper-room. Circumstances afforded food for reflection, lately; and, in spite of the fur-lined coat, in spite of the installation at the Albany and other indications of prosperity, Blaise's eyes were becoming haunted. The finances of *Men and the Moon* sat by his pillow at night. The taste of them was in his food; the echo of them in his laugh.

"Well, how did it go off?" said Magdalen, as if she had not already asked the question.

McFein turned his pale eyes malevolently upon her. He had never forgiven her unexpected action in the matter of the cheque. All her subsequent generosity had not availed to remove the sting.

"Oh, pray, do not let us tear my *poor* passion-flowers in pieces!" he exclaimed, cutting across Lady Adelaide.

rather patronizing: "Really, most interesting." "Did you not say you wanted the wonder of it to burst upon you to-morrow night?—It will create comment, no doubt!"

"Adverse comment, probably, as all fine work must. *A capite ad calcem abundat dulcibus vitiis*," quoted Blaise at random, but with a confident look to the dramatist as to a superfine literary confrère, well aware as he was that McFein was innocent of the poorest latinity. "But *Euge!* we shall stand by you—we shall stand by you——"

McFein bent over his *consommé en tasse* with an unvoiced sneer:—Poor old Isidore, was he not exquisitely pontifical . . . when everyone knew the paper was a first-class frost!—Nevertheless, the dramatist dared not yet openly deride the editor. After sipping the very last of his cup and then pushing it from him, with a gesture of depreciation, the pallid youth contented himself with remarking:

"At any rate I'm new—which is something in a second-hand world."

"New——!" echoed Lady Adelaide. "You are certainly that!" She glanced at him with disfavour. "I can't get over your last act. It's made me feel—— Yes, please, Mr. Blaise, a little champagne, thank you, thank you.—You know, my dear," she addressed Magdalen after restoring her shattered nerves by emptying the bubbling glass, "you know, my dear, Mr. McFein's heroine, Pudentia, is a morphine maniac. She dies in horrible agonies. Literally dies for the want of the drug, while Armiger, the man, you know, toying with the subcutaneous what-you-call-it, the horrid little squirt, remains callous to her supplication.—Well, just a teeny drop more, dear Mr. Blaise."

"Is that the story of *Flowers of Passion*?" asked Mag-

Magdalen, turning her infantile gaze upon the draught. She had roused herself from a mood of abstraction and spoke with the false sprightliness of one whose thoughts are far away. "I've never been to a play since I was a morphine maniac. I think it must be vewy interesting. Did you ever have morphine?—Is it nice?—I want to make you forget?"

"Of course I have," said the playwright, who had treated Lady Adelaide with contemptuous silence. "I should not dream of giving shape, in my work, to the experience which I had not lived through. I never write with second-hand emotions. Yes, personally I find life very stimulating, not to say intensifying." He fixed a cold stare on Magdalen.

"But I don't want anything intensified," cried Lady Adelaide. "I myself should like to sleep, to drift.—What one wants is to be lulled. Don't you think so, Mr. Blaise?"

Blaise started from an absorbing contemplation of his own.

"Oh no," he exclaimed, "I agree with neither of you. Life! Life—real life, that's what we must brace ourselves to deal with: not with drugs, McFein—not, dear Lady, by shutting our eyes to fact, not by lulling ourselves." Lady Adelaide interrupted sharply:

"I think you are all talking great nonsense.—What did you have at dinner, Magdalen, besides Simon?"

"It was quite a family party." Mrs. Denver paused. A gleam of malice sprang into her eyes. She looked from Blaise to her aunt with a tilting lip. "It was just Ted and Clara, and—Harry."

"Harry!" gasped Lady Adelaide.

"Yes—Harry."

"How did they dare!" said Lady Adelaide, shaking her head out of all prudence.

"What do you mean, Aunt Adelaide?—Of course I knew he was coming. We had quite a long talk." She turned to Mr. McFein. "Write a play sometime, about a husband and wife who agree to disagree, and are quite pleased to meet each other at dinner-parties."

"It would not be so very new," sneered the dramatist. If there was a being to whom his acid soul devoted perpetual rancour, it was the man who had given him that bad quarter of an hour, not so long ago, in his starvation days. "I knew a lady in New York who always made up her bridge-table out of her husbands."

Mr. Blaise's hands were trembling as he pondered over the unexpected turn of events. So, that was what lay at the back of the singular change he had been quick to feel in her. . . . They had met, and they had talked. Yet they had parted again, that was obvious. They agreed to disagree, in her own words, but all the woman in her was stirred. That was obvious too. And she had let her hand lie in his and had not even known that he had pressed it. It was the husband, with whom she had quarrelled, who had brought this fever heat into her pulses, this anger and pain into her unseeing gaze. The meeting had been arranged, and she had told none of them a word of it. . . . It all spelt danger, danger.

Mr. Blaise insisted on escorting the ladies back to Berkeley Square, Magdalen having dispensed with her car, much to Lady Adelaide's annoyance. She said that the chauffeur had a cold on his chest, and that it hurt his feelings if anyone else drove her.

"He puts it on for you," cried her aunt as a particularly disjointed taxi started noisily along Pall Mall. Magdalen did not shift her indifferently turned profile

to answer. It was quite likely that people "put for her. Everybody played upon her weakness for own ends . . . except one, and he would have given what she would give him, neither love nor money. Suddenly, she had a vision of that possible home, where for her, lost away in some unknown part of London where the tree-tops looked in at the windows, and so quiet that one might fancy oneself at Teyne. Then she thought of her own great house, of its splendour and desolation. And her heart turned sick. What mess she had made of everything!

"But what does my lady say?"

She started—her aunt tapped her arm: "Magdalen. Mr. Blaise is speaking to you."

"What does my lady say?" repeated Mr. Blaise with his ponderous courting way. "What does she say to the idea?"

"What idea?" Magdalen had not heard. When she had dropped that key, she wondered, that had been pressed into her hand? . . .

"I think it's a most delightful idea, don't you, Magdalen? Much nicer than going to any of those places."

"Oh, much," said Mrs. Denvers, at random.

"A first night," Blaise went on explaining, "is to end very late. In my rooms, at any rate, the lights will not be turned out . . . and we secure the dramatic effect. He might fight shy of a public place, after his triumph . . . We cannot contemplate anything but a triumph of course."

Magdalen stared out of the window again.

"Just as you like," she said.

Nothing mattered, anyhow. As well that as anything else. Of course they were speaking of the *première* of that monstrous play to which she stood godmother.

morphine maniac—how horrible! Why had she done it?

The taxi drew up with a final jerk. Smallwood must have been on the look out, for the door was instantly flung open.

"Oh, I'll run—I'll run!" said the Philanthropist jocosely. "The ancient retainer terrifies me, you know."

He held out his hand, but Magdalen had flitted up the steps and into the house, without a word. Blaise paid the taxi, with a sense of disquietude: the heiress was generally particular in these details, and that infernal Smallwood, after hustling—positively hustling—Lady Adelaide across the threshold, with his "You're not going on anywhere else, my lady? Will you kindly step inside, my lady?" had banged the door in his face.

The editor pulled the fur collar high about his ears. It was a cold night but brisk. He would walk to his rooms. As he crossed to the opposite pavement, a man who had been standing in the shadow of the trees detached himself and moved swiftly towards the north side of the square. Blaise stared after the figure without speculation, after the fashion of a preoccupied brain; but even as he set foot upon the ascent of Hay Hill, he brought himself up short.

"Good God," he exclaimed, "that was Denver!"

Yes, it was Denver unmistakably. How often he had marked the fellow come with that swinging tread across the park at Teyne. Denver! He was spying on his wife!—Watching secretly.—Why?

Quick upon his discovery sprang a surmise worthy of the mind that formed it. "He mistrusts her . . . does his own detective work. He is on the look out for some proof against her. . . ." And, dancing after this idea,

came another, that set the philanthropist's pulses tingling and his head buzzing. He had always had a strong conviction that the break between husband and wife had been caused by jealousy. Certainly it had followed with remarkable swiftness, upon the newspaper scandal. He had built very high hopes on that breach; but the heiress's maddening elusiveness had dashed him from his pinnacle. And, time after time, his quick intuition had warned him that the least presumption on his part might be fatal to his desires. But now . . . what could he do?—Denver himself he had found an unconscious auxiliary—Denver was jealous, jealous of him. Of whom could he be jealous? To-night he had obviously rushed from the dinner-party . . . where they had "met and disagreed" . . . to lie in wait—and spy!

Blaise had an excited laugh. Ah, had he only known, he would have contrived less perfunctory good-byes on those steps watched by Denver.

At the foot of Hay Hill, he stood staring awhile in space. Fate was playing into his hands at last! This was the psychological moment of his life, the moment to seize and grasp! . . . He thought of the letter he had had to write to Magdalen from the office, that day, the thought of the doubt, the anxiety, the precariousness of his position. And the sudden possibility—the mere conception of which had set his whole being in a turmoil—began to dazzle and lure, intoxicatingly.

CHAPTER V

BILLS, LETTERS—AND A CONCLAVE

AFTER a tormented night, Magdalen slept late, and woke with a headache. The sense of blankness which ever since her separation from her husband had invariably attended the first moments of returning thought, came upon her, this morning, intensified. She turned languidly in the bed, and glanced with distaste at the letters piled beside her tray. What new bothers would they contain? Harry had left her to struggle alone. How cruel he had been to her last night! The blood rushed to her face as she recalled her appeal and its humiliating reception. She stretched out her hand and seized her correspondence. She would not think of it any more. No one was ever to guess that she had wanted him back, that she had begged him to return. She tore open the first letter, instinctively putting aside that superscribed with Blaise's precise and affected calligraphy: she was quite sure that the editor of *Men and the Hour* would have nothing exhilarating to communicate.

The epistle she had lighted on, however, was not destined to reconcile her with existence. It was from Mr. Pawle—of Pawle and Brunton, the family solicitors—the head of the firm himself.

"With regard to her demand for a further sum of five thousand pounds, to be realized out of stock, he requested to be allowed to investigate the nature of the

new security in which she purposed to invest t
and if she did not see her way to concur with this
caution, he would feel himself, to his great r
obliged to resign all further management of her a
He could not reconcile it with his sense of the ob
tions devolving upon him by the late Mr. Temp
confidence in his firm, to be a party to such rec
drawing upon capital, as he had been asked to faci
during the last three months. He would have
glad to have had the opportunity to explain his p
of view in person, but understood, from Mrs. Den
last communication, that her engagements did
allow her to make an appointment for the purpos

Irritably Magdalen flung the sheet from her fin
Very well, then, she would have to engage and
solicitor—that was all. Certainly she was not goin
be hectored by the pompous old man !

She now caught up Blaise's letter.

"Dear Lady Mæcenas," began the Philanthro
in his playful way, but what he had further to say
not at all playful. It was discomfortingly seri
however lightly he tried to treat it. He was not ge
to spoil the evening's happy meeting by dull tall
business ; therefore he preferred to write that wh
it had become his duty to communicate. Swi
there had come upon them one of the experiences
all journalistic enterprise—*Men and the Hour*
threatened with a libel action.—Now, he was given
understand that injured feelings could be assua
by a few thousand pounds, in the way of comprom
On the other hand, an action might be a very use
advertisement to them. "Alas, dear lady, this is
age of advertisement !"

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"Oh dear!" moaned the newspaper proprietress, "this is dreadful! What shall I do?"

Two or three thousand again . . . and Mr. Pawle threatening to resign already because of last week's demand: that five thousand upon which, she had been told, the prosperous development of *Men and the Hour* absolutely depended.

A memory of the past broke upon the gloom of her reflections—a memory of the mornings when she would gather together everything that looked like a business letter, and thrust the bundle into her husband's hands—those strong brown hands! Would it not have been worth the sense of abdication to have had the daily bothers so comfortably, so effectively, so safely lifted from her shoulders? Then, upon this thought came another, swift and stabbing: how convenient it would be to be able to write back now: "Dear Mr. Blaise, you must apply to my husband!"

Vexed to find her resolve thus repeatedly betrayed in her own mind, she sought distraction in the perusal of the rest of her morning's budget. It was not, however, calculated to allay the feelings of self-convicted folly, the irresistible regret, the unbidden yearning.

Mr. Herbert Rosenbaum was surprised and grieved to have been informed that there was no answer to his letter delivered by hand this evening. He did not think that he was exceeding the bounds of reason in his request that some notice should be taken of his complaint, and that, seeing the urgency of the matter, he should receive Mrs. Denver's reply before to-morrow afternoon.

To-morrow, that was now to-day. Magdalen could not for the life of her remember what Mr. Rosenbaum's grievance was, nor what she had done with the letter

that she had scarcely glanced at. She sighed impatiently. Talk of his not being unreasonable! How could she answer a letter she hadn't read? And what was the good of an editor, anyhow?

The next was signed by a name unknown to her, Mr. Saxon Cox, who, understanding that the post of critic of *Men and the Hour* would shortly be vacated, begged Mrs. Denvers—to whose recollection he ventured to recall himself—to exercise her influence with the editor. It was a long letter; Magdalen glanced down the closely written pages—caught such words as “cabal,” “unfair treatment,” and the phrase, “your well-known and generous discrimination”—crushed the sheet in a ball and flung it after Mr. Pawle's letter. All at once she felt that if there was one creature more irritated than another, in an irritating world, it was the misunderstood and struggling genius.

It was almost a relief to turn to Woolland's bill. But even she, hardened spendthrift as she was, gasped at the total. It was not possible, no, it could not be, that she should have got all these things since June! Everything had been paid up to June—ah, those happy days when she had not even had to write a cheque!

Then an item caught her eye: Mauve ostrich boa—ten pounds ten. A feather boa! Why, she never dreamed of putting such a thing round her throat. She hated feather boas. Mauve, too!

Then, as vividly as if it had been projected against the brocade curtains of her four-post bed, came the vision of Lady Adelaide's highly tinted countenance, surmounting a feathery ruff of violent hue. Magdalen remembered how she had noticed it—at Marienbad—how she had wondered why her relative should tint her complexion to match her garments.

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It was too bad! She would not have it!—A phrase of Harry's leaped into her recollection. "I will not have your generosity so abused that you should go on giving merely because you have already given so much!"—This was not even giving—it was taking!

She rang the bell violently, and demanded a pencil. Yes, she would mark every item that was not of her own ordering, and then confront her aunt with the document. Three dozen Saxe gloves!—She never bought gloves at Woolland's. One mauve sunshade—rose quartz handle—five guineas! It was beyond everything!

When the maid returned with the pencil, she had also a letter in her hand.

"Just arrived for Madame."

Magdalen recognized Diana's scrawl—which would have disgraced a Board-school infant. Goodness knows what Diana wanted now! Magdalen thought resentfully of Diana's recent abortive interference in her own private affairs, and was about to put the envelope aside unopened, when she felt that it contained something hard, and curiosity impelled her.

As the gilt key with the green ribbon dropped out, she sat staring.

"Darling Mag," wrote Diana, "Captain Denvers says this was dropped by you. I hope Smallwood let you (and Lady Adelaide) off with your lives, if you had to ring him up."

"Fond love,

"Yours,

"DI."

"*Tiens—la jolie petite clef!*" said Céline, with the friendly familiarity of her race.

"Take it!" cried Magdalen. "Put it in an envelope to return it. It's a mistake. It's not mine."

But as the French girl was proceeding to obey, her mistress changed her mind :

" Give it to me ! " she exclaimed.

She clutched the key and fell back on her pillow.

Following the example once set by the editor of the celebrated Review, Mr. Blaise had established a managerial sanctum as well as his private rooms in Albany, where he had secured the set known as Q.

Wednesday being the busy day *par excellence* of the weekly paper, Lady Adelaide knew that she would be sure to find him at his post. She considered the matter that brought her of sufficient urgency to insist upon an audience, in spite of the doubtful expression of the personage in charge of the ante-room.

She was, however, kept waiting long—unpardonably long, she thought—in a narrow back chamber, off the greater apartment through the folded door of which a murmur of men's voices reached her fitfully. Yet the black marble clock on the mantelpiece had ticked off twenty minutes from the time of her entrance, when, following on the sound of a closing outer door and retreating steps, Blaise made his appearance. He wore a look of deep concern.

" Thank heavens ! " exclaimed the lady. " I thought you were never coming——! " She broke off, conscious of the irritability of her tones, and started afresh with accents at once plaintive and affectionate : " Dear Blaise—dear Isidore, I know this is the forbidden afternoon, but I am quite distracted."

Again she paused, unpleasantly struck by his countenance which expressed the utmost dejection. Even his luxuriant hair looked as if distracted fingers had been

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ploughing its waves. The gaze he fixed upon her admitted her for a moment, as a comrade in misfortune, to depths of doubt and apprehensions; then the usual heavy curtain of opacity once more shut her out.

"What is it?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

A sickly smile distended his lips.

"Dear lady—what is what?—Come in, I am heart-broken that you should have waited. But an editor—Duty, duty!"

She saw that he hardly knew what he was saying, and her heart beat quickly as she followed him into the sanctum and took possession of the red morocco arm-chair he pushed towards her.

"We shall be quite undisturbed now," he said, as he closed the folding doors.

He was about to sit beside her, when, as if struck by a thought, he crossed the room, opened the door into the passage and said a few words to the attendant without.

"I have now denied myself to everyone," he said, coming back to her. "Everyone—and now, dear lady——" he stopped as if unaware that he had not finished his phrase, and his veiled glance swept by her to the writing-table, where it rested upon an envelope that lay on the blotter, face downwards.

"What is it?" asked Lady Adelaide again. All her ultimate hopes were so bound up with this man's success or failure, that anything so profoundly disturbing him must hold menace for her also. A moment the Philanthropist hesitated; then, without rising, he swung back on his chair, so as to reach the letter—saying, as he did so:

"I am absurdly over-sensitive—but the fact is——" he paused and moistened his dry lips, "I have just now received this communication."

"From Magdalen?"

In spite of its careful artificial bloom, her face withered as she put the question.

"So unexpected is its tone," he went on—"I'm so wounding——! But read for yourself." He drew the sheet from the envelope and gave it to her.

Magdalen's writing was of a peculiar description; at first sight it looked like a schoolgirl's round hand, only on inspection that one discovered a certain affected quaintness in every drawn letter. A very few words filled the paper.

"Dear Mr. Blaise,"—she had written. "Wretched bore! Hadn't we better give it all up?"

"Yours sincerely,
"M. A."

Lady Adelaide's hand trembled.

"Give it all up—does she mean the paper?"

He nodded.

"Oh, it's impossible, she doesn't mean it. She's in one of her silly tempers. Pay no attention. In half an hour you can talk her out of this. She's made me the most awful scene: and, by the way, that's what I'm here to consult you about,—not that I want to bring you into it, but, if she's behaving like that to you! . . . I have been counting on your influence. It's all terribly upsetting."

Contradictions stumbled over each other in her agitation. Blaise rose and began to pace the room.

"What was your scene about?" he asked, halting a few moments before her arm-chair.

His hands were in his pockets. He stared down at her, gloomy-eyed under the shock of hair—for the moment she was the original Grub Street adventurer, rather than the sleek literary potentate of recent months, or even the suave philanthropist of her first acquaintance.

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"My scene?—Oh, very much the same as yours, I think." Her mouth twisted into a smile of bitterness. "The silly child has turned on me—on me! Oh, for nothing, nothing at all. Some silly mistake in a bill. I—the fact is——" Her voice shook now, to match her trembling hand—"she's ungrateful, oh, ungrateful! I have been led into expenses, a style of life quite beyond my income. Given up my home to protect her, to stand by her! And——" She stopped suddenly. She had the reserve of her class: she would not let that sob of fury escape her.

For an appreciable time Blaise still stood, brooding over her, it seemed, and over their desperate situation, his hands still in his pockets. Then she heard him draw a long breath. He came back to his chair and spoke with decision:

"I'll fight the action, then."

"Fight the action?"

"Yes—the libel action, since she won't compromise. It will be an advertisement, anyhow. By God I'll fight! She cannot prevent it . . . and she'll have herself to thank for what she may have to pay."

Lady Adelaide shot a startled look at him. Here was a voice she had never heard before, a man she did not know. Meeting her scared eyes, he proceeded swiftly in the tones of one making a necessary but tiresome explanation.

"We are threatened with a libel action. Every paper is liable to that. I suggested compromise. That is her answer: Give it all up! Chuck the paper—chuck me! If she thinks she can play with a man's career like this——" He paused, and then the pent-up grudge broke out in a passionate tide of words: "She took me up, played with my love and threw me over! She went a

little further with Denvers—threw him over. She me on this enterprise, now she wants to throw th and my career with it. I say she shall not. She to throw you over—leave you in the lurch. A say she shall not! Denvers was a fool: he c hold her—I . . .”

Lady Adelaide sat as if fascinated. The m always influenced her; but she had never gues this hidden brutality. She had never, perhaps, a him so much. Yet her own trouble began to wei more heavily as the realization of his insecurity trated her mind. It was all very well to bluster. could anyone hold Magdalen? . . . And shoals c were swimming in now, this horrid Michaelmas! Magdalen was to begin to examine them, what v become of Lady Adelaide?—Had not Magdalen in ungrateful girl, made some sinister suggestion getting the lawyers to put everything straight once r The devoted relative had no greater enemies than odious firm, Pawle and Brunton. And there was Nugent woman threatening proceedings . . .

Suddenly his voice cut across the turmoil o thoughts. It held the old caressing, musical note.

“Dear friend, let me speak one moment without i ruption. She whom we both love has been ungratef you. But I am not ungrateful. Let me prove it to Let me show you how I value, how I have always va your kindness, your friendship, your—sympathy.” T was a fall in his tone, upon this last word, which ga emotional significance. “You have just said it, you in straits. Let me, while I still can, do what I can. me give you a draft for three hundred pounds. O have a generous salary,” he thought it advisable to plain. “I am alone in the world and I am not extra

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gant—I make my little pennies here and there besides.—In short, the money is in the bank, if you will deign to accept.” He saw the greed in her eyes, even while her mouth shaped itself to the perfunctory disclaimer. And hastily he added: “Surely, a loan between friends—friends, dear lady—need not even be discussed.”

The hard-pressed look and the doubt and the greed, passed from her gaze, superseded by relief.

“Oh, Isidore!” she said faintly. She had had a very distinct notion, in presenting herself at his office to-day, to make him instrumental in procuring financial relief in her present crisis. If they could not delicately contrive together a scheme to induce Magdalen to clear her, she had at least counted upon his helping, with his knowledge of business, in the negotiation of some loan upon not too grinding terms. But this easier and incomparably more rapid solution of her difficulties was as unexpected as it was delightful. . . .

He caught her hand, kissed and pressed it.

“Not a word more! You shall get the letter in the morning.” His impenetrable eye suddenly became misted; pathos quivered in his deepened voice as he went on: “Do I not owe you an imperishable debt, oh you dear and high lady, who have stood my friend so nobly, with such exquisite tact and steadfastness and— and understanding?”

Lady Adelaide responded to false sentiment with all the ease of the fundamentally unprincipled.

“Ah, Isidore!” she said again. “If I had had my way, how happy should we all have been! And she, poor child, poor child——”

Her eyelids fluttered over dry eyes, she gave a heavy sigh. Blaise drew a chair close to her, leaned forward and asked in a weighty whisper:

"Tell me, dear friend, do you associate this change towards me, towards both of us, with her last night?"

"Her meeting with her husband?" Lady A's expression was that of one who finds dread confirmed.

Blaise nodded.

"She was very strange last night," he said, "distinctly upset. If I may so express it, she was in a doubtful state of equilibrium."

Lady Adelaide sat with clasped hands, mentally upon a vision of disaster.—What would the future hold for her, if Magdalen and Denvers were to be reconciled? What, indeed, but penury, humiliation, futile struggles with overwhelming debt, the loss of all her prestige and the recriminations of Simon? Were Magdalen and Denvers to be reconciled, the first to go overboard would be herself, and never again would helping hands be stretched out to her—nothing was more certain.

Blaise went on, and his words fell upon her senses like the toll of a passing-bell.

"You know when things are in a state of unbalanced equilibrium, the weight of a grain of sand will determine on which side they fall. If I thought it was for the happiness of our Lady Caprice that she should be thrown again into the arms of that cold, hard, calculating man of the husband so determined to play the modern Paganini with our wilful Kate—what say I—to play the game with Murdstone with one no more fit to resist his brutality than a child—if, I say, I thought she could be happy with Denvers, if we thought so, dear friend, would I lift a finger to keep them apart?—No, no! I know you too well, you know me too well, for either of us to harbour such a suspicion!"

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"We do," said Lady Adelaide incoherently.

The two stared at each other. Then Blaise proceeded, warming up to his best platform manner :

"Thank God, we no longer live in the days when a woman was handed over to a man's keeping as if she were a bartered chattel ! Thank God, the marriage contract is regarded as a contract, not as a life sentence, irrevocable, soul-enslaving ! Thank God——" here he made one of his dramatic pauses and flung upon the listener one of those rare glances, in which the real man peeped forth. He was appraising his accomplice, shrewdly—it was not too late yet to step back, should he have ventured too far. But she had hearkened, fascinated, and nothing in her countenance betrayed that the idea he suggested was either novel or shocking. He drew his chair yet nearer, and proceeded now in a rapid whisper : " This is a crisis. Everything depends on the manner in which we meet it. It is borne in on me that Denver is playing the last card of his rash game. He is determined to make her yield or to break her.—Last night after I left you——"

Lady Adelaide had to bend forward to catch his words ; he spoke now so low.

When, half an hour later, she parted from the editor of *Men and the Hour* at the Burlington end of the Albany, and sallied forth alone towards Berkeley Square, there was a flush on either cheek, not due to art, and a hard gleam of determination, almost of triumph in her eyes. But the Philanthropist walked back the echoing length of the covered passage towards his rooms, with a slow step and a countenance of heavy thought.

CHAPTER VI

A FIRST NIGHT AND A LAST

TRUE to her habit, Magdalen had invited as of her old coterie as would fit in her double to share the thrills of the first night of *Flow Passion*.

As usual she mixed her guests quite regardless of money, and the author of the play—impudent, assertive, affectedly decked in his eighteen-thirty gasolite suit, sat cheek by jowl with Dilwyn, the very pink and pale of the discreetly unobtrusive young diplomat. Mr. Her Rosenbaum, the injured Art Critic, alternately bit his lip and scowled at his editor across Diana Spofford's innocently cheerful countenance. And poor Ted hemmed away in a corner behind Lady Adelaide's reserved sequined person, tugged his fair moustache and glowed at the occupier of the envied chair beside the hostess.

Blaise it was who was granted this privilege. Magdalen, characteristically, had begun to repent, as of a moment's loss, of her recent stand. She was consequently graciousness to-night, towards her Editor.

The excitement of the hour, moreover, had entered into her veins; the sense of her own importance had once more gone pleasantly to her head. The whispers that had followed her as she had passed through the usual first night groups; the persistency with which glasses were levelled upon the double box in the centre of which s

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throned ; the visit of two or three noted critics, in those terrible moments of first-night delays, made her feel as if, at last, she had come into that kingdom of power which had been promised her. It was her *Men and the Hour* that was bringing McFein to the front. It was in her drawing-room that the subject of his play had been first mentioned to the popular actor-manager, who was protagonist to-night on those boards—and who, after a little matter of business had been agreed upon between him and his hostess, had found his eyes open to the possibilities latent in *Flowers of Passion*.

It did not seem to her, therefore, as if she wanted after all to give up a proprietorship of which for the first time she was tasting the real savour. So she smiled on Blaise.

The curtain went down on the first act, to that intermittent and perfunctory clapping which generally greets a new author at this point. The languid hands of the critic seem to say : " He still has got three acts in which to redeem himself—or dish himself—poor devil ! " Anxious supporters, with irregular patter of palms, betray the apprehension of their own heart : " How is it going ?—Why don't people applaud more ?—Do let us clap !—Oh no, that's worse, nobody else is taking it up."

The dramatist turned a green face and a sickly smile upon the young members of his clique who appeared at the box to offer their effusiveness, and plant their stabs. " Splendid, dear boy, splendid !—A bit of all right !—A winner it's going to be !—You ought, by the way, to tell Ashton to speak up a bit. Oh, she ? She was fine. Ye-es—I'd rather have had Rose Montgomerie, if I'd been you, dear lad.—But she'll do, no doubt—when she's a

little quicker at her cues.—Between ourselves, I w
Times friend wasn't quite in such a savage humour

Clara Mayne came round in her turn, with a
indifference on her pale face which irritated Mag
Blaise interrogated her with an uplifted eyebrow ; b
important critic shook her head :

" I'm not going to say a word—but that I'm inter
I think everyone is interested." She gave an encour
smile to the dramatist and took the Social Refor
vacated chair. " Magdalen, you're simply shining o
the house, like a young May moon ! I never saw s
lovely dress ! There's Mrs. Ancell scribbling away
mad, to tell the social columns all about it, and you l
a fine house, isn't it, Isidore ? " She lowered her v
" I wish Florence would put a little more heart into
business ! It's not fair of her, to be grinning through
lines at her friends in the stalls. Did you see her pre
to yawn just before saying, ' I am on the rack ' ? "

Isidore smiled and nodded. But his nod was vag
his smile a mere display of teeth. Magdalen attrib
his unwontedly heavy and abstracted mood to her re
cruelty, and by and by, when the theatre was dark
before the raising of the curtain for the second act,
seized the moment of general settling down to murmur
his ear :

" After all—I don't want, weally, to give up
paper——"

She felt her hand seized and convulsively pressed, a
her heart swelled with the sense of benevolence and pow
which was so pleasing to her.

Denvers was Clara's guest in a narrow box on the opp
site side of the house, where, hidden by the folds of t

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curtains, he sat watching Magdalen and her company, so long as the lighting enabled him to do so.

When McFein's morbid drama started afresh on its eccentric course, he fell into a profound fit of abstraction. Only when an inarticulate murmur from pit and gallery was followed by the unmistakable sound of a hiss that seemed to coil round the house rather than proceed from any particular quarter, did he awaken to external circumstances and to the fact that the *Flowers of Passion* were destined to wither in the bud. He looked at Clara; the light from the stage was full on her face. She was too experienced a theatre-goer to traverse such a moment unmoved. He saw that she had grown scarlet.

"I knew," she said, with agitation in her voice as she leaned back to whisper in his ear, "I knew the hypodermic syringe would do it—the public would never stand that!"

"The hypo—what?" ejaculated her cousin, his jaw dropping in amazement.

"My dear boy—haven't you been looking? Mr. McFein's Pudentia has disclosed herself as the morphine maniac. You can't have listened—you can't even have looked. Florence is behaving disgracefully," she added, vexed. "Though she did tell me she hated the part, I never expected she'd make a farce of it."

When the curtain came down again the house burst into an uproar. The opinion of friends in stalls and dress-circle vainly tried to drown the critics of pit and gallery.

"The worst of it," said Clara, "is that the thing is really full of cleverness. But it's horribly disagreeable. I wish Magdalen hadn't been associated with it.—Did you see Ashton's face?"

"It's going to be a failure, isn't it?" asked Denvers grimly.

"Going to be?—My dear boy, it is a failure."

"Then Magdalen will lose all she's put at the business?"

Clara looked at him curiously.

"You say that as if you were glad."

"So I am.—I am glad the paper is a failure too. I'm glad that money is pouring like water, through her hands upon one failure after another. I wish it were all gone. The curse of money! She would have remained the sweetest child that ever drew breath, if it had not been for money: look at that boxful over there! Look at the creatures sponging and toadying. Look at Lady Adela! Look at that McFein—look at that fellow Blaise, squat beside her!—Clara, forgive me, I'm off. I can't stay here."

He got up and walked out of the box.

Mr. Lilienstern—a member of the staff of *Men and Hour*—and an unrecognizably prosperous, even slightly plump, Jerrold Marvell—for Mr. David Evans had come up from distant Cardiff for the occasion—were at the same moment pointing out to each other, likewise with considerable disgust, the spectacle in the double box.

"Cast your eyes up yonder, Lily," said Jerrold. "There's the boss of the show, eh? Your editor! Our patron!—That's what drove me back to Wales . . . to be patronized by Blaisius—that bladder, as empty as a puffed-up balloon!"

Mr. Lilienstern, who accentuated his name by a Disraeli set of curls, glanced darkly in the direction indicated, and then down at his red and swollen hands.

"Blaise told me I was to clap, d—— him!" he said in his lisping confidential voice. "Can't afford to quarrel."

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with my bread and butter like Montagu. Monty's chucked it, you know—but it's all very well, Monty's got something to fall back upon—I haven't. Got to write it up in the rag, too—pitiable rot as it is."

"Pitiable," echoed the Welshman heartily. "Except——" He passed his hand over his hair which had become astonishingly smooth and was combed back, in a fashion which the Cardiff young ladies thought very becoming. "Except—you noticed, perhaps, the little song in this act. It shone like a pearl, I thought, amid the general mire.—I dashed it off for poor old McFein."

"I recognized you, my boy, I recognized you!" exclaimed the effusive Liliens Stern. "Come and have a drink. I'd say let us go round to her box, but 'pon my soul, I can't bring myself to be civil to that fellow. And she——" he paused and shook his head.

"She——" began the little poet, and stopped, the self-satisfied look passed from his countenance, to be replaced by the old scowl. Mr. Liliens Stern shook his head again.

"It's even betting——" he began; but they were in the gangway now: he paused, and, clutching Jerrold by the arm, dragged him back against the wall. "Look up there—isn't it written for the whole house to see? Hasn't he got her in his clutches? Isn't even the husband kicked out already? Does anyone else get a look in?"

A group of spectators pushing by them reminded the two young men of their purpose. They allowed themselves to be carried on to the bar, where the poet indulged in a couple of whiskies without all the soda. It was only when seated once more in the stalls, in the semi-darkness, that he gave full expression to the disgust of his feelings:

"Blaise! . . . Blaise and Magdalen!—Oh, Lily, if you knew what once passed between her and me!—Blaise and that sweet lady! Oh, Lily, Lily!"

The conclusion of Mr. McFein's play was greeted by of those indescribable scenes which sometimes, fortunately not often, meet the luckless dramatist in first-night appeal to the public.

Magdalen was terrified at the uproar and confusion that broke out as soon as the last curtain touched dusty boards. It seemed to her that Bedlam had been loose; that the audience, a little while ago rows respectable, decent citizens, had unexpectedly developed into a raging mob ready to rend her protégé; howl with fury because he was not delivered to their vengeance. She sprang up with a white face and turned to look for the unhappy "author." But he was gone. She glanced apprehensively back into the theatre, half expecting to see him flung out to be broken up, as the huntsman flings the fox to the hounds.

"Take my arm," said Blaise in an urgent whisper. "Let me get you out of this, quickly!" and, as he spoke, wrapped her cloak about her shoulders.

His tone and look frightened her still further. She had never heard such sounds, nor seen such convulsed faces before. Some of his friends in the stalls had had the malice to raise a fresh cry for the author; and the counter howls and boings were hideous. Magdalen clung to Blaise's arm as to a plank in shipwreck, and allowed herself to be guided swiftly into the passage and carried on the rush towards the street.

Lady Adelaide was apparently also much flustered by the noise which "those horrid people in the pit and gallery" were making; for she absent-mindedly persisted in donning Diana's cloak, and only perceived her mistake when in the doorway of the box, which she had effectually blocked. When at last she consented to

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exchange garments with that protesting young lady, considerable time had been wasted.

The belated party on reaching the hall could see no trace of Magdalen or Mr. Blaise.

"And a very good thing too!" said Lady Adelaide to her companion, looking cheerfully at their blank and anxious countenances. "He's very sensibly taken her off. I'll just pop into a taxi and go home too.—Poor child, no doubt she's been upset by all this! I dare say she does not feel equal to the supper-party."

"Supper-party?" cried Diana. "Nobody has asked me to supper.—Where were you and Magdalen going to sup, Lady Adelaide?"

But Lady Adelaide, scuttling down the steps to her taxi, turned a deaf ear.

"Just hang back for a minute or two, Di," said Spofforth to his sister. "There's no chance of the brougham being up yet—with all these cars nipping in."

"Old John persists in thinking he's driving poor papa to the House of Lords," said the Bishop's daughter explanatorily to Dillwyn.

But the Foreign Office youth only gave her a vague smile. His blue eyes were fixed and anxious. Seizing his opportunity, in a momentary pressure of the throng, he drew Teddy aside and whispered:

"I say, old man, I don't like it."

"Like what?"

"The way that fellow rushed Mrs. Denvers off.—Did you happen to catch a glimpse of his face?"

"No."

Teddy's wits were never of the nimblest. But all Magdalen's old friends had a profound distrust of Blaise—intensified, in the case of both these young men, by the

jealousy of a bygone infatuation. Horror dawned on his honest countenance.

"You don't mean to say——" he stammered.

"I mean to say," retorted Dillwyn quickly, recovering his balance as a large lady from the gallery, ruthlessly bent on exit, propelled him from her path, "I mean to say that you're a cousin, and it wouldn't do any harm if we were to slip round to Berkeley Square and just inquire if she had reached home safe.—Horrid crowd here! I must see Miss Di home."

"Teddy's in a hurry off somewhere," said the second later to Teddy's sister. "May I escort you back?"

This arrangement was greeted by Diana with a smile which gave a radiance to the daisy freshness of her face. Dillwyn's swift glance marked her emotion, with astonishment that gave place to half-amused, half-terrace speculation.

"Take my arm, won't you? That's a good idea, isn't it?" He had never used that intimate tone to her before.

As the little group were about to part, Clara came swiftly through the now thinning crowd towards them. There was also a certain anxiety at the back of her cheerfulness.

"Have all the others gone on?" she asked. "Where is Magdalen? She told me yesterday that Mr. Blaise was giving a little supper in honour of McFein to-night. She and Lady Adelaide were going. She wanted to know if I had been asked. Have any of you been honoured?" She laughed a little. "McFein maintains he never hears a word about it. I saw him just now. But, poor fellow, he can't be expected to remember anything to-night——" She broke off. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed the

looking from one to the other of the young men. "What has happened?"

"Nothing," said Dillwyn hurriedly, "nothing." He had the masculine instinctive dread of imparting one woman's secrets to another. He hurried Diana down the steps, pressing her hand against his side with unconscious new fervour.

Clara glanced round for Spofforth; but he too had fled. She stood a moment knitting her dark brows.

"There's something odd about it all," she reflected. She was a woman of decision. "I can't go after Harry at this hour, I suppose . . ." she thought. "But I can ring him up."

CHAPTER VII

WATCHES OF THE NIGHT

THE plan elaborately arranged between Adelaide and Isidore Blaise, at the Albany interview, was after all simple in the extreme.

All Blaise wanted (he had told his fair patroness) was his chance; and to that chance she had resolved to give him. She had persuaded a willing intelligence and an atrophied conscience that, Magdalen's first matrimonial venture being a complete failure, the sooner its ties were loosened the better it would be for the happiness of all parties. Nowadays, fortunately, nobody felt severely on the subject of these sometimes quite avoidable incidents. People who had foolishly made a conjugal mistake, and sensibly rectified it, were just as well received after as before—in the only society where divorcees were counted. How few even troubled to inquire which was the divorcer, which divorcee.

Denver, everybody knew, had abandoned his young wife. He was likely to reap little sympathy; and as Isidore now opined, he was revengefully on the lookout for a ground to repudiate her, why should he not be gratified, since it meant release for Magdalen from her most anomalous position? Things could be managed very quietly; and the end would justify the means. The poor dear child would further be provided with a husband whom the devoted aunt had always looked up

as the one suited, above all others, to fill her existence with bliss. And Magdalen need never know that it was not purely accident that had opened the door to opportunity.

It had been arranged, therefore, between these two disinterested creatures, that Blaise was to profit by the confusion of a first night—and circumstances had served them far better than could have been anticipated—to hurry Magdalen out of the theatre, ostensibly leaving Lady Adelaide to follow with McFein.

McFein's non-appearance had been secured by the elementary process of omitting to ask him; and Lady Adelaide, even as her taxi whisked her up St. James's Street, had not yet decided whether that belated message (which Blaise's telephone might or might not receive, according to circumstances) should contain the announcement of an attack of faintness, a sprain on the theatre steps, or a sudden seizure of influenza. The last alternative would have the advantage of disposing of her comfortably in bed for three or four days, out of the reach of all difficult interviews, should unpleasantness arise.

She had prepared herself for the unwonted sacrifice of paying her own fare, and letting herself in with her latchkey, for Smallwood was the last person she desired to meet at this particular juncture. She was seriously annoyed, therefore, to find that very personage standing on the doorstep, apparently on the look out.

"What are you doing there?" she inquired sharply, and passed him without waiting for a reply. Then, on a happy thought, "Pay the taxi, please," she ordered.

Smallwood returning found her standing close to the warm radiator in the inner hall, shivering ostentatiously. Fate had decided for her.: neither faintness, nor accident—it must be influenza.

"Shut the door, for heaven's sake! I feel most fully ill—I am afraid I've got influenza."

"Are you, my lady?" Smallwood's manner study in correct indifference. But he could not gleam from his eyes as he added: "Sir Simon's waiting for your ladyship in the master's study."

"Sir Simon!" ejaculated his spouse, in such sternation that she quite forgot her symptoms. dear, what can he want? In the study do you say

As she crossed the hall, the thought leaped pleasantly into her brain:

"I need only tell Simon I've got a germ, and fly."

But the old servant arrested her:

"It's the influenza that has brought you back alone, take it, my lady? And Miss Magdalen—Mrs. Denver ought to say—has gone on with her friends? May I not so bold as to ask which of them was accompanying my lady?"

"Really, Smallwood——!" Lady Adelaide tried vainly to laugh. However humble and well controlled a conscience has become, there are times when, like proverbial worm, it will turn. Hers did so now, with most disagreeable sensation. "Really, Smallwood, you are extraordinary! You know that your mistress took a large party to the play. You don't suppose that she should have left her——" she stopped: the lie did not refused itself. She felt that her cheeks were burning, but remembered with a vague comfort that it would look suitably feverish.

"Am I to understand," asked the inquisitor doggedly, "that Miss Magdalen is with Miss Spofforth's party?"

"You are to understand that you are very impatient," flamed the lady.

"Adelaide, what is this?"

Sir Simon flung open the door. His attenuated figure was outlined against the fireglow of the cosy room within.

"Ask Smallwood," said his wife, her never very melodious voice upraised. She seemed struck herself at the discrepancy of its ringing tones with her invalid state, and coughed and again obviously shivered.

"I was merely asking, Sir Simon," said Smallwood, with the same concentrated obstinacy, "if her ladyship would be good enough to say with whom she has left my mistress."

"And with whom have you left her?" asked Sir Simon, turning his piercing eyes upon his wife. He had been whiling away the time over a book, and his spectacles were pushed up upon his forehead. He looked a singular, crumpled, withered old man, and yet a certain force emanated from him. Lady Adelaide felt afraid.

"Don't come near me!" she exclaimed, pulling her furs about her with one hand, while she extended the other to ward him off. "I feel dreadfully ill. I'm sure I've got influenza." Then angrily: "Goodness gracious, you don't think, both of you, I would have come back, but that I felt I ought to be in bed. I'll tell you, Simon, I've got a germ."

But the expected recoil did not occur. On the contrary, after fixing her a second longer with those relentless orbs that were so singularly acute in the parchment face, the ex-minister advanced nearer:

"You don't look ill, Adelaide;—I don't believe you're ill.—I don't understand this business.—It is high time I should interfere. . . . Yah—pah! you and Magdalen, you're becoming the talk of the clubs. I heard a couple of fellows to-night. . . . My wife and my niece! Don't

tell me," exclaimed the old gentleman with a break of exasperation in his querulous voice, tell me, Adelaide, that you've left this young cunchaperoned, with a set of disreputable, giddy God knows what public restaurant ! "

The lie had to be told after all.

" If you call my own relations, the Spofforths putable people, Simon——" she cried, goaded. The countenance changed ; a car had drawn up at the and there were rapid steps on the pavement. Small intent frowning brow relaxed :

" This'll be her," he exclaimed, hurrying to open as the bell thrilled through the silent house.

Sir Simon's gaze, still fixed upon his consort written on her face an amazement, which changed terror as a young man's voice echoed loudly into the

" Oh, I say——" Teddy was explaining, " I'm fully sorry to disturb you. But would you mind tell me, has Mrs. Denvers come back all right ? "

" Come in, sir—come in and speak to Sir Simon," cried Smallwood agitatedly. " No, sir, she have not home.—My lady, here is Mr. Spofforth asking for Denvers."

Lady Adelaide had small time for reflection. It seemed to her that accusing eyes hemmed her in on every side. There was nothing for it but to throw Isidore and Isidore dalen overboard together. And overboard they went with as big a splash as she could produce :

" Good heavens ! " She tottered, not altogether officially, her knees were really shaking beneath her. " The wretched child ! I'm afraid she's taken advantage of our separation in the crowd, to go on alone with Blaise to his supper-party.—Oh yes, Simon, Mr. Blaise wanted us to go to a silly supper to-night—I believe

I never dreamed that she would go without me. I told you, didn't I, Teddy, that I was sure she'd be home before me.—Oh, my poor head!"

"You didn't seem to be thinking that when you stepped in here a while ago, my lady."

Smallwood, deadly accusing, was cut short by Sir Simon:

"Hold your tongue.—Get me my overcoat. Get me my hat and stick.—My stick, sir!" He repeated, "I'll pick up a cab. Stop making that noise, Adelaide! Where did that fellow ask you to supper? Answer me. Answer me!" he repeated so ferociously that the truth leaped from her, before she could consider its advisability.

"Oh, at his rooms, at Q I the Albany."

It was Spofforth who gave the stifled exclamation. Sir Simon uttered no word, but wrenched himself into the fur-lined coat that Smallwood held up for him. He snapped his stick and hat from the same willing hand.

"May I go with you, sir?" asked Teddy, as they reached the bottom of the steps. "We'd better walk—it is just round the corner, really."

The old man turned on the well-meaning youth.

"If you want the whole town to talk——" he snapped; but suddenly softened. "No, young man," he went on, while still trotting quaveringly towards Hay Hill. "This, this——" he struggled for breath and for words. "Yah, pah!—this is a damned silly business, and it won't be the better for meddlers. It won't be the better for meddlers, sir! Go home, and forget it. Keep your mouth shut at least, if you can't. That's what you've got to do."

Teddy fell back, first angry and inclined to rebel. Then suddenly the common sense that underlay the uncompromising words forced itself upon him.

"It's a game old cock," he thought admiringly, as he watched the tottering yet indomitable energy with which

the valetudinarian breasted Hay Hill. "I'll just about after him, lest he should tumble down in. Then I'd have to come in—after all, I am kin enough have a right to look after her."

"I'll go to bed," said Lady Adelaide faintly. really very ill. Smallwood—Smallwood!" Magdalen's servant turned his anxious face upon her with so much animosity that she hastily altered the intended remark. "Won't you help me upstairs?" to a stammered "are you going to do?"

"I'm going to fetch my master," said Smallwood. The house shook with the force with which he beat the door that led down to the basement.

For one overcome with faintness Lady Adelaide contrived to get upstairs with remarkable celerity—dropped her cloak on the first landing to proceed more slowly. The sense of hurry and fright lasted until she was between the blankets, in the darkness; and then, when she set herself to face the situation, her tremors gradually began to subside.

Was it, after all, such a bad thing that this scandal should break out about the two whom, as matters stood, only scandal could unite? There was already, it seemed, enough gossip at the clubs. The conversation that Simon had overheard must have been fairly pointed to have put her in such an idiotic state of fuss.

Heaven knew she could not be held responsible. No one could accuse her of not having accompanied her child everywhere . . . up to to-night. And as for to-night, whatever happened, even if the discrepancy in her own words and actions were brought home to her, she could always (if indeed a suffering woman could be held

account for every word) plead her desire to shield her impetuous niece. And Magdalen would want shielding. She would want championship. She would not be over-eager—by to-morrow morning—to investigate her best friend's lapses from the path of rectitude.

As for the little transaction of the cheque, there was no likelihood of its seeing the light. Blaise was as deeply concerned in the privacy of the affair as she was herself. And she reflected, with a glow of satisfaction, that the money had had nothing to say to her actions that evening: she would have done just the same, would have helped those poor young things just as heartily, without that friendly assistance.—No, she could regret nothing. Things had come to a climax. Nobody in Magdalen's position could be expected to drag out all her youthful years, abandoned, alone, unloved. . . .

If anyone was to blame in the whole matter, it was Denvers. If the aunt was arraigned for not better guarding the child, what of the husband? Lady Adelaide could very well turn the tables (and meant to do so, should need arise) when she had recovered from her influenza. "I am going to tell my master," Smallwood had said. Let the old busybody carry his story! Denvers was basely looking for some such lapse on his wife's side—Isidore had told her as much. Well, here was what he was looking for.—Let him make the most of it!

Then once more she turned hot as she lay—hot this time with indignation. Smallwood was Denvers' spy, then; was doing private inquiry for "the Master," as he called him. That accounted for his inquisitorial manner. How base—how low! That's what came of marrying the agent. Silly, unhappy child! It was indeed time to cut her free!

There is nothing so comforting as righteous anger, when conscience requires soothing. Lady Adelaide fell

asleep on this comfort. And the sound of steps passing and repassing her room, the opening and shutting of doors, and later on, the faint reverberation of the door, all failed to disturb her.

From the theatre, Denvers went straight back to his lonely rooms ; and, by a spell of hard work, tried to conquer the torment of thought. He had several contracts to look over, the details of which demanded attention, and attention was difficult to give this evening. He was restless, thoroughly ill at ease ; now and again tempted by inexplicable impulse to rush out and seek further news of his wife.—He was aware that his anxiety was becoming nothing less than an obsession. He tried to reason with himself. Had he not taken every precaution for her invisible protection, day by day ? Did not Smallwood bring him early every morning, the program as far as he knew it, of his mistress's movements for the day ? Would not the telephone ring, in due course, at night, to convey the faithful old guardian's last reassurance before retiring to his rest : " All well, sir, she's here, safe and sound ! " Indeed, had not the morning information been unwontedly consoling ?

" It's my opinion, sir," the old man had said, in the intervals of brushing the master's garments and general tidying his rooms, " it's my opinion that she is getting a bit sick of the whole thing . . . of the whole lot of them, I may say. That Mr. Blaise has not been next door to the house these two days. As to her ladyship, she's looking just about annoyed. Very tart Miss Mordalen was to her, last night at dinner, very tart indeed. And she hasn't as much as opened that paper ; there's a pile of them in the boudoir, and I saw it this morn-

just where I left it yesterday. Of course we are having one or two of them to dine to-night. But then there's Mr. Spofforth, and Miss Di, and Mr. Dillwyn coming too. And they'll all be with her at the theatre. . . . Very particular she was about having them. Made me telephone last night to make sure of Miss Di. Her ladyship didn't like it."

But it was more difficult than usual, this evening, to make the voice of reason audible against the clamour of his heart; against the taunting suggestions which succeeded each other, as if whispered by some imp of torment. It was all very well to say that she was at the least as well guarded now as before her marriage. The very fact of her marriage state, without a husband's protection, exposed her to risks unlikely to threaten a girl. The fact that they were separated must attract attention to her, stimulate the adventurer—and she had been encircled by adventurers from the beginning. All very well to tell himself that it was Lady Adelaide's interest to justify her position in the heiress's house by a decent show of chaperonage. He knew Lady Adelaide too well. Thank God, he knew Magdalen! He had come to understand well enough the chief anomaly in her character (and it was the best safeguard of all): dearly as she loved adulation, admiration, even adoration, it was only from the ideal side. It pleased her to stand on her pedestal and receive incense; but no nymph was ever more ready to fly in horror from the first sound of the satyr's footsteps.

A memory came upon him of the terror with which she had clung to him in the boat, although it had been, as it were, but from the shadow of an outstretched hand.—Suddenly he seemed to feel her cling to him again. In his empty lonely room, her voice seemed once more to

call out, "Harry, don't leave me!" And he had le-
Worse, he had refused to return!

He flung down his pen, he could endure it no-
Though after a first night, and no doubt a s-
party, he could not expect her to be back yet, he y-
to the restlessness which so often had driven h-
go and watch unseen for her return home. This
lover's patrol, under the shadow of the trees in Be-
Square, within sight of her lighted window, had b-
so nearly a custom, that Smallwood always look-
him before sending the night's message on the
No matter how long he might have to wait there
time, it would be more tolerable than here.

He turned away from the table and cast a lo-
scrutiny round the room, after a fashion which had be-
habitual with him. Was everything as he would
it to be when it should first strike her eyes? He cr-
over and opened the door of the white room. It was
with the glow of the wood fire, fragrant with the sc-
violets. "Is there such another madman alive!"
asked himself. His fingers were still on the door-ha-
when the telephone-bell rang out with its iterated s-
ness of summons.

"Are you there?"

"Who is it?" He expected to hear Smallwo-
voice, but it was a woman who answered:

"Is that you, Harry?" His heart leaped,
steadied itself dully.

"Oh, is it Clara?"

"Yes, it is I. . . . Harry——"

"What is it?"

"Oh, you will think me an absurd fidget," said

distant voice, so clear in the night's silence, "but——" it broke off to laugh nervously. His veins ran as with a fire of impatience:

"Yes, yes—I'm listening, what is it?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I happen to know that Mr. Blaise expected Magdalen to supper to-night—Yes, to supper—at his rooms, Q I, Albany Court.—His rooms, yes. And I can't make out who else is going to be there. Lady Adelaide went home, alone.—Yes, alone. The other two went on.—Yes, yes, I do mean Magdalen and Mr. Blaise. They went on from the theatre, together. It was an awful——"

The voice was thrust back, as it were, through the line by the brutal closing of the telephone receiver, and Harry, seizing hat and stick as he darted through the lobby, did not even wait to put on his overcoat before dashing down the wooden stairs at headlong speed and out into the November night.

Sir Simon toddled up Burlington Gardens towards the silent secluded passage of the Albany. He was preparing his interview with the neatest precision. Though he had demanded a stick and twirled it as he went with senile severity, he did not, on reflection, intend to use it upon Mr. Blaise's shoulders. A man has not spent so many years of his life in diplomacy for nothing, even should old age have exasperated a naturally irascible disposition. No—he would ring the bell at the fellow's rooms—Yah, pah! to think that he should have to seek any young female relation of his, after midnight, at a fellow's rooms! "I have come, sir," he would say, "to escort Mrs. Denvers, my niece, home,—Lady Adelaide Bruce-Walsingham, my wife, having, I understand, been unable

to join her, owing to a sudden and regrettable position."

The rest of his remarks on the situation he reserve for Magdalen in the returning four-wheeler.

Having reached the silent and jealously reticent of the Albany, he paused to inquire of the about the position of Mr. Blaise's rooms. He had received the information that they lay at the further end of the covered passage and, panting, hailed the porter.

"Has the lady gone out this way?"

Sir Simon instantly recognized Isidore himself, who was bareheaded, in evening dress; and, as the old man saw at a single glance, in an acute state of discomposure.

The porter hesitated, staring; Blaise repeated his inquiry in angry, overbearing tones:

"Did you hear what I said—did the lady go out this way?"

"No, sir," replied the man, and turning to Sir Simon, "This is the gentleman you were inquiring for," he said, with sarcastic emphasis on the word gentleman.

"Mr. Blaise, I believe," said Sir Simon arrestingly. Blaise, who had already started to run back, brought himself up short and wheeled round.

"Who is that?"—Then, upon a sudden recognition, he made a strenuous effort to compose himself: "Sir Simon!—Oh, Sir Simon, most ridiculous situation, the fact is—well—your niece, Mrs. Denvers, was to have supped with me—and Lady Adelaide—and I'm afraid I am afraid they've missed their way! I was expecting them, you see, aha. If you'll excuse me, I think I must just run and inquire at the other end."

Sir Simon, perplexed and annoyed, shuffled after the swift figure with the best speed he could muster.

But when he pushed open the inner door at the Piccadilly end of the building, it was only to see Blaise dashing through the outer one, which he swung violently back behind him.

"Gentleman's lost his lady!" said the second porter humorously.

Sir Simon had halted with a "Tsha!" of disgust. He now fixed the speaker acutely from under his bushy eyebrows:

"Lost his lady, has he?"

"Yes, sir—regular state he's in. 'Has a lady gone by?' says he. 'Yes,' says I, and off he goes, just as you saw, without a hat on his head, more like a madman than anything I see in my life.—New-comer he is, sir, in the Court."

"New-comer, is he?" Sir Simon's querulous voice vainly reached for geniality. He jingled some coins in his pocket and hesitated. "So the lady went by, did she?" he snapped at last.

"Yes, sir." The porter, with the tactful grace peculiar to his kind, accepted the coin from the trembling old hand. "Thank you, sir.—Just as much in a hurry as the gentleman, she was. I asked if she had a carriage. Offered to get her a cab. 'Oh, no,' says she, 'let me out—at once, at once!' Queer go, sir."

"Yah, pah!" said Sir Simon, with great disgust. Shaking his head and pondering, he began to retrace his steps, pausing a moment at the entrance of Q I to stare at the open door through which the light was streaming.

She had run away from him—what did it mean? What—the veins of his forehead began to swell, the thin blood suddenly was stirred into fury—what had the

villain dared to say or do?—He clutched the stair
shook it in the solitude. Well, she had got away, and
Home by this time. Adelaide and she would have
of his mind to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, that was
No use making more scandal than need be. Ay,
Denvers too would hear from him—Denvers, who
to be looking after his own wife. Monstrous—monstrous
If every man should think himself justified in giving
his married duty because of a tiresome wife! . . .
Yah! Denver above all should have a bit of his

Lost in these cogitations, he was emerging once
into Burlington Gardens, when he was startled by an
unexpected rencontre. A taxi whizzed round the corner
from Savile Row and drew up with the grind of un-
speed in perilous proximity to him. He jumped
with a testy ejaculation; and then, to his amazement
recognized in the man who flung himself out of it
very person he had been castigating in his mind.

"Sir Simon——!" Joyfully Denver hailed his
uncle. "You here!" He drew a breath of relief.
"You've been at the supper-party, too, I see.—Unwonted
dissipation, Sir Simon, eh?"

"Supper?—I?"

"Yes, supper at Mr. Blaise's—have you not?"

"Supper?—poison! At that fellow's?—No, sir.
came to bring home your wife."

"Magdalen——!" The light faded from Harry's face.
"Where is she, then?"

"Tut tut—not so loud!—She's gone home, of course.
Very sensibly. I expect you'll find her at home—if you
go there. And it's high time you did go there, young
man. No—no—no, we can't talk here. I'll get into that
pestilential machine with you. Only tell the fellow I
rather die in my bed. In with you, I say! I'll drop

you at Berkeley Square and take it on to my chambers. Eh, what? And when you get there, just you stay there!"

"But——" Denvers' lips were parched. Reassuring as the ex-minister's words might be, he felt that something lay behind them. "Are you sure she's gone home—or is that only what they told you at the door?"

Perhaps Sir Simon had a diplomatic sense of the time to speak, and the time to be silent, or perhaps he had, at the bottom of his odd withered heart, a pity for his erring relative's unmistakable distress.

"I can't vouch for her having reached home safely, especially if she's got a brimstone fellow like this to drive her—ugh! But I can vouch she's started for home. D'ye think I'd be likely to leave her behind me, eh?"

The effort of being audible in the taxi produced a fit of coughing, of which circumstance Sir Simon was perhaps not sorry to avail himself. All further conversation became impossible till the reprobate driver drew up before the Berkeley Square house.

"Out with you, now!" croaked Sir Simon. "Tell him the Hamman Chambers, will you?" He was now chiefly anxious to get his ancient carcase home to bed, out of the way of further vexatious emotion.

Harry stood on the steps of the house long after the noisy machine had throbbed itself out of sight. Now it had come to the point he hesitated. If she were indeed safe at home, the situation would not be improved between them by his rousing the household to inquire. And, if she had not reached home, surely Smallwood would be on the alert. He crossed to the opposite pavement. The house presented a front of complete repose. But, by the light of the street lamp, he presently perceived that the area gate was ajar. As he recrossed the way to

investigate, hurried steps sounded behind him, and finding, he found himself face to face with Smallwood.

"Oh, sir—oh, Captain Denvers, sir, wherever you been this dreadful night?"

"Why—Smallwood——"

"I've rang you up, sir, time and again—I've in and out of this here house like a rabbit out of its hole—and round the square forty times and back 'phone again. And—oh, sir, she's never come home."

"Not home!"

"No, sir. And Sir Simon went after her, and never come back either. And—I'd have been round her myself, sir, only for the expecting of you, and thinking she'd be home herself every——"

"Stop a moment," said Denvers. He put out his hand to arrest the voluble speech, and stood lost in abstraction. As once before that evening, he seemed to feel the soft touch of Magdalen's clinging hand and to hear her whisper in his ear: "Harry—Harry, hold me!" An overpowering conviction came upon him, born of no process of reasoning, no attempt at self-solace or plausible conjecture, a message it seemed from some spirit out and beyond.—She had come home indeed, home to him! . . . and he was not there.

It was as if he saw her slowly going up the old stairs at Gray's Inn, the little key in her hand! And he remembered that she should find him there, waiting!

"Take me with you, sir," panted Smallwood, running in pursuit after clanging his gate, as Denvers dashed northward.

The night silence which fell upon the square, when the footsteps had died away, was almost immediately broken again: a four-wheeler came slowly lumbering round the corner, halted, creaking, before Mrs. Denvers' door.

R

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CHAPTER VIII

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

WHEN Magdalen allowed herself to be hurried into the taxi-cab by Blaise, she was panic-stricken. She would have gone anywhere, with anyone, to get out of the pandemonium in the theatre. Only a little while ago she had felt herself, as it were, queen of the assembly ; now it seemed to her that, in the horrid turmoil of the fiasco, she herself was being derided, howled at, threatened. She could not, of course, realize that a certain section of the theatre-going public was merely enjoying itself. It took her two or three minutes to choke down an inclination to tears ; and she was grateful to her companion for refraining from speech, as their vehicle steered its difficult way down the crowded Strand. All at once the driver—one of those dashing foreigners to whom London trusts the lives of its citizens under, it seems, a special providence—imparted a violent swerve to his machine and avoided only just in time the thundering onslaught of the motor-bus he had been dodging. Magdalen turned instinctively to Blaise and saw that, apparently unaware of their narrow escape, he was smiling to himself as upon some enchanting secret thought. The impression this secret smile made on her was so unpleasant that she cried sharply :

“ One would think you were pleased, Mr. Blaise ! ”

The man started slightly, composed his mobile face and

assumed that reverential air which he was v
reserve for her.

"Is it possible I have so betrayed myself? De
forgive me! It is true I was——" His eyes fir
with their black impenetrability. "I was shan
congratulating myself on my good fortune."

"Your good fortune? I don't know what y
mean. It's been perfectly disgusting and the
ghastly failure!"

"Oh no," said Blaise quickly, "it's been a fai
grant you, but a glorious failure. Our friend's pla
be discussed all over the kingdom within twent
hours. He ought to be a happy man! No mere
success could have advertised him like this. And
me——" his voice sank—"as for me, can I help
glad of this chance, this opportunity?——" He fe
movement of recoil; and, swift to interpret it,
humbly: "Ah, do not say you grudge me this pr
little *tête-à-tête* before the others come!"

"I think you're very silly," said Mrs. Denvers, bu
voice had lost its sharpness. She lay back more rest
the customary atmosphere of worship going some
to restore her equanimity. Blaise gave her a sid
glance once or twice, then set himself to talk of imper
matters, discussing the play, its effect upon the p
mind, the criticisms he expected; he was fluent
florid as usual, yet interesting, sometimes even ar
ing.

By the time they reached Burlington Gardens
dalen's nerves were soothed, the momentary unplea
impression forgotten. Characteristically, the thou
that she had sunk a good thousand pounds in this
aster only increased her desire of presently pouring b
upon the dramatist's wounds. She sought for the m

graceful and tactful words with which to greet him when he should come in upon them.

"Of course," she said, stopping half-way down the solitary covered passage in the Albany, which echoed oddly in the night to their steps and voices, "we will give him just as good a notice in our paper as if it had been a most splendid success."

Magdalen could not help being conscious that she was acting up to her own ideal very nobly, and expected a correspondingly enthusiastic acknowledgment. But, to her surprise, Blaise turned his opaque gaze upon her as if he had not heard; and exclaiming:

"Do not let us stand here," hurried her along with an urgency to which she yielded, vaguely astonished. Perhaps it was this astonishment which gave rise again to that intangible sense of displeasure which had already come upon her during their trajet.

As she entered the rooms, however, the sight of his lavish preparations drew from her an admiring exclamation. The little waiting-room, which Lady Adelaide had found so dull, was transformed. Great vases of lilies stood on the mantelshelf, on the bureau a bowl of orchids. The purple curtains were cosily drawn. The crimson morocco arm-chairs from the "sanctum" flanked the little hearth where a fire glowed ruddily. A Cordova leather screen added its dim note to the rich colours. Through the open folding-doors there was a vision of a rose-decked supper-table laid for four, already illuminated by amber-shaded candles. It was like a scene on the stage; and for the moment Magdalen, who loved sumptuousness, was pleased and forgot the annoyances and discomfort of the evening.

"How vewy, vewy pretty," she lisped graciously.

He was standing by the door, which he had carefully

closed behind him. Without speaking he came forward and extended his hand to take her cloak. But here something in the gaze he fixed upon her, something now masterful in the gesture, filled her with a quick distrust almost amounting to repugnance. She stepped back from his touch.

Prompt as he was usually to realize his slightest move, to-night the sense of opportunity blunted his anxious susceptibility.

"Surely," he said in her ear—the familiar tenderness of his tone struck her as odious, unpardonable—"shall you will take off your cloak, fair lady? Sit down on this, my humble hearth, and warm those feet which—" he was about to add, "before which I have ever kneeling in spirit," when she again moved toward him with so unmistakable a reserve that he stood a moment nonplussed.

"I am cold," she said irrelevantly. "I will keep my furs.—No, I will not take that chair, I hate a fire.—Do you think Aunt Adelaide is likely to be long?"

He had not known her so intimately without knowing her in many moods. But never before had she looked upon him and spoken to him in this manner. It seemed to thrust him back, irrevocably, to his own social place beneath her. A dark flush mounted to his face, the veins in his temples swelled. The man who had always been subservient before his benefactress was filled with an ignominious anger. She was now in his power, and she presumed to flout him! The baser depth of his nature, so long persistently overlaid with sentiment, altruism and philanthropy, was stirred. While luring her into the *guet-apens* he had intended, nevertheless, to display himself at his most chivalrous. Though plotting to support the jealous husband undeniable cause for action, he

thought it advisable still to pose as innocent, to pose almost as a fellow-victim of circumstance. Blaise, in fine, who conceived himself in the rôle of a Galahad unwittingly placed in the position of a Lancelot, now hesitated upon a brutal impulse to throw aside all subterfuge. A red glint came into the eyes fixed upon her. But it was only a flash. The professional hypocrite prevailed over the natural man. It would be folly to yield to impulse when the end could be reached by diplomacy, and with infinitely better results.

"Oh," he said at last, "we mustn't expect the good lady yet! First-night crowds, you know."

The effort to speak naturally produced a jauntiness of tone which continued to grate on her. She said irritably:

"How tiresome everything is to-night!" and drew her furs closer about her shoulders.

"We were lucky to get away so quickly," he pursued. He must arm himself with patience—it was only just midnight, hardly a compromising hour yet, in these times. She must be humoured back into content. They must have their *tête-à-tête* supper in harmony. And afterwards—well, afterwards, the moment would have been reached when he would be bound, in very manhood, to reveal the depths of his long pent passion; when both must look the future in the face.

"How horribly strong your lilies smell!" remarked she, in the same petulant tone, after a pause, during which Blaise vainly sought a subject, sprightly or soothing, with which to beguile the time.

"Shall I put them outside?—I thought they were the kind you liked—at Berkeley Square." He could not keep a certain injured bitterness from his voice.

"Oh, no, it doesn't matter."

"Come a little nearer to the fire," he urged after

another pause. "I'll put a screen before it. You look uncomfortable sitting there in your wraps, so unsettled."

"Oh, please don't fuss.—What can Aunt Adela say about——!"

"First night, you know——"

"I do think it is mean of her, to abandon me like this."

He gave her a quick look and then averted his eyes.

"It is we who abandoned her, don't you think?" he rushed away, you know, and left her in the lurch."

"We rushed away——" Magdalen repeated the words slowly as the truth of the fact was borne in upon her. It added to her dissatisfaction. "No, you rushed away," she said sharply.

"You were so frightened, I thought you were going to faint."

He had found a happier tone in which to say what he was concerned and apologetic. Her sensitiveness responded. The memory of that moment of panic came back upon her—that horrible, shouting, seething crowd. Her lip quivered, she closed her eyes to hide the nervous tears.

"It's been a most beastly evening," she said, with a little catch in her breath.

"Ah—we must end it better! Don't let's think of anything unpleasant. I want you"—his accents took on their deepest thrill—"I want you to remember this night as——"

"As what?"

He subtly altered his phrase:

"It would be a great sadness to me were my little party to leave a bad impression on you, dearest lady——"

"The party is conspicuous by its absence," she said with a cruel laugh.

"You cannot expect me to think so."

"What can have happened to Aunt Adelaide?"

"But surely—a first night——"

"You've said that ten times already—it's past twelve o'clock."

"I'll stop the course of time," he said jocosely, jumping up from his chair and tilting the squat marble clock into silence.

He was so pleased with this useful thought that he could not keep a smile of triumph from his lips, and had to stand a moment with his back to her, to hide it. Without turning round he spoke again:

"Perhaps your aunt is not feeling well——"

The silence behind him made him wheel round quickly. She was sitting staring straight before her. As he turned she raised her eyes. With the childishness of expression, peculiar to her, she seemed to be trying to grasp an incomprehensible and alarming idea.

"But Mr. McFein?" There was a shrill note in her voice.

Blaise hesitated a moment. He was questioning with himself whether a lie was still worth while. In that instant's hesitation, Magdalen, as in a flash of lurid light, read something of the truth. . . . He had never asked Mr. McFein!—Why?—And her aunt, what was the mystery about her absence? What trick had been played to prevent her coming? She knew now, as certainly as if he had admitted it, that Blaise knew Aunt Adelaide was not coming.—It was not by accident that she found herself alone, at midnight, in his rooms! Something cried out in terror within her, but she clenched her teeth. Instinct warned that if she betrayed her fear, she would lose all hold on the situation.

"You look pale—you are tired." Again there was the

odious tenderness in his air, as he advanced and be her. "You want some supper.—What say you? we not begin supper?" Then he went on, bantering bubble of triumphant laughter rising irrepressibly to the bland accents. "Surely neither you nor I conventional as to want a chaperon——"

From that seat which she had chosen, so uncomplainingly aloof, she was determined not to move. She drew her cloak closer about her, as if it were a kind of protection, and flung a furtive glance measuring the distance to the door by which they had entered. Vainly she sought for some words in which to frame her desire for his departure. What if she were indeed to plead that she was ill, faint? No, no, how horrible if she were really to do so now, here! She closed her eyes, and swayed, ever so slightly.

He cried out at once, all sympathy, all ostentatious solicitude:

"You are exhausted. This rough evening has done too much for you, my delicate lady! Lean back, and I will bring you a glass of champagne. Ah, you must drink it."

He hurried into the adjoining room. With a look strained like those of a trapped animal, she lifted herself noiselessly from her chair, took two steps, and stood listening: paralysed. She heard the clip of the nightgown and a muffled exclamation of haste that might have been a curse. Hidden as he was from her sight, she had a momentary vision of his cushioned hands trembling with eagerness, of his face with the benevolent mask off, convulsed with exultation.

Then, sharply, cutting into the sound of his panting breath and the frenzied drumming of her own pulse, came the ring of the telephone-bell.

Another smothered malediction escaped him. Then, after a pause his voice rose, veneered with amiability.

"Hallo, hallo! Is that you, Lady Adelaide? What? Who is it then? Oh, you—you, Lilienstern!—Confound it, what do you mean by ringing me up at this hour?—"

The obviously uncontrollable burst of temper was Magdalen's deliverance. The palsy fell from her: here was her chance—she could move without being heard. She opened the door, never pausing to close it again as she slipped into the passage. On the steps of the open entrance, the ungoverned anger of the voice still reached her ears:

"Why, of course, damn the play—damn it! Isn't it damned already—"

She started running, instinctively turning towards the nearest exit—the seething of Piccadilly was as a haven of refuge, compared to the horror which this quiet, reputable place had slyly held for her.

She was able to control her frenzy of flight sufficiently to pass with some show of decency in front of the porter's lodge. But what he said to her, what she answered the man, she never could remember.

Once on the pavement she started running again, traversed the deserted outer courtyard to plunge into the great thoroughfare, taking her course against the westward-flowing stream, with the instinctive hope of arresting the first empty cab. One after another vehicles whizzed by, but all were filled with the pleasure-seekers of the London night—painted faces at the windows, inane smiles . . . ever and anon a shrill laugh, or a snatch of song, it was to her like some revolving wheel of nightmare.

Presently she perceived that she was herself an object of astonishment, jocular curiosity, comments, to the passers-by; that groups had stopped to stare after her;

that some had turned and followed; that a man even dared to speak to her. Then she realized that, her wreath-crowned head, her long ermine cloak, diamonds flashing in her ears, running along the street, she was indeed inviting amazement, not to say insult. She realized also that she was for the moment the most unprotected creature on that pavement, forlorn, the most unprotected creature on that pavement. Physical weakness seized her, the terror of her own condition almost overcame her. Then through the swirling phantasmagoria of the night crowd, the lights, the haughty bustle about her, she caught a glimpse of a policeman's helmet. With indescribable relief, she knew that she was safe. The creature who had spoken to her, the creature who had followed, melted away; the starers fell back. She steadied herself gripping the constable's arm; with the sense of security, strength returned to her.

"Will you get me a cab, a taxi, please?" Then seeing the amazement in the man's eyes, she added at random, "I must have taken the wrong turning. I cannot find my servants—anything will do—a four-wheeler."

It was the antique conveyance now crawling desolately into sight that had suggested the last words.

When she had sunk upon its mouldy blue cushion, when its rickety door had been clapped upon her; when she heard her rescuer's authoritative voice repeat the address in Berkeley Square, and felt herself fairly start, she could have wept for thankfulness. Early-Victorian propriety seemed to encircle her. She did not even check at the jog-trot progress, it soothed her jarred nerves. Her whirling brain had time to recover its balance.

But, when she found herself, latchkey in hand, secure inside her own hall-door, for no reasonable cause feeling

returned. The wide marble space under the cold light of the electric lamp seemed to enfold her with a fresh sense of desolation. The heavy door, as it fell into the frame behind her, had sent a dismal echo through the silent house, which had sounded in her ears like the closing of a tomb. She crossed the hall, opened the door upon the basement stair and called softly, but there was no reply. She had never thought that Smallwood could have gone to bed, knowing her still absent ; and though, at another time, she would have avoided his outspoken comment upon her follies, to-night she yearned for the human companionship of a faithful old servant. She turned with a heavy heart : even Smallwood did not care !

As she swiftly ran upstairs, the sight of Lady Adelaide's cloak, flung on a chair, brought her suddenly to a standstill. . . . It was true, then ! It was as she had suspected in those dark moments which seemed now as far away yet as haunting as an evil dream. She had not been able to realize the full meaning of her aunt's defection while the sense of imminent personal peril had lasted. But now, as she gazed at the well-known brocade and fur, she understood. Her protectress, her close relation, the woman whom she had loaded with benefits, had indeed entered into so vile a scheme ! . . . There had been no accident. Lady Adelaide had gone quietly home to bed—leaving her, knowingly.

A shudder seized her. Helping herself on by the banisters, she slowly went up to her room and locked herself in ; locked, too, the door of the empty dressing-room—and then stood, drawing long breaths, shivering still from head to foot.

"At least, here I am safe," she said aloud.

But even as she spoke the words, her heart cried out in denial. Safe ! How could she ever feel ~~safe~~ again ? She

stood listening for phantom sounds, for steps within the house, for whispers and the secret opening of doors. What if Smallwood had been lured away? Those Blaise and Aunt Adelaide, who had been capable of night's treachery, of what might they not yet be capable? Whom, in this house, could she trust? Who would save her? Was there anyone in the world?—and then her heart cried out again. It was as with a great cry: "Yes!" The fluttering of her pulses steadied down. Warmth came back to her veins.—And he was waiting!

She ran to the drawer where lay the little gilt key, thrust it into her bosom; drew the diamonds from her ears, the pearls from her neck, and flung them on the table; let the ermine drop from her shoulders and left it where it lay. Then she wrapped herself in a dark motor-coat, pulled the hood over her head, crept downstairs and hurried herself out into the square.

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CHAPTER IX

THE STEP ON THE STAIRS

HARRY stood in the middle of his empty rooms, hands extended, eyes staring, like a man struck witless. Empty!

It was thus Smallwood found him as, panting and coughing after the hurried ascent of the stairs in Gray's Inn, he followed through the wide-open doors.

Twice the old man called, in vain; then he shook his master by the arm.

"For God's sake, sir!" he cried out, frightened. Then the inspiration of his office came to him: he went over to the cellarette. "Take a drop of brandy, sir,—and then we'll go and find her!"

The words roused Denvers.

"Good God!—find her! Yes, we must find her!" He pushed the proffered glass from him, moving to the door, but stopped and wheeled back into the room, unlocked the bureau and thrust a handful of sovereigns in his pocket with frenzied haste. "As for you," he went on, go back to the house—there's just a chance, and you'll— Hush!" He broke off as if once again turned to stone, one hand still on the open drawer, the

other gripping Smallwood by the arm. "Hush repeated in a lower but still more urgent voice, old man made a movement.

In the dead silence of the ancient Inn, through open doors, the open stairway, he had caught a sound the courtyard.—Yes, there was a step . . . a woman's step upon the flags without. A woman's step, though of a high heel. Hurriedly it approached nearer, hesitated—and then, up the stairs the wooden response the little foot, louder if duller than the echo from the stones. Slowly now, halting . . . how tired it sounded.—Her step, her step at last!

Now she paused on the top landing. He could hear her draw a sighing breath. With a wide gesture he turned Smallwood aside. He knew vaguely that the old servant, pale-faced, was still staring at him as at a madman. She was entering; her narrow skirts in the lobby rustled faintly at each hesitating movement. . . . Now she appeared within the door: she crossed the threshold. Just as she reached him she seemed to fail, and he caught her up in his arms. Awhile they clung to each other without speech.

Smallwood, his eyes bright with tears, gazed a moment more, as if to assure himself of the happy reality, then crept out.

The sound of the heavy outer oak closing startled two who had forgotten all in life but each other. He looked round, understood.

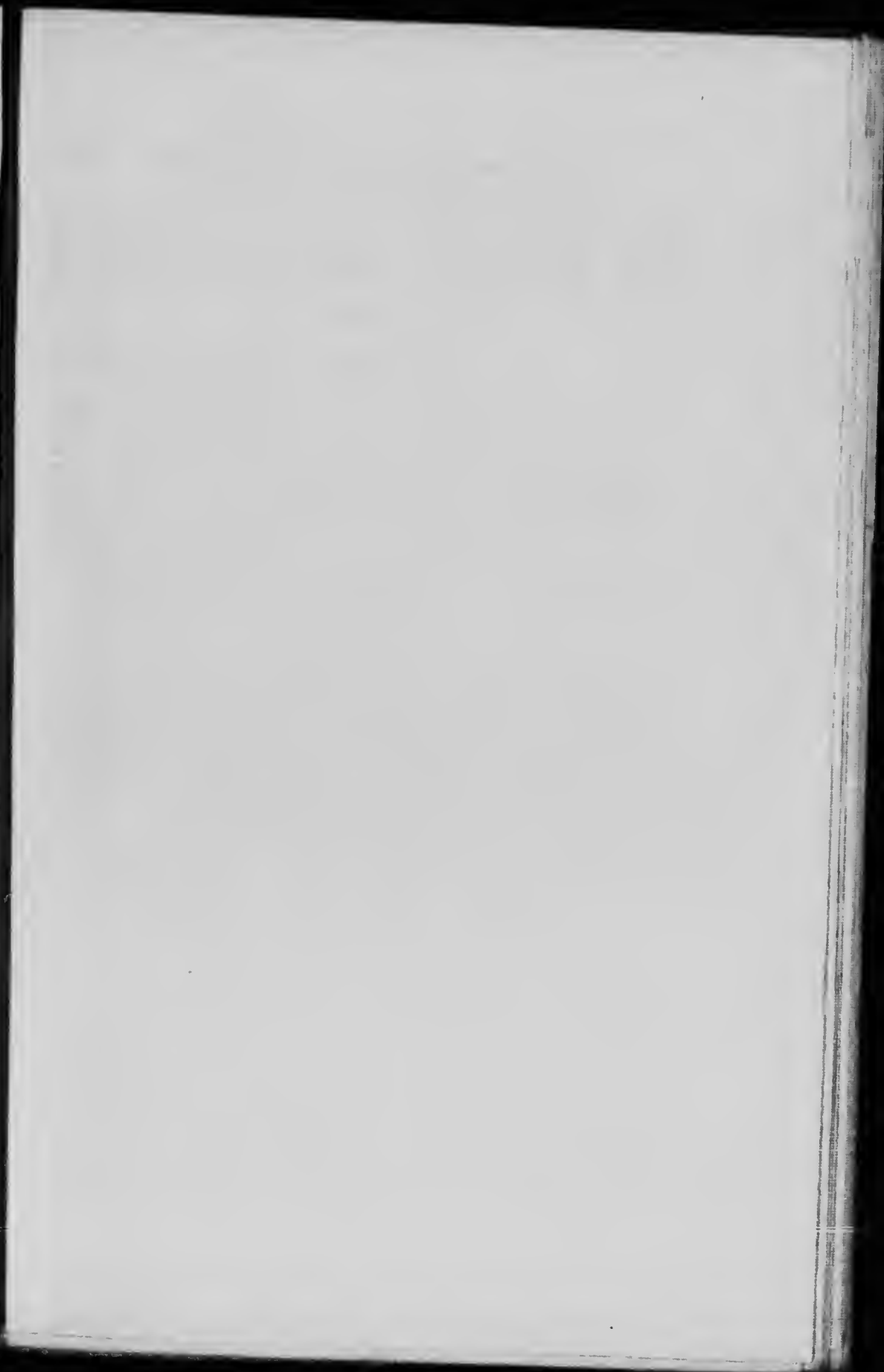
"It means," he whispered close to her ear, "that we are alone . . . that I have you at last, safe from all the world . . . !"

THE STEP ON THE STAIRS 361

But she, feeling the relaxation of his clasp of her, clutched him with frightened hands—those beloved hands that had been reaching out in spirit to him all this night—and cried :

“Harry—Harry, hold me fast . . . never let me go again !”

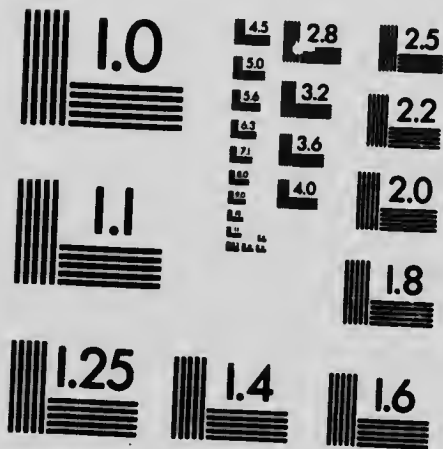
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"The woman's cause is man's, they rise or fall together"—
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