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TWO GENERATIONS

**JUSTICE OF THE PEACE. Mr. Niven's  
Earlier Novel. Second Large Edition.**

*Some Press Opinions—*

*British Weekly:* I am more and more impressed by his striking ability . . . he is marvellously sure and keen as an observer, and he can put his impressions in the tersest and most memorable form.

*Daily News:* Mr. Niven has done it. He has written a novel which is a genuine novel of ideas, and not a mere brilliantly accurate essay in observation . . . a remarkable novel.

*Daily Telegraph:* This story is remarkable . . . for the knowledge of character, for the minuteness with which that knowledge is put into words, and for the simplicity with which poignant emotions and the deep love of man for man are rendered.

*Dundee Advertiser:* In *Ellen Adair* Mr. Frederick Niven . . . presented an extraordinarily vivid and truthful picture of Edinburgh life. . . . In *Justice of the Peace* he has done a somewhat similar service to the sister city of the west. . . . A book of real merit.

*Graphic:* A mordant study of family life in Glasgow, stronger than anything that has appeared since *The House with the Green Shutters*.

*Illustrated London News:* It deserves to survive.

*Manchester Courier:* The lovability of Mr. Moir and Martin make the story of deep appeal. In its kind Mr. Niven's novel is a masterpiece.

*Nation:* The whole picture of Ebenezer Moir's "soft goods" business is intensely living . . . the feel of the bustle and movement in the big warehouse—all this is conveyed with a sure and felicitous touch . . . very striking piece of character study.

*Observer:* He is splendidly drawn, this "Justice of the Peace" who tried to keep the balance between his son's needs and his wife's claims. . . . It is a drama of the Family, that often tragic combining of like blood and warring temperaments, and Mr. Niven sets it forth with poignant effect, since he is one of the writers to whom more than one passion appeals as the stuff of drama. *Justice of the Peace* is a slice of life in which that much-abused phrase is seldom used; life in its work and its romance, its littleness as well as its largeness . . . its common human relationships seen under the sharp light of pity.

*Fall Mall Gazette:* Mr. Niven has achieved something unmistakably big in *Justice of the Peace*.

*Spectator:* A powerful, engrossing, disquieting book.

*Tatler:* A singularly powerful, well-balanced piece of work . . . a very remarkable story.

*World:* . . . genuine power.

# TWO GENERATIONS

BY

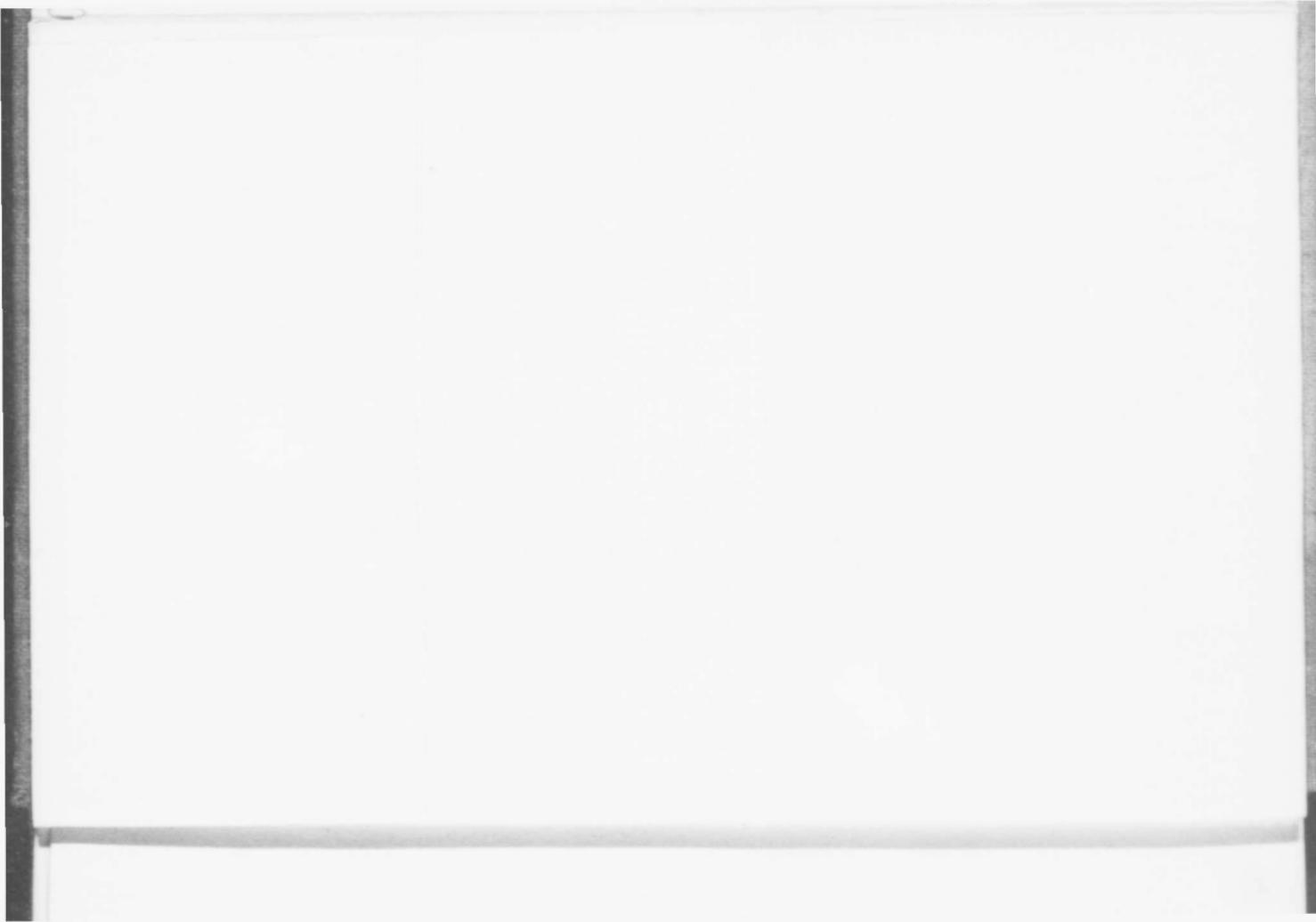
FREDERICK NIVEN

*Author of "Hands Up!" "Ellen Adair," "Justice of the Peace,"  
"The S.S. Glory," etc.*

LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH COMPANY  
LIMITED

1916



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# TWO GENERATIONS

## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

THE poet of St. Andrews University, in verses beginning :  
"His name is Alexander Bell, his home Dundee, I do not  
know him quite so well as he knows me," commented  
regarding something or other that—

" . . . one all as well might try  
To cultivate the people of Dundee,  
Or lead a camel through the needle's eye."

It is an opinion generally shared by those Dundonians for whom the evening paper does not contain all that it is necessary to know, those to whom the fierce tidal river gurgling through the darkness along the city-front, under hazed stars, also (and more authoritatively) speaks. And such do bloom, once in a blue moon, even in that city. The Law (the hill rising behind the town) is to such not merely a handy waste tract without the gate, round which one may walk arming a girl in the dusk, with ears alert for the skulking bully, but a hill—to which the eyes may well be lifted up now and again from the city streets, because of the effects it gives in combination with the sun and with mists, or with far-horized and windy days.

But most people, say the sociologists, have little heart for these things, and they tell how and why. What is there for the people of Dundee *to do*? They point out that those who make their money (that is in the sense of making more than a mere wage) in Dundee do not—they get heated about it—give a damn for the place. These live beyond the city areas—to dodge the taxes they

add, indignant, and doubtless rightly so. They state definitely that the employers are not interested in the workers, have no desire to make their lives *worth living*. And at that some pensive listener may break in with a little waggle of his head (or perhaps a prefacing sigh, or a "Huh!" as of desperate disgust): "And the people who are making the money, what of them? What are their interests?"

"Champagne instead of whisky. That's all the difference," one will elucidate.

"But they buy pictures at least," another will say.

And the one who sighed will sigh again and agree: "They do—occasionally, the kind of picture that is on the line at the Royal Academy." The significance thereof some understand, and others do not; and counsel is darkened.

Certainly the town council does take an interest in the masses, as the ordinary citizen may prove to himself by entering the Town House to hear the debates of the city fathers. Some who avail themselves of this right of entry get as excited as the debaters; others say it is as good as a play, and tell (amused and amazed) of these sittings. Thus may you hear of one conference at which the agitation was over the subject of milk in bottles, sterilised, for the poor; and how two of the councillors came to loggerheads over the lactic theme, and one in the heat of argument grew personal, personal regarding himself, thundering at his opponent that he was a believer in "parritch and milk," that his own family had been "brocht up" upon that combination—an excellent diet, he averred. "And I have three strapping dochters," he roared, "to prove it." There was laughter and trouble blent in the Town House; his friends caught his coat tails; a brother councillor besought him to "sit down on your ——" a word to be found in Burns, who, by the way, is their poet, with his bottle songs, and his songs of sentiment, so exclusively idolised that there is apt to be trouble if one should suggest that Lady Nairne (for one

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example) and Drummond of Hawthornden (for another) struck chords the ploughman poet knew not of; so exclusively idolised that songs he never penned are taken for his by many, so be they are in the Doric. Is it not on record how a joyful wag, the genial Mr. W——, if not in Dundee, at a neighbouring village, recited (as the word is) "M'Andrew's Hymn" upon a Burns Nicht, to the consternation of none?

Assuredly whether those who make their money out of the place do, or do not, give the aforesaid damn for the life of the people it is discussed in the Town House. And if some of the city fathers seem to be more interested in hearing their voices than in the subjects they discuss they are not the only public men thus suspect.

The city has a library, but the reading-room seems to be very much a home of rest for the out-of-work. The library has an odour. Entering the reading-room you are reminded of all you have read regarding germs in the air, and you clamp your mouth shut, and breathe very definitely through the nostrils—it being impossible to take, like a swimmer, a deep breath, dive in, consult the organ you are in search of, and then come to the top again to breathe. The authorities have not yet sunk to the depths, or risen to the heights, of Edinburgh, where there are two reading-rooms—one in the basement of the library building (with an adjacent wash-house where a tramp may, *sub rosa*, if he is smart, wash his handkerchief instead of just his hands) and another up aloft where are laid out those journals which, for some reason, odoriferous people—or let us say without any bones about it, people with a stink—never wish to read.

The city occasionally gives a picture-show to make the angels weep, but the citizens shed no tears, express no shame; how, indeed, can they be expected to when they don't even go to see what is on the walls? And how, breaks in the Socialist agitator, can you expect them to be interested in pictures till their conditions are improved?

It is a disturbing, squalid, sordid, rollicking, huggemugger, jolly, and miserable place. One is often reminded there, under the church-steeple and factory chimneys, of a phrase of Cunninghame Graham's fisherman about "free, fornicatin', pious folk."

A fine endeavour is made on Saturdays to give a penny concert to the people, those for whom the Kinnaird Hall placards announce the occasional advent of great performers in vain. It is typical of the town that the penny is put in a "plate," a "plate" atop of a little column set in the drill-hall doorway, just such a "plate" as stands in the vestibules of the churches and chapels where the collection is taken at the door on entering instead of during a lull in the midst of the service, by means of little velvet bags, with handles at the top, like loving cups, that are passed along the pews. Beside the offertory "plate" in the church vestibule stands the deacon; at the penny concert, in the drill-hall, beside the "plate," stands a policeman. He looks a little uncomfortable, as if self-conscious, as if he felt that the chief of police was making him appear absurd; but I have known only two visitors to the concert who saw the comical likeness. "Like a deacon in a helmet," said one of these, and his face was wreathed in smiles.

People do worry after all, you will observe, about the place, and how to make life worth living there. They worry over a hundred and one things that seem party to the squalor, from the lack of music to the half-time system in the factories. But those who are worried over appear to be inured and not interested. The women work at the looms in the great gaunt factories and mills; the men go a-whaling and are gone by the year; or they are seamen on the jute ships; or they have got, as they say, "blank well fed up with the place" and have fled to a Colony. The girls make chocolate, also far-famed marmalade (from I know not how many hundreds of tons of oranges brought there annually), and outnumber the men by eight to one,

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or so. Besides producing these sweet things, and weaving, from the jute, all manner of fabrics from coarse sacks to fine carpets, the city pours forth a great quantum of popular journals with certified circulations of so many hundred thousand per week. Of literature, in the other sense, of writing (which Mr. Hueffer has told us is the greatest matter in the world, since by it ideas are conveyed) it has given us next to nothing. If there be chatter on that head, the young Dundonian who wishes things were otherwise (he to whom the river talks as well as the football special) will cite you the Rev. George Gilfillan. It is the best he can do. With a queer and admirable attachment to the place he will try to make the most of Gilfillan, who has got into "Everyman's Library," but who is esteemed by those who prefer to accept facts instead of to play ostrich as the man who "discovered" Alexander Smith a few weeks too late.

In a recent year a great poet—perhaps the greatest living poet, no writer of commercial jingle at any rate—lectured there. What a situation! The eternal irony was at it again—for his chairman was deeply "interested" in a type of "popular" reading matter perilously like that which the poet said, in the course of his lecture, he wished the people had never been given, to the overlaying of their own tales and myths. The chairman drew his hand over his face and smiled under it. But what has one to do? One must have a prominent man as chairman; and if the chairman, when certain words fall from the poet's lips, draws his hand thus over his face but partly hiding a smile, it is perhaps better that he should feel inclination to smile than fail to see the situation even as comic, to say naught of tragic. The lecturing poet seemed a little astonished at the vigorous cheers that broke forth when he mentioned the name of one whose work he admired, one who had aided him. It was so hearty, spontaneous, immediate, that one wonders if anybody told him afterwards that the reason for that

applause was that there was a Dundonian of the same name. It was the most sincere applause of the evening—and this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Yet, though from Dundee the country is flooded with journals—with a guaranteed circulation of three hundred thousand a week—containing founded-on-fact stories (a concession to truth!) in which one may live in a world of the "Tragedy" of this or the "True Story" of that, there is wealth of local legend, going back by way of Bloody Clavers and Sir William Wallace, who went to the Dundee Grammar School, says history, to far-off lies (of hobgoblins and dragons even), better than the truths of to-day in that we know they are lies and their charm is their antiquity, hinting eternity. Thus is the visitor to Dundee button-holed, as it were, by an illuminated place-name on the front of a tram-car buzzing down the Nethergate on some autumn night of sticky pavements and tiny stars; and he inquires why "Nine Wells" is so called. His answer is scarcely likely to come from the first man he interrogates; but it awaits him nevertheless, has indeed been told in verse by the local bard, in "Tales o' Our Town," to be had of George Montgomery, New Inn Entry, off the High Street; and in that small tribute to the place, made by one of her unostentatious sons, you may hear of the Nine Maidens and the Well, and discover why the Deil's Stane is so called, or peruse the Strange Story of the Castle of Mains. But the frail volume is hardly likely to sell three hundred thousand in the author's life-time.

Printers' ink being thus mentioned, it is pleasurable to affirm that one of its journals is alert for any local or national manifestation of the Divine Fire, and has printed words by singers whose names are like to live in Scottish Song and Ballad Books to be, when a new anthologist shall arise, as witness the best ballants of Alexander Anderson and Joseph Lee. And its "leading daily," in a country where so many dailies claim the title, can

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stand unabashed beside any other, even unto the leading, or only, daily of the beautiful capital. It was not the *'Tiser* (as in friendly fashion all save the purists call *The Advertiser*) but *The Scotsman* that referred to a sonnet by Swinburne in *The Saturday Review* as "a noteworthy contribution" that consisted of "only two stanzas—the first of eight and the second of six lines." *The 'Tiser* could never be so ponderously funny. But then Dundee, as has been already remarked, has never been entirely self-satisfied; there is naught of superficial prettiness and deep vanity about Dundee; and she has not to live down to any tradition of "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers."

It (to fall back again into the neuter) is a noisy town, for it is cobbled, or laid with stone, and the human voices must pierce much din of wheels and hammering heels, though in this book what certain of them say will have to be translated. What, for example, do you think is the meaning of "Fat far?" Even if by a stroke of genius you guess at once that it means "What for?" you would hardly like to have to go on guessing. But enough of scenario. We must get on to George Murray, whom we shall see anon stepping blithely down the Constitution Hill on a diaphanous morning of May.

There was no doubt that he was a young man of parts, of gifts, though how he had ever developed them one wonders, inquiring into his early years. He was an only child. His father had held a post at the — Library in Glasgow, and married, as they say, "beneath" him, nobody knew why or how. Old Murray was always poring upon books, patiently attempting from time to time to interest his wife in other matters besides her station, which she looked upon with satisfaction, contrasting it with other stations in life esteemed below hers. Doubtless, like many others, he had made a mistake. Certain poets have sung of love at first sight, and novelists like Henry Harland airily write of it; but how is a man to get to know a woman, or a woman a man, unless they

frequently meet? There is a great tendency, at least with many, to "put one's best foot foremost," to look one's best in social meetings; and most people are generally a little above than a little below the average line in their life-chart upon a first meeting, upon a second, upon a third. . . . Better far don't try, with an accent on *try*, to be your best; for the devil of the thing is that, when at last the two do really meet and know each other they have already apparently and nominally met so often that they will only get a name for being quarrelsome, or forgetful of friendship, if they then (staring at each other and really meeting for the first time) whirl about with a hasty, "O—good-bye!" Up pop Tom, Dick, and Harry, if the two in question be male and female, expecting the marriage bells. In the process of finding out that you are not suited you have had maybe fifty meetings—and it won't do; you cannot disappoint them.

I don't *know*, but I have *gathered*, from what antique relatives were left a few years ago, that it was somewhat thus these wedding bells rang; and although, of course, I have no definite proof, I am not going "out of the way" in mentioning that this is what I gathered. And it is, also, such a usual procedure. There was of the union, if it may be so styled, but the one child. Mrs. Murray was a fiery woman, fiery-eyed and with a tremendous vitality. Her eyes looked as if they saw everything outlined and very definite. After marriage she showed less interest in books, the main theme of her husband's conversation; and after the birth of the child the mask, or the attempt to live up to her best, as the case may be, was over and done with. Librarian Murray went deeper into the world where his friends were books; and she took less pains with her attire. As (I gather) they had drifted—or Murray had drifted—into marriage, so they now drifted into a state where it needed but a word from him that her hair was untidy and thereafter there was a chronic tendency to fallen locks and straying fringes.

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The boy went to a good day-school, anon to a good boarding school—from which he came back to his father's funeral; and then his schooldays were over. The mother, after reading the quarter of a column of obituary notice in the paper, and wearing her mourning black with a certain terrible air, lapsed back. She had been left enough to live upon in a small way; the library committee granted her a small pension, and Murray senior's private collection of books fetched a pleasant sum, more than it cost, by reason of rare editions he had "picked up," which atoned to her for his selfishness in continuing to buy books after marriage. Upon a consideration of ways and means she removed to a country village, renting a cottage there, and took to wearing a mutch. Odd (lacking the explanation, that is) that she who had once known the pride of place should now speak such a phrase as "he is ambitious" with a fleering accent implying "he is an upstart." She seemed biased against even worldly ambitions as greatly as she had been against those spiritual and scholarly enthusiasms, one of the results of which had been to bring more books into the home that was hers. The boy, back from boarding-school, a sociable kid, was before long playing with the village children in the street—a change from the ringing fives court; but youth is adaptable.

A relative of the father's, not bereft of the sense of clan, made a point of visiting the rustivating widow. Finding her, behind her speeches of hospitable welcome, distinctly severe, and as though bastioned, not only for defence, but for sallying forth to fight, he did not suggest that she should have allowed the boy to carry on his studies; but he agreed with her that it was time George should be "doing something." It was a case for making the best of a bad business. Also he thought how queer it was—the librarian under ground, this at least physical part of him (reminiscent of him too) playing in the street, and things, as he thought to himself, rather "going to

pigs and whistles." He could not rate the widow. He realised that her metallic eyes dared him to come within a hint of doing so. They bowed to each other and talked with nicety, but though he had a cup of tea and a sandwich in his saucer there ended the signs of hospitality; there was no suggestion that he should make a prolonged stay, not so much as an offer to relieve him of his hat, which remained, throughout, upon his knees, to remind him, each time his gaze rested on it, that his friendly visit was to be no more than a cold call. But seeing he had thought fit to come down to see her, the widow hinted that she thought he might have come sooner, to do something for his kindred. With a little low-breathed "Well, by God!" to himself, in the train going home, wondering what the defunct scholar would think of it all, he decided that the best he could do—things being as they were—was to get the boy into an office, and the sooner the better. "Leave him alone down there with her much longer, and" (perhaps he was extreme) "he'll be fit for a station porter as a start in life." He was greatly vexed. It was, however, not too late; and when the troubled relative, having obtained for young George a post in a shipping-office, met him now and then in town, he was pleased by the youth's smartness. "Mother still living out in the country?" he asked once.

"Yes."

"Pretty early rise for you, eh? Makes a long day of it."

"Rather! Have to be up by candle-light half the year—but it's very healthy."

Evidently a boy who looked on the bright side—a smart boy withal, eager to be as smart a man of affairs as any, eyes and ears open. The genial relative, looking at the youth, remarking a certain knowing air that he wore, considered that perhaps the curtailment of the kind of education the father had planned for him did not greatly matter; more of the bourse than of the library

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seemed the boy, and doubtless he would make his way. The relative contented himself that he had dropped down to inquire into Librarian Murray's widow and son not too late, and dismissed a faint curiosity as to how the youngster regarded his mother as he grew older, she who, having elevated herself by marriage, had retrograded, with a last state worse than her first.

The knowing boy, indeed, had his private opinion of that queer mother out there, almost a "character" in the village. Though he was gone to business all day he knew that the grocer of whom she had her goods was a "licensed" one; he knew all about that. And he had his own views, too, upon religious people—for his mother was one of that kind of tipplers who hang on to the Psalms of David, talk unctuously to the visiting parson, subscribe their mite to his missionary funds or building schemes, the while there is a flask of brandy always under the pillow. The boy knew. He had known for a long time before he fired off his knowledge at her one day by way of a crushing rejoinder in one of the embittered altercations that appeared to be essential to the widow—she was as one refreshed by feuds. Furiously she lied to him; furiously asked him how he, her son, dared so to insult his mother, and with blazing eyes and clenched teeth hissed the Fifth Commandment at him, with tremendous stress upon the final words, "that thy days may be long upon the land . . ." as if wishing to scare him of an early passing. But he showed little scared, and his face told her that he had more than guessed, that he knew; she took hold upon herself, and with the air as of one grievously maligned, though she was trembling with rage, she informed him that the tippie was medicinal. Nevertheless, the whisky or brandy went down as tea in the grocer's account thereafter. This subterfuge was, perhaps, more to square her own conscience—maybe it could be squared that way—than because of anything in the way of fear of the young man. Or perhaps she had

the whisky entered as tea because it is the usage in such cases; for it is a simple tale of everyday people, such a tale as some minor critic may easily, undiscerning, call *vieux jeu*! If it had been a queer home before that day when George, in the midst of domestic recriminations, brought uproar by divulging his knowledge, it was more queer thereafter—mother and son watching each other something like ready wrestlers.

To the mother Hate seemed more healthful than Love; she throve upon it; but to the son the natural alliance, the continuance, living with her, simply because she had given him birth, the while she hated him, was almost intolerable. But he had great reserve of gaiety; and though he would never again open the way to such a scene as that which concluded in a kind of tacit agreement of enmity, it amused him, secretly, to discover the hiding places of her bottles. Oh, great sport! He saw through it all! He had sips himself many times; he would never forget that. Then one day, to be sure, she caught him thus sipping. With white face and blazing eyes she talked, an inferno of talk, with no oath thrown in as in a man's way, but in a kind of cold fever; and though there were, on the very face of the case, opportunities for the son to fire off again, as before, cutting replies, he made no reply. He merely looked in the glittering eyes and listened—and realised the virago that his mother was. In the future when he found her *cache*, and, chuckling, sipped, he put a little water in to the amount of spirit extracted. "A knowing old bird," he used to say to himself. "I wonder what her wrinkle is for having no smell. It's nothing so obvious as a coffee-bean." And trotting down the village street to catch the morning train he would chuckle, thinking what sport it would be to say: "I wish you would tell me what your tip is for hiding the smell, mother. Even when you are staring squiffed there is not a whiff on your breath." Jaunty and smiling over his private fun he hastened on, his eye

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on the semaphore. But needless to say he never asked that intimate question.

Her further discovery—of her son in the act of watering her secret store—came on the very day that he (who, ever since the first fiery scene, had been trying to obtain a situation that would take him far from home) was offered a post in Dundee. And in the midst of the cold flow of hate that ensued he had a sense of satisfaction. Somehow or other he always thought of Moses and Aaron when she was in a rage in this way. There was a kind of calm and collectedness upon her, as if some awful God was with her. And maybe there was—the God she had made for herself, the God, or Demon, of a brandy flask under the pillow and a great Bible on the table—at once a raft for herself and a bludgeon for others. His private sense of satisfaction that the discovery of the flask—and watering—led to such a whole-hearted anathematising caused him to receive it with unbelievable, nay, to the widow, infuriating aplomb. Had this scene not befallen she might have determined to accompany him, to take up her home in Dundee. As it was, when she desisted for lack of breath, he said, "Perhaps I had better leave you, then, seeing I am everything that is evil."

She drew a deep breath as though to shriek at him, but the "I wish you would!" which came, came not in a shriek but in that tense, contained manner of hers that made these scenes so terrible, suggesting that all she said was utterly considered, was not really heightened by the moment's agitation. He did not immediately announce the fact of his new situation; he let a few days elapse—hideous days, or evenings rather, for it was only in the evenings that they saw each other. The first she knew of it was a shuffling and heavy step on the stairs. She came out to see what he was about, with a grey face and eyes still smouldering from the recent outbreak, and found him shouldering down a packed and roped trunk.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I've got a situation that won't allow of me living here, since you think" (it took courage, he found, to say this with her terrible eyes on him) "I had better go."

Raising a hand, finger pointed in air, she predicted in a most haunting tone: "You will repent of this." She paused. "You can go!" And he experienced a superstitious feeling of horror; the impression was that he now went out to a world that was going to lie in wait to trap him. There was something uncanny in it. It was a scene that he often recalled, recalled as might an onlooker have recalled it—for he saw not only his mother in the retrospect, but himself. The picture often seemed to haunt him.

But on this bright and open May morning, as he swung down Constitution Hill, such an episode, with its air of prophecy of evil, its Macbeth feeling, its air of sanctified hellery, might well be forgotten. Chucking his chest and breathing deep, new-shaven cheeks tingling, business-bound (swinging his furred umbrella in right hand, clapping his necktie now and again with left), he smiled the smile of one ready to hail passing acquaintance with a breezy salute. "Ah, good morning! How are you? Fine to be alive!" For there was no haze on this May morning. The heavens were open, the city roofs were not all drab; the ribbon of the river shone; the trees in the Barrack Park, and those by the pavement's edge (protected by a kind of iron basket round them), if they were a trifle sooty, were not sooty as to their buds—dainty, virginal new buds, shooting mystically fresh.

From an extremist view, a view with an edge of bias, a view that suggested some personal secret core, this young man would jib away with an "Oh, I don't think it is as bad as that. I see what you mean, but don't you think you are extreme?" and despite his mother he entertained no cynical views on her sex. He was, indeed, keen on the other sex—or at any rate had an appreciation of bright glances and rosy cheeks. He was very much

aware, trotting down to business, of the girls on the way, girls met morning after morning, always within a stone's throw of the same central point. That one who favoured dark attire and flounces—if he met her on the hill above Rustic Place, why then either she was early or he was late. If he did not encounter her until at the corner where one turns for Albert Square, then at sight of him she would have a quicker flutter in her walk, for to meet him there verified for her the fact that the clock she had seen at the corner of Reform Street was indeed correct, and she was late.

He used to try to twinkle that comment to her, for he was a great twinkler; he felt so free away from that mother who was like a witch—free to get himself into mischief even if he cared! There were others all up and down the hill, and some of them twinkled back, and some of them did not—which only meant that Murray twinkled to some, and in other cases twinkled to himself; and all this despite the fact that he was on terms with his landlady's daughter which made others expectant of developments, though to be sure he did not see the situation as did the onlookers, did not look upon himself as, if not (this was their view) "exactly engaged," then just about as good as what is called "engaged."

He was not extremist. You could not expect him to be super-faithful when he did not know himself just how he was drifting—and being towed occasionally too! To-day he felt free (just a shade too markedly so—perhaps there was just a hint of trying to convince himself that he was utterly free!), stepping on dry pavements, enjoying the morning tang and the red cheeks, and jaunty chins, and dancing eyes on the way. He was no great self-dissector or he might have esteemed his freedom much like that of a bird's, free as to the fluttering wings but held fast in the bird-lime.

## CHAPTER II

CONVERSATION in the office that morning tended to dull the joyful appearance of the young man. He listened to what his colleagues had to say, but he did not take part in their discussion. He did not know but what they were extreme; there were moments when some of them struck him as unctuous. The subject agitating the public mind that day (or the peg on which to hang a view) was yesterday's fiasco of a disarranged marriage.

"It was a bit stiff," said Johnny Molison, leaning against his desk and plucking over with left hand the right top corner of his ledger, trying to pretend to himself that he had really commenced work, but all the while shooting off his views and opinions at the rest of the clerks. "When I went past at lunch time yesterday, the carpet-business—the baize, the what-you-may-call-it, you know what I mean——"

The others smiled, though really, as to his theme, they were serious enough.

"——was," went on Johnny Molison, unruffled, "laid across the pavement from the steps to the siver." He was of the people; "kerb," "gutter," he knew not of—"siver" was his word. "And they had evergreen trees in pots on each side of the door."

Constable gave a little "Huh!" to himself, and catching Murray's eye, Murray looking round at that exclamation, winked to him and raising his hand to half-open mouth, as if to prevent the remark he was about to make from spreading, as if to shoot it privately to Murray, he murmured: "The damned old wife!"

"Eh?" said Molison.

"Go on," answered Constable, "go on with your bay trees, evergreens, or whatever they are. Orange blossom, I expect," he added.

Molison went seriously on. "And when I came back," he said, "there was a string of carriages and cabs all the way down—let me see—as far as to The Pillars."

"Oh come off the perch!" cried Constable.

Molison turned and confronted him solemnly. "That's right," he declared with hearty accent. "I call it a dirty shame," he drawled. "The fellow never turned up. Think of the poor girl."

Taylor, who was "engaged," and most happily "engaged," thoroughly agreed with Molison; although to be sure he found him droll, and now smiled faintly upon him. Peters, from Aberdeen, who never heard what was said to him the first time (who, when addressed, seemed to come out of a swoon and always drawled, slowly, "Ah beg your par-don?"), Peters stolid, also agreed.

"Ah think it is very unfair," he said.

This confirmation whetted Molison to reiteration. He let all the gathered page-corners slip from his hand, and turning fully round most definitely and stolidly asseverated: "I call a man who would do a thing of that kind——" he paused, and everybody waited, attentive, perhaps some of them mock-attentive, while Taylor again smiled whimsically upon him: you could hear the clock tick, "——a cad!" he brought out at last.

Constable was studying him, curious, interested, as might a gardener study a new type of tomato. Murray frowned; Taylor smiled more broadly—at Molison's stolidity.

"That was too bad," he said when Molison's heavy gaze rested on him.

"A dir-ty trick," chimed Peters. "He needn't have kept from running away until it had gone as far-rr as that."

"I call him a cad!" repeated Molison.

Little clipping Harvey, with the bald head and the fluff on top, he who looked like a baby but was father of three (he was already at work, but had half an ear for it all), pleasantly said: "There was no necessity to go as far

as that. He should have broken it off long before. It was such a—well, what might be termed a show-up——” his voice cracked on a high note “——for the girl.”

“And her father,” put in Molison. “I understand he was paying all the expenses.”

“Terrible!” said Peters. “It was the fellah’s duty to marry her.”

“What I call any man who would do a thing like that——” ejaculated Molison.

Constable cocked up his head and examined the young man with a distinctly increasing interest.

“——is a cad! Yes, that’s what I’d call him. A cad.”

“Too good for him,” said Harvey, and plunged to his ledger again, while Constable, looking as though his body had been petrified while his neck remained pliant, sent his wide-eyed gaze slowly from Molison to Harvey.

“Ah tell ye what he deserves,” put in Peters. “He deserves a breach of promise case.”

Slowly Constable’s head moved again atop of his apparently stunned body, and unblinking he gazed now on Peters.

“Well!” Constable spoke suddenly, his voice coming out with a burst. “I think you are a lot of ruddy old women.”

This was a remark in the manner associated with Constable, expected of him. “He can never talk about anything—you know wha’ Ah mean—in a gen’l’manly way,” Peters once said, discussing him; and Molison agreed: “No, not gen’l’manly. He’s very rude if you disagree with him.” But that was not exact; he was very rude when he did not agree with them, very rude when, hearkening to their chatter, he could keep quiet no longer. Another trouble was that his colleagues were prone to imagine he was contradicting them even when he was not. He thought on a different level from them.

“I think,” he went on now, in less vehement tone, his explosion over, “that the girl is damned lucky to be shut of him. She is a very decent sort. With our friend Mr. Molison’s regret over the unnecessary appearance of the

green baize and the green bay trees——” there was a chuckle in his voice, but they all (at that) whooped at him in harmony, for they all thought he was defending the man.

That was the way discussion usually ended when Constable talked, how confusion came and he was infuriated. Peters began to tell him, “Ah think it was his duty——”; Molison broke out, “As I said before——”; Harvey chirped in the middle of the din something about “at the eleventh hour, as one might say”; Taylor shouted, “My opinion is——”; and Molison made a fresh attempt with, “What I would call a man——”

“Did I contradict you?” Constable roared at them. “Can’t you listen to what I say? Where are your brains, you——?” (There he was at it again!) “I said she was well quit of him. She has a lot to be thankful for in getting shut of him.”

They all began again to cackle like a disturbed rookery; and it ended—as these cross-purpose talks always did end—with Constable marching to his desk, taking up his pen gently, trying the nib on his thumb-nail, getting to work, waiting till each of them had in turn said his say; then, when at last silence fell he, without turning his head, exploded in a definite and quiet voice: “I tell you what you fellows are. You’re a lot of piffing old women.” His jaw snapped shut, he went on with his work—and everybody still thought he had been contradicting them.

“Not very nice language for a gen’l man,” chirped Harvey; but he was a little fellow worth watching, had a roguish side, and maybe he now only wanted to set Molison and Peters agoing again for fun.

Several times during the forenoon, even though the subject of the marriage which did not take place was not mentioned again (chiefly because of Constable’s preposterous forcing upon them of his preposterous views, for that was how to the end of the chapter they would look upon it), Murray sat abstracted from his work, there at his table, chin on hand, frowning and pursing his mouth.

He had a table to himself, did not stand at a desk more or less communal; and there, a little apart from the others, he emitted a little sigh from time to time, then discovered himself again not working, and dipped pen afresh in the ink.

At lunch-time, feeling as if all was unreal—sky overhead, pavements underfoot—Murray went to a jeweller's and, as one in a dream, purchased an engagement ring. He knew the size because his landlady's daughter once slipped off a dress-ring she wore upon the finger of her right hand to see if it would fit him (that ring which had been sign of a prior engagement to her, but which was retained to deck the right hand instead of the left when the affair was broken off), and he knew just where it came to on his own finger. That fortunate playfulness (oh, meaning nothing at all, bless you, not even a hint, not even a suggestion) helped him now in his honourable step; he procured a ring of the right circumference, had it wrapped in tissue paper, and the frail tissue packet in sheeny white paper, very neatly, with two little dabs of sealing-wax on the back, making it like a packet from the chemist's, thought he, as in his daze he put it in the right-hand pocket of his waistcoat.

There it reposed, there it worried him like a guilty conscience all afternoon when it should, seeing he had purchased it in such a stunning mood of duty and honour, have seemed as a kind of pocket benediction. People would persist, all day, in talking about that marriage which was not; it was one of those themes that seem to serve as a pleasant change from weather-talk. People coming in to transact business, when the business was transacted, must to a certainty comment: "Queer thing that of yesterday!" and he, on his side of the broad, shiny counter, would elevate his brows and reply. "H'm, yes—yes, indeed," thumb and finger of right hand in right waistcoat pocket the while they told him that what they would call a man who could do a thing like that was a cad. "A cad. Yes, that's what I would call

him." There was no dodging it. "Of course there will be no breach of promise case—neither she nor her people are like that. Not but what he deserves it," was the verdict in one case.

Constable, overhearing that remark, went stiff, and the moment after the speaker had departed demanded: "What the devil did that blatherskate say 'neither she nor her people are like that' for, and then add 'not but what he deserves it'?" People make me tired—make me tired!"

The whole office gave tongue again; Constable was as one deluged for a minute by the clock; and none of them could understand what Constable was after when he roared: "I did not say he wasn't this or wasn't that. I know her people a bit—and I say—and said!—it's a good thing for her to be shut of him. What I'm saying now is that that chap who's just gone out has a slip-shod brain—on a par with yours, you idiots—when in one breath he says they are not people to do a thing like that, namely, urge a breach of promise action, and in the next breath says he deserves it."

"Do you think there is something wrong about a breach of promise action?" asked Molison, trying to be shrewd.

"I'm not talking of my opinion! I'm saying that the fellow unctuously said, 'they're not people like that,' and then added that he deserved it. If he deserves it for God's sake bring it, give it to him. If, on the other hand, it is decent not to bring a breach of promise action then let us have a little less unctuous tone over being merely decent! Oh you can't understand anything! You, Molison, are a horse; and some day you'll marry a mare—that's all. Oats is your feed."

"I have always heard," interjected Peters, "that the man who is in the wrong is the one who loses his temper."

"Have you? Then you've always heard rot—but it's like you to believe it. Rot is what you naturally gulp down." His particular gaze upon Peters passed to a comprehensive glance. "You're the most lost and helpless set

I've ever met. I notice it takes the whole bunch of you together even to show that you can't understand me!"

"Huh! Ah don' think that was a very gen'l'manly thing 'e said about a mare!"

But Murray made no attempt to follow these later wranglings. He was now occupied with his own thoughts—there was no getting away from them. So as to buy that ring it had been necessary for him to call a halt to thought and simply plunge. He told himself that all men must feel more or less, at suggestion of marriage, inclined to jib away. He told himself that honour decreed that he buy the ring. Had not the girl repeated to him how her married sister jeered at her ringless state, and charged her with "carrying on"? And the calumny had made her weep, she said. He had felt a faint sense (and tried to increase its intensity), a faint sense of indignation for the girl's sake then. He had also felt (and still felt, pondering) indignation that a woman he had never seen should be meddling in his life. But there was always this "sense of honour" business—and now the ring was in his pocket.

At half-past five he gave in to himself—he who at noon had acted without his own full consent—sent the office-boy to his lodgings with a note to tell his landlady that he would not be home to supper, was detained at the office. The main trouble of being in love with your landlady's daughter—or in passion with her, or disturbed by her, or even of wondering if you are in any of these conditions with her, or if it is expected (and rightly expected) of you to become engaged to her—the main trouble of it is that you can't get an opportunity for what one of these American writers of the prettily religious sort has called "a little look-off on life." She is always, as the other kind of Americans would say, "around." If you are a twinkling young man like George Murray, arrested by the *frou-frou* of skirts, moved by cheek bones, and intrigued by tricky chins, you really do want to get away from the immediate

spell to settle whether you want her by you always or not. It would be honourable to let you get away, too.

Having sent the note home, Murray strolled away from the noisy heart of the city and in the old Barrack Park found a remote seat. It was quiet there, and he had the park to himself, partly because it was too early for the shadowy cuddlers, and partly because this park is not situate, like many, in a position offering short cuts to people going home. Topographically it is not like that. From where he sat he could hear the footsteps of people going past on the Barrack Road to left, and could hear children's raucous voices squalling below, mellowed by distance, perhaps down in the Lochee Road. A vacant message boy dawdled by in Barrack Road, holding a stick against the railings, relishing the noise he created; an old man on the verge of the next world, leaning heavy on a stick, dragged his feet along the gravel, shuffling toward the gate. The rattling of the message boy's stick against the railing ceased. There came a little more quiet. The outlines left the bushes, the leaves merged. There was a hint of dampness that made Murray turn up coat-collar and thrust hands in pockets. There was a suggestion of the smell of cats as well as of the wet earth. Lights were lit in the town below; the thin last drifting glamour of day was dissipated rearward on the summit of the Law. River Tay turned to a discouraging leaden hue along the city front.

"I don't know," Murray announced to the gathering darkness. He wanted to strike a balance in his mental and spiritual books. "Let me see, now—how did it begin?" He frowned, sitting there in the twilight. "It began with that damned harmonium," he said.

The execrable instrument in question was in the sitting-room of his "diggings." He had a turn for music and—there being nothing else to play upon but the harmonium—he had played upon it. It did not occur to him introspectively to consider that the fact that he called it the

"damned harmonium" was proof enough that the little hoop of diamonds and sapphires in his waistcoat pocket was sheer travesty. He was no extremist; he desired to think out his life, see where he really stood, but he was not introspective. Better perhaps had he been. If one can take both soundings and the sun in uncertain waters, why not? And here he sat on the bench in Barrack Park neither, on the one hand, deciding to follow his instincts, nor, on the other, delving to the root of things, despite the original outburst regarding the harmonium. He kept fumbling at the ring-enveloping paper in his pocket, and fumbling also the incident of the landlady's daughter in his mind.

"Let me see, now. She came in and told me she liked music. She stood for half an hour, and so I gave her a seat—seemed discourteous not to. Let me see, now—when was that? That was six months ago. She did not come back again for a day or two after that; then she came in and sat down of herself—said she didn't think it was good for me to play on the harmonium so much. Don't suppose it was. Damnable instrument! Told me I should go for a walk, and I told her I was bored walking alone, and hadn't made many friends in town yet. Why in thunder did I do that? Let me think. Yes, candidly, I believe it was one against me—caught her perky look, thought I could hug her free. Cad! Went for a walk, but no hug." He grinned sardonically. "Next night she asked me if I didn't think the harmonium was out of tune. She couldn't stand it. Had her hat on; so I asked her if she was going out. Yes—going for a walk; would have to make it a short walk because she did not like to be out late alone, didn't like the country roads round about." He gave another little laugh. "Funny business. The cavalier goes out to protect the lady—ostensibly. My boy, you hugged her." He lifted his hat and said: "Pooh! No more walks after that. Hugged her in the sitting-room. This is what's called a 'streaky

story'—and I believe they are nearly all streaky stories! Well, she's very pretty, a jolly sort. Funny, though, that she never suggested another walk. I'll tell you what you are, Murray—you're a kind of joyous ram. What you ought to do is to get new digs. You go home and say to her, 'Look here, we're thrown together far too close here. We really don't know each other—I mean how we feel towards each other.'

He sat and considered that; but there seemed something wrong with the argument. Why should he want to get away from her so as to know how he felt toward her? He shook his head.

"The long and the short of it is, Murray," he told himself, "you don't want to marry the girl."

He became aware of the chilliness of the park; the slope was heedless, dank, unfriendly. The outside world did not offer man a nook to sit down in and weigh his affairs. He envied a watchman (out on the road to guard workmen's tools) his brazier fire, rose and made exit from the park by the north gate, intending to go home. Booh! It was chilly. He was now shivering after sitting there so long. People talked about the smell of the good, fresh earth. Rubbish! Smell of cats—that's what it was. No, he wouldn't go home yet. Which way to turn? Countrywards was uninviting; the Law loomed black under a grim sky that closed down on the city. It was the kind of night on which, walking on country roads, one blundered off the uneven side-paths into wobbly gutters and twisted an ankle, and came home irritated instead of refreshed, came home feeling balked. The lights of Constitution Hill (running straight down-town) and of Barrack Road (sweeping into Constitution Hill) made together a great letter Y which he followed for as far as he could see it. No; he did not want to go home yet. The lights did not lead him thither—they led the other way. That ancient wise man who, asked for advice, told the anxious inquirer to listen for the curfew bells ringing

and discover whether they said, "Do it, do it!" or "Don't, don't!" knew what he was about. The lights, to Murray, led townwards, not homewards; so townwards he again turned. There seemed a friendliness down there in the converging, the gathering together of the lamps. Under the grey-black of the evening there was something warm and cheering in the town's centre. The business crowds had thinned away, the promenading crowds had not yet come.

He ascended to the first-floor rooms of a hotel that gave, so he had discovered on these evenings when late work (genuine late work) kept him in town, an excellent little something in the way of a half-snack, half-supper. A fire burnt in the grate; the blinds were drawn; the lights in the room were not yet lit; so the walls were illuminated partly by the firelight flicker, and partly by the glow, through lowered blinds, of street-lamps and shop-lights without. A young waiter followed him and jumped about with a taper, genially chattering: "Good-evening, sir—a bit chilly. Little bit of supper? Yes, sir. There you are—another light. Supper at once."

While the meal was being made ready the waiter spread a large napkin at one end of the table, arranged salt-cellars and pepper-casters, and glasses with decorative nicety; and Murray, standing with back to fire, straddling his legs, felt more comfortable, getting quit of the hopeless darkness of his ineffectual solitary session in the Park.

"There you are, sir," said the young waiter, the preparations over. "A bad business about that marriage that didn't come off yesterday." (It had given him subject-matter all day.)

Murray looked at him under his brows, head lowered. "Yes," he answered, and then added, for something to say that might temper his monosyllabic grimness, quoting Constable on the spur of the moment: "I expect the girl was jolly well shut of him, jolly well shut of him."

"That's what I say," agreed the waiter.

Murray gloomed at him. "Caddish thing to do," he said, thinking of Molison.

"You're right, sir. A man like that I would call a cad."

Murray gloomed more deeply at him. "But of course if they were not going to be happy—well, far better not to get married."

The waiter wagged his head. "Just what I say, sir."

"Though," continued Murray, surveying the waiter freshly, "it is a pity the thing went so far."

"Went so far," echoed the waiter. "Just what I say. I thoroughly agree with you."

Murray made a sound between a sniff and a snort. There was no help here from man. All that this waiter wanted was a sixpenny tip.

"Just run off to see if your supper is ready, sir," said the waiter.

"Huh!" murmured Murray, and fell back upon his own resources—or lack of them. The supper, at any rate, seemed to him well-nigh delectable.

"Something to drink with it, sir?"

It was a sound suggestion. "Yes, beer," said Murray, considering that though in stomachic enjoyment there may not be salve for mental pain, there is no need to be both empty of belly and disturbed of mind. So thinking he settled farther down to a leisurely relishing of the quiet meal, and to the pleasure that came of knowing that when it was over there would not come in to him, smiling, radiant, the girl for whom he had to-day bought an engagement ring—though he did not acknowledge the position to himself with such impossible-sounding directness.

"Coffee, sir?"

"Yes." To be sure the sipping of coffee would give him cause to sit on here longer, aloof from a world that, if a man dabbled with it, more than dabbled with him in return.

"A liqueur with the coffee, sir?"

"Eh? Yes—yes." He had thawed out the Park chill, and he refused himself permission to go back to the

unravelling of the skein that he had vainly tried to unravel out there in the cold. Cutting was the only hope—but that did not occur to him. When presently came occasional laughter, click of glass, baritone and bass of men's voices, rippling soprano and contralto of women's, he knew what these sounds signified; and leaving the supper-room—where, it dawned upon him, he had sat a long time—he sought the tacit camaraderie of the bar-parlour. He was welcomed even in the doorway by the lady of the soprano voice behind the little counter, she polishing a tumbler, admiring the movements of her hands and looking pretty.

"Enjoyed your supper?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you."

The waiter bobbed away to clear the table. Murray sat down on a wedge of divan inset in a nook in the farther wall, and the three men already in the parlour (they whose voices he had heard) continued their chatter with the soprano and contralto behind the bar. Another man entered and perched himself on a high stool, and him the soprano served, for the stools were arranged beside the counter. The waiter dashed in again, opened a hatch, and slid therein from sight Murray's supper dishes, then came over to him where he had settled in the nook. All that Murray desired was to stay away from his diggings. He had discarded the attempt to balance his private books. He wanted but to forget them—so he ordered another liqueur, and when it was set before him on a circular table he nestled back to sip it with many delays, and to be amused (without taking part) in the chatter of the bar-parlour. One of the men, big, bluff, rosy, addressed Contralto, evidently taking up an earlier topic: "No, my dear, I agree with what everybody's saying—if that young scamp was going to bolt he should have bolted before he gave her the engagement ring."

"Oh, well, there are other pebbles on the beach!" she replied.

Soprano interjected with a roguish laugh, glinting briefly at her colleague, and then turning to the man: "You wouldn't do a thing like that, would you, Mr. Birkie?"

"Me! I'd marry the lot of them, I would. I've got a big heart."

Baritone and Bass, Soprano and Contralto, carolled. Murray smiled. The three men looked at him, and seeing him smile response he was recognised by them as not without sympathy toward the persiflage and drawn, by that unanimous glance, into the circle.

"It was a bit of a show-up, as I might call it," said a little cadaverous man who was sipping brandy; and the phrasing brought Harvey into Murray's mind, and a sudden picture of the office where his day had been so troubled. This speaker seemed about to leave the easier persiflage for seriousness. "I think it is so sad for the family," and he looked at the barmaids to make sure they observed he was a man of sentiment.

Then round the corner, beyond a projecting part of wall, came a sniggering, "He-he-he!" Murray craned slightly forward to look round the bulkhead, or pillar, but he could only see a pair of feet; the giggler was hid, was in another niche—a niche balancing the one in which Murray had established himself. The waiter, catching Murray's eye as he sat back again, wagged his head in the direction of the feet, while the large stout man, perceiving that the cadaverous one was now snuffed, continued, thickly and richly: "I don't know so much about that. They have everybody's sympathy. Everybody's sympathy."

"Everybody's sympathy," chorused a heavy, black-haired man who had not so far spoken. And the man in the niche, he whose feet only showed, giggled again.

"The risible faculties of our friend in the corner——" began the big stout man, and while he was fumbling for the rest of the sentence the cadaverous man said, "Risible faculties is very good." Soprano and Contralto pealed; Bass and Baritone rumbled.

"It would have been better," came the voice of the unseen man, a cultured voice, "if the thing had never gone to such lengths. I understand that there was a string of cabs and carriages from the house to beyond Tay Street."

"Half down the Nethergate," said Soprano.

"As far as The Pillars," said Contralto, and nodded a "Yes—that's so!" to her colleague.

"As far as The Pillars," echoed the little cadaverous man.

The invisible one gave his chuckling giggle, then went on. "Well, let us say as far as Caithness—as far as the North Pole—it doesn't matter. My comment is merely that it would have been better if the good young people," and there was a chuckle in his voice again, "had got to know each other a little better before ordering the procession. There seems to be a certain disparity," and he spoke very slowly, "between the progress of the love-match, and the progress of the arrangements."

The barmaids' faces were like masks; the big jolly man, the black-haired man, the cadaverous man stared, non-committal. Murray caught the waiter's eye again, and that youth took it upon himself to raise his hand and tap the top of his head with one finger; but Murray frowned at the young man, something in the manner in which one corrects by a sign a chatterbox child who babbles when its elders are talking. The fat man created a diversion by noticing that his friends' glasses were as empty as his own, and bending to them he inquired, in a low voice, as if not to interrupt the speaker in the niche, what they would have, at the same time beckoning to the waiter to attend. And then in a tentative fashion, he added: "And perhaps our friend the professor in the corner will have something with us?" Murray heard the feet shuffle in the niche, and he gathered that the "professor" executed a bow, for he next saw the fat man bowing toward the unseen.

"Of course," said Murray, "everybody will call him a cad." He wanted to get to the root of the matter, to hear what that Voice would have to say, and he feared the topic might now be about to suffer closure.

The feet of the (to Murray) unseen shuffled very audibly at this, and the unseen rose, curved round in his niche, he now anxious to discover who had spoken; then, standing there like an interrogation mark, surveying Murray, he said, in a voice as of one giving information: "You are quite right, sir; and that is the end of the matter. We all express our views, but we none of us know anything about it. No man can know a woman unless he frequently sees her; no woman can know a man unless he frequently visits her—but every visit is put down to their credit, so that, eventually, if the marriage is not arranged, the girl can be called a jilt by everyone in the city who is interested in other people's affairs, or is jealous of her hat. Jilt!" he repeated; he seemed to taste the word. "Jilt! It is not a word that we look upon with strong disapproval. But the man—the man is called a cad. And that is almost the last word. Let us call him a cad. Yet," he asked again, "how have people to get to know each other if they don't meet?" (The waiter arrived before him with his glass, which he took up from the tray.) "My respects to you, gentlemen," he said.

Everyone had listened with more or less interest, but he spoiled the whole effect (maybe from becoming abruptly nervous, perhaps suddenly thinking he looked ridiculous) by laughing a silly little laugh of: "He-he-he!" The barmaids would laugh at anything. They were the kind of girls that would laugh if a gentleman sitting on one of the high stools across the counter, even before he began a funny story, pointed a finger at them. To tap them on the chest was to set them giggling for the evening. This queer "He-he-he!" now started them a-going; they pealed. The men roared, really at a droll silliness in the

situation—at the pealing and empty laughter of the barmaids following on that unexpected tittering “he-he-he!”

“Very good, professor, very good,” said the big man when the laughter ceased.

“So we can leave it like that,” announced the little cadaverous person, “and discuss other matters. The fellow was a cad.”

Contralto and Soprano had a little private giggle. Only the cadaverous one glanced toward them—smiled.

Suddenly the big man turned to Murray. “Will you join us, sir?” he asked.

But Murray was on his feet. “No, thank you, sir—I must go,” he said, bowed to the men, raised his hat to Soprano and Contralto, nodded to the waiter, and, walking heavily, passed downstairs and into the street, meeting other men going up as he descended, to find night, and the movement of night, now wholly on the town.

There was a kind of excited, shoulder-rubbing glamour of humanity; something of vivacity returned to him, with a touch of diablerie. The street-lamps and the shop-lights, such as still splashed their gold on the grey pavements, played tricks with the pale passing faces—Beardsley effects. There were stir and excitement. Pedestrian traffic was congested in the city's centre by reason of the laughing and talking groups; with an air of expectancy young people were parading to and fro, reminiscent of swarming bees, raising a hum under the far and tiny stars like that of the hive.

Of the laughter, the chatter, the turn of girls' heads, Murray was aware in an abstracted fashion. These things did not at first annoy him. It was pleasant to be amid humanity but not octopused by it—if one may be allowed a neologism. But anon they seemed to interrupt him even as he was on the point of coming to some decision regarding his life. He turned aside from the crowds into Whitehall Street simply to get away from the crowds, and there it occurred to him

to go right on down to the water-front. He accepted the impulse and offer of sanctuary out of the throng, strolled on the docks, looking across the league-broad Tay to the lights of Newport that faintly twinkled, backed by a bulk of wavering-ridged blackness, the foot-hills of the southern shore. The river gurgled along the piers, and every now and then gave vent to a horrible sucking sound; the reflected dock-lights accentuated its cruelty—or heedlessness. There was, to be sure, a freshening wind down here that might have clarified him toward a decision. But he was not clarified. He strolled on the jetty, feeling very much a loose end, with the hum of the city on one hand, the sucking of the river on the other, the remorseless splash of it even underfoot, below the wharf on which he dallied. There was, at the end of this wharf, a kind of companion-way, a square cavity railed round upon three sides, and with a flight of steps leading downward from the unrailed side, to a lower wharf—or less wharf than boat-landing stage—this for ease in embarkations and disembarkations with the rising and falling tides.

He leant against the railing surrounding this well-like cavity, looking down (his eyes now accustomed to the darkness) upon the splash, and wash, and swirl of the shadowed water that was spangled here and there with fragments of broken light. On the lower steps he could dimly see, thanks to the faint sheen of backward dock-lamps, the rising and floating and faint twinkling and then the wavering subsidence of clinging seaweed or water-weed. The rising tide swung between the steps in small cascades, flooding back and forth. Looking out and up again he remarked that the stars were dulled, the lights of Newport hazed over; there was a mist, or trail of cloud, going past. He sneezed. He took out his watch and peered to discover the time—held it up this way and that; but the lights behind were not strong enough to illumine the dial so that it could be read. He lit a match, and in the quick flicker of flame saw that it

was now eleven o'clock. Ah, well! He could go home, for the household would be in bed; and he could, perhaps, think in his own sitting-room, might there thrash out what he had been unable to thrash out here despite the recent unconscious friendly lead of the man in the niche in the hotel bar-parlour.

He put thumb and fore-finger in right waistcoat-pocket, and started homeward. The old cracked chime of the town-clock was playing its foolish "la-la, la-la" of a quarter past eleven as he made his way through the crowds that still thronged Nethergate—the now less superficial promenaders—and circumvented the newly outcast knots of toppers from the many public-houses, eleven o'clock being the closing hour in those days.

At half-past eleven he put key in door, entered quietly, and quietly fumbled to his room under a low-lit hall-lamp which he extinguished in passing. Opening his sitting-room door he was met by a dancing of flames in the grate, dancing of their light all over the warm interior. His fire had been recently stoked, suggesting a thought for him coming home through the cold night after late work at the office. There was a smell of burning, not of the coals, and looking down he saw that his slippers had been tilted on the fender to warm and, cause of that odour of singeing, a cinder had fallen into one of them and grilled a hole through.

It was not the hole that abruptly, without warning, enraged him; it was the sign of solicitude. He looked with fury at the shoes set there. He wanted to yell: "Will—you—leave—me—alone?" He knew he wanted to yell that; he had that clear enough in his mind to the very words, and it struck him that the answer might be: "Why didn't you leave *me* alone?" He was just (suddenly finding himself in a highly-strung condition) breaking into an imaginary conversation heatedly begun so, when his door stealthily opened, and there entered a girl in her dressing-gown.

## CHAPTER III

A TALLISH girl was looking round the door, a girl with black hair, arched, dark eyebrows, pretty blue eyes that, wide-open though they were, held no wonder, and a cleft in her chin. Always when she met him there was blent with her smile of greeting a hint of calculation; she was like a chess-player who, having had to leave his chair for some reason, comes back again to the friendly game smiling, and considering the board to see if his partner in the game, or opponent, or playmate, or what-you-may-call-him, made a move in his absence.

"Hullo!" she said in a subdued voice.

"Hullo!" he responded, turning round. "You're not in bed."

"I'm just going to bed," she answered. "Have you been working late?"

He had not yet turned up the gas, and now doing so it seemed to him, as he looked toward her, that she was watching him keenly, almost suspiciously. That reading of her glance might of course be guilty conscience. Certainly if he did catch a calculating, or watchful expression, it was but a fleeting glimpse, the tail end of a scrutiny given while he was occupied in illumining the scene. When he turned fully to her, her eyes brightened with a candour veritably child-like.

"Didn't your mother get my note?" he inquired.

She just nodded her head up and down several times, opening her eyes wider still, and came right into the room, gently thrusting the door shut behind her.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "You're worried about something. My boy is worried." It occurred to her that one with an untroubled mind would have turned the light up on entrance, not stood before the fire as he stood, casting monstrous shadow on wall and winking

ceiling. He hadn't even been taking off his boots; they were still on.

Her endearing voice gave him conflicting emotions. He looked, with heavy aspect, at the big blue eyes. Item: he had led her to imagine they were on terms for endearments. Item: she was going one step further in this solicitous endearing vein. Item: why couldn't she leave it to him to take the steps onward? Item: her voice enraged him.

"I say," he blurted out, "what exactly was it that your sister said to you about me?"

Holding out her hands, she came to him with little running steps.

"Oh you've been worrying about that!" she exclaimed, but with subdued voice, extending those shapely and smooth hands to him in a gesture as if they tenderly held some unseen urn or what-not.

"What exactly did she say?" he repeated, and stepped back a pace from the hands held out so. He did not want to touch them.

"You mustn't trouble about it," she answered, bringing the hands gently down again; perhaps they had been held forth merely in a gesture. "My sister only said that she believed you were flirting with me. I told her there was nothing on between us at all" (she did not fail to remark his tiny start at that, no start such as is necessary upon the stage, but a faint, yet immense matter; it communicated itself to her without need of any jerking of his body or head), "but she said, 'Oh, that won't do!'"

"But," said he, looking at the floor instead of at her, "I thought your sister said something about a ring."

"Yes—that was the last time, when I went to see her and took off my gloves. She looked at my hands and said she thought I was going to show her the ring, told me I was 'carrying on'—" He raised his gaze to her, and with something like a childish little treble coming into her voice, she added, "Made me cry, she did."

He looked at her thoughtfully and called himself a cad. He should never have gone out with her for these suburban strolls; he should never have asked her to sit down in his room. He put forefinger and thumb in waistcoat pocket and fumbled there.

"I did appreciate," said she, "the way that when I told you about that you flared up. But, but I hope," she brought out after a pause, "that you haven't gone and got a ring!"

He took his finger from the pocket, leaving only the thumb in, and drew a long breath.

"No," he replied. "No. I think it would be far better if we were not influenced at all by what outside people say." (He seemed to hear the little man of the divaned niche in that bar-parlour "down-town" laughing: "He-he-he!") "All Dundee might offer advice, but it is their own—our own affair, I mean," he said. "I really did think I should get you the ring because of the way your sister spoke to you. I was annoyed, at the time, that she should say such things to you. And then——" he stuck.

"And then what?" Her glance probed.

"Your mother——" he stuck again.

"My mother! What?" she asked, and there was noticeable a little furrow between her brows. "Do you think she is throwing me at your head?"

He looked at the furrow and thought to himself: "Oh, I can't talk to her like this—it is insulting." Aloud he said, hastily: "Oh, dear, no, I don't mean that. But she says funny things to me sometimes."

She looked thoughtfully and regretfully up at the ceiling corner. "I know," she said. "About time you were married, and so on. I wish she wouldn't be so silly. But, as you say, neither of us need mind so long as you know I'm not running after you. You know that. Tell me that," she pleaded suddenly, "I should hate to think—tell me."

"Why of course I know that," he answered, and had

to clear his throat. His voice sounded not his own. He looked in her eyes; it was a strained moment, and there was silence. There came back to him memory of the river gurgling and sucking under the wharf—the picture, as if still in his retina, floated before him. How far away he had been a little space ago from this, this coil and trouble, this business of lies and half-lies that he had blundered into. Here was not courtship such as one reads of in books. Was it thus people moved toward marriage?

"Tell me again," she begged. "For if ever I thought that you felt—oh, it would break my heart!" she seemed on the verge of tears.

"No, no, no," he hastened to make the situation more comfortable. "I know that quite well. It is not that."

"It is silly of me," she said with a little laugh. "I know you are not the kind of weak or conceited man to think you're *run after*. Forgive me, but——"

He merely nodded his head, staring. Then he drew a deep breath.

"Warmed your slippers for you," she piped and adorably gave him her child-like gaze. "You didn't say 'thank you.'"

He was engrossed otherwise.

"I—I really made up my mind to buy the ring to-day, so as to protect you from these nasty things your sister says," he, in a monotone, informed her.

The interlude of the slippers was utterly expelled.

"Nobody matters but ourselves," she whispered, and put a hand on his arm. "I'm glad you haven't got it after all."

With sudden relief he looked at her and believed in her greatly. If this were, or were not, the Real Thing, at least, after all, their alliance was to be their own, uninfluenced, unhastened by others. He almost believed in himself too—and believed that this was the woman which a kind Destiny intended for him.

"You are, little girl?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, "because, you see," and she glanced up into his face, a grown woman, but with that seemingly ingenuous and childish openness, "to-day is Friday."

"Friday!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. And it would be unlucky to buy it on Friday. But you could get it to-morrow. I'm glad you did not buy it to-day."

Baffled, he stared at the pretty face. What tremendous difference was between them really—between the Thing inside himself, and the Thing behind these eyes, pretty as a Persian cat's. Suddenly she took the half-step nearer and confidingly nestled to him; and he held her.

"I would like the man I marry to respect me," she murmured.

At that remark his grasp slightly relaxed even at the moment of embracing her as she leant to him. The remark was like that many-pointed impediment used in warfare to obstruct the advance of cavalry; throw it down how you will there are various prickly points protruding. A new notion seemed to kindle in her eyes suddenly and she interrupted his self-communings.

"Do you know what I will do to please you, dear?" she said. "When I go to see Alice, or when she comes here, I'll take the ring off—to please you."

She did not note a look in his eyes then—indescribable, for her own words were no sooner spoken than she had a private thought which fully occupied her. As he noted the change in her face, as if she were suddenly afraid of something, he, too, had his private thought. They lived in different worlds. It was as if he had a stab of pain.

It seemed to him that he was only deferring utter alliance, not preparing the way for a parting. Besides, was his arm not round her, however lightly? Heavy solemnity was on his face.

"But you don't like her speaking in that way," he said. "She made you cry."

Her big eyes were looking away past him, over his

shoulder, sad—like eyes of one craving for aid. They were infinitely troubled, plaintive. He felt pity for her, because of all this that, he told himself, he had brought her of little vexations and upsettings. He gathered her warm body closer. Then her gaze came back to him; she raised her eyes to his face.

"My sister said you were only *carrying on* with me, didn't mean anything." Again she felt a change in his hold about her, and if it did not altogether relax that was only because the young man could not accept the horrible opportunity offered to him to say, thrusting her from him: "And she is right! Let it end—let it end now. I want to go away." As his arm relaxed her clinging slackened. She stepped back a little, and with fingers on his shoulders, looking in his eyes, she added: "She doesn't know you. She had no right to say such a thing about you. I know you are an honourable man."

Meeting her gaze, he stared in her face, his own like a mask. For a long, an infinitely long time, it seemed to him, they stood so. He let her scrutinise him; he wished her to read all that he knew must be in his eyes. There was something almost suppliant in them, a weakness showed then, and it was as though he flung himself upon her mercy.

"I must go, it is late, and I would like the man I marry to respect me," she repeated. She slipped from his arms; she moved backwards, head lowered, watching him with her bright eyes, her colour exquisite, her cheeks adorable; she blew a kiss to him from the door, and was gone quietly.

Murray stood transfixed, and to himself he said: "Well, by God, you've done it now." There followed a little click as the door closed. She had evidently stood outside, turning the handle slowly and with firm hand (she had firm hands; she grasped things firmly, definitely), to prevent a sound that might awaken her mother; it was all between themselves. Had she heard him? No—he

had not spoken aloud. Oh, well, it was at any rate between themselves. The mother had merely a turn for levity, that was all; hence her little rippling comments on how her daughter and he seemed to be very good friends. And the sister was probably only a meddler. Then there flashed up in his mind again the sudden, thoughtful, half-frightened look that had come into her eyes immediately after the announcement of her intention to take off the ring on seeing her sister. Queer how that expression stuck. It was the main feature left to him of this midnight interview.

He looked at the slippers that he had thrust to the side of the fireplace, and considered them afresh as one disgusted. Left alone, he lapsed back into his earliest mood. He walked through to his bedroom, and with slow movements removed his watch, wound it up, put it under his pillow, tossed keys and loose change from his pockets on to the dressing-table, and then stood there with bent head, hands in pockets. The grey night without had broken down in rain that tip-tapped, tip-tapped like feet of worried ghosts. He took the packet containing the ring from his waistcoat pocket and threw it at the dressing-table.

"Reprieved for a night, George, my boy," he said. And then, pondering his own remark, he added: "Too good for you—she's too good for you. That's about the size of it."

#### CHAPTER IV

MURRAY often woke cranky of a morning. He objected on principle to awakening so, for the cranky person was, he considered, biased, unduly influenced. He did not care for himself in that mood and did his best to levy discount on its views. Still, there it was. It seemed to be constitutional; and if, because of his dislike of

extremes, he tolerantly agreed, to-night, with the view expressed by someone (or if he refrained from argument either with a thought of its futility, or because of a desire to be broad-minded), to-morrow morning, dressing, he would hark back to the night's talk and consider that he had really grievously erred in not denouncing the namby-pamby or the illogical views expressed to him. It was not that his brain was not sufficiently alert to dissect a pronouncement at the moment; it was not that his brilliant replies came too late; it was that his policy veered. In the presence of one illogical or inane voicing inanity he would think: "What's the good of talking to him!" but afterwards he would think: "I should have talked! It is absurd that such inanity should be allowed to pass." (Had he only known it, Constable, if not every morning on entering the office, at any rate every now and then, decided, conversely, not to take part in any dispute from politics to ethics—and he invariably did! *Drôle du monde!*)

This morning Murray awoke to contempt for that banal person Johnny Molison. He should have flattened his banalities yesterday; and Peters, "frae Aberrrdeen," the stolid drawler of platitudes, should also, in the name of human intelligence, have been severely crushed! Constable, he recalled at this moment with pleasure, was not an idiot. But his mood would not allow him, thus regaining some measure of tranquillity in recalling yesterday's office-talk, to retain it. A second later he was bitterly considering how foolish it was to try to express any clear opinion to these lumpish, contented, serious mill-stones of people. He cut himself while shaving because of them.

Another droll characteristic of Murray's was that in these cranky—as he considered them—morning moods he would thrash out vehemently some minor trouble of yesterday, and all the while the real reason for his private fuming was not the matter he vented himself upon. The

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real trouble he kept in the background, rending the minor futilities, instead of the major which really worried him. Most of us doubtless have some such kink in us. It was a good thing for his chin that he did not blunder on into direct consideration of the more intimate affairs of last night till after the scraping operation was over.

"Damned fool!" he ejaculated to himself as he hunted for his collar button. It was himself he was now maligning. "Got back on to the old basis when I might have got off it!" (There! He had come to the major cause of his "crankiness.") "Glad I didn't buy the ring because it was Friday! O Lord!" He waded on deeper into his quagmire as he knotted his necktie. "The whole business was at cross-purposes. Queer how she wanted me to tell her that I knew she was not forcing the thing. Well, can't go back on it now."

Drawing on his jacket, he flung his arms abroad in a kind of weak Samson gesture, and considered: "The long and the short of it is I am going—I am going—to get out of here. I won't just bolt off. I'll have a heart-to-heart talk with her. I'll tell her it will be far better for us if I go elsewhere. I'll tell her it will be better if I call instead of living here—help to put a stop to this tittle-tattling and interference of relatives."

But looking at himself in the mirror, completing the morning's grooming, he was not satisfied. That image in the glass lacked determination, resolution. He thrust forward and peered at the reflection of his face with some annoyance. Still, he could not make himself a forceful person by glaring in the glass—and he passed from the bedroom to the living-room, where the cloth was spread, and the breakfast herrings exuded an enticing odour under the polished cover. If Ethel had only come in then to say good-morning his resolve might have had at least a beginning; but of course she didn't, that was just the moment when she would not possibly appear. She did not come to see him at all.

Half-an-hour later, swinging down to business, he felt, if not still free, at least reprieved. Yesterday he had told himself he was free—with less exactitude than to-day he told himself he was reprieved. The little tissue-paper packet reposed, for proof of the reprieve, in his waistcoat-pocket. It might, it just might, be more than a reprieve: for he had left word with the little maid that he would not be home either to lunch or supper. He had been very adroit about that. He had not left the message until he was on the point of departure; for he had veered again in his policy. When Ethel did not step into his room with a pleasant "Hullo!" in the doorway, he had decided to give himself what yesterday he had wished for—a reasonable space of time away from her. Had she entered, so he flattered himself, he would have come manfully to the core of the racking and misguided business. Now it could wait. What he had aimed at yesterday he would have to-day and return so late that she would be bound to be a-bed. In the interim he would think over in detail the arguments to be put before her, arguments that would make it evident to her that for the best—that would be it, for the best—they should separate now. He really had no appointment for the afternoon, could have come home when the office closed at one o'clock quite easily; but his whole instinct craved for the interlude, the breathing space, seeing she had not, of herself, sought him out before his departure. He was going to a smoking-concert in the evening to give a Gladstone bag, a jolly evening, and a cheer of farewell to one of his colleagues.

Means to fill in the gap between lunch and supper-time was fortunately given by a whale. It had beached itself just outside the estuary, as whales do now and then along that coast. Here was a distraction. Not only interest in natural history sent the trippers out on that Saturday afternoon to see and smell the whale. Boredom sent them, the lack of so much as a penny concert in those days

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caused them to welcome that stranded leviathan as it were with open arms! And Murray saw and smelt it in the company of friends, and with them exchanged glad-eyes with the girls on the beach, and felt almost free again instead of merely reprieved, and had a game of quoits, and two or three rounds of "nips" in the Something Arms. The whale provided distraction, and though gazing on all the stranded whales on all the beaches of the world could not save him from having to come to judgment anon, it was (so well did he manage to dismiss worry over the hole he had got himself into) one of the happiest days of his life, and tragically brief.

\* \* \* \* \*

To Ethel it was a long day, one of the longest in her knowledge. Purposely she had not risen early that morning, realising his attempts to go free, denied though they were. She knew that as she backed away from him last night her appeal had not been nil. The mere lure of her eyes under arched brows; her body, taken from his arms, going away; her cheeks of pink and cream (she had backed so from the mirror in her own room immediately on entering it while yet her cheeks had the glow he had seen), had made their impression upon him. Not only because of what he had earlier said, but because of how he had looked then, she knew he would never again even hint that he had been pursued instead of having been allowed to pursue. She was a little indignant with him. No man would be able to leave her in the lurch, as was that girl left whose *fiancé* ran away on the wedding day, day before yesterday. She would leave him alone now, this morning; she would force him to ask for her, and thus set seal upon his statement that he knew she had not "run after" him.

But here was a change in the board (to revert to the simile of the game of chess) that she had not expected. "Leave him alone and he'll come home, and bring his tail behind him," had been on her lips last night as she

disrobed. In the morning, hearing the maid deliver his message to her mother, the furrows showed between her brows. She had a childish rage on learning that he was not to be home till late. She had pictured the returning process with dragging tail—for he was very keen on her, she was sure of that, and he wouldn't be able to help himself. She blamed her mother for this hitch in the proceedings! It was those silly giggling remarks of her mother's that made him—oh, she knew, she felt it—doubtful about *taking the step*.

That was a trifle unjust to Mrs. West, for Mrs. West had been a useful friend to her once or twice.

But this morning she blamed her mother; and it was a snarly household that day. Ethel flounced and tossed; Mrs. West grew placid. Ethel wanted her mother to ask her to do something—anything at all—so that she could do it with a jar; but the mother made no request for service, made only one little comment, or another, on nothing at all during the forenoon, with a "my dear" tagged on at the end. Thus it was that, long before noon, Mrs. West was in a position to say: "Why, my dear, you seem to have risen off your wrong side."

Ethel tossed her head. "How do you make that out?" she asked.

"I don't know—something in your behaviour."

The girl pouted.

"Isn't the love-affair progressing satisfactorily?" the mother inquired.

"I do wish you would mind your own business!" snapped Ethel.

"Hoity-toity!" replied Mrs. West, and straightway minded her own business.

Ethel, going into the drawing-room to dust, felt a desire to sweep all the ornaments off the mantelpiece; did not, of course, do so, but after that mad desire discovered that the pouting fit was worn out. In the afternoon she conceived a hope that the young man would

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come home by supper-time after all; but the young man didn't. She went out, more subdued than pouting now, intending to call on friends to be cheered up, but either her mood or theirs was wrong. She seemed to be not wanted, did not remain long, and after her departure the friends upon whom she had thus dropped in had a feeling as though she had come on some errand not performed. The hours before bedtime she spent in passing from the subdued to the irritable, in disliking the way her mother looped the curtains, in thinking that the petticoat arrangement, called a valance, round the mantel was tiresome. She went to bed in a pet. But the remark to herself of, "Not going to lose sleep over *him!*" was doubtless not a mere empty brag, for the town clock (away below) was playing its little Sunday morning psalm tune when she awoke.

With the coming of another day came strengthening to her resolve to let the sheep come home dragging his tail. Her mother had little to say, but her mother noticed very acutely that the lodger and friend did not leave his own sitting-room that morning, and that her daughter did not enter it. She also noticed that the young man had scarcely touched his breakfast; the tray was brought away again with evidence of the merest dabbling. Ethel, remarking its state as it was carried past her in the hall by the little maid, thought that perhaps all was well. But she did not know whether to be annoyed or pleased, a little later, on hearing voices and realising that her mother had gone into George's room and was chatting with him.

Really it was quite a pleasant chat.

"Oh, there you are!" said Mrs. West on entering. "I wondered if you were not feeling well."

"Good-morning. I'm all right."

She laughed. "Two late nights!" She shook her head at him. "You were not working late on Saturday, surely?"

"No—I wasn't working late last night."

She appeared not to study his face, but had her guess nevertheless. She shook her head again, motherly, at him.

"I was at a smoking concert," he said.

"Fie! Fie!" she cried. "I know what smoking concerts are by my own boy. They are not good for young men." She dropped her voice. "And I'm sure Ethel would be worried if she knew. I was very glad when *my* boy fell in love, for he stopped all that smoking-concert nonsense then. Made a man of him," she murmured. "Oh, well—I'm glad you are not ill, at any rate."

And with a little smile she departed while he, instead of sitting down again, walked over to the window, and, hands in pockets, looked out on the empty road, the grey-blue roofs below, the twists of streets utterly vacant save for the sparrows, and the wet green of the hills beyond Tay southward. The old lady struck him, that morning, as a very decent dame, not a bit strait-laced, but worldly wise. There were two sides to the marrying and settling business. One wouldn't overdo this smoking-concert racket if one were married—there was really nothing in it. He had (truth to tell) been three sheets in the wind last night, and he did not now argue (following up Mrs. West's remarks) that he had allowed himself the daft dizziness of these three sheets in the wind in great part because it dulled his worry over his, if we may say so, courtship. He argued instead that really here was but more proof that it would be good for him to marry—and settle. He was not just a junior clerk, a kid; he was beyond a kid's years.

But if he had, also, as he believed, a mind beyond the minds of Peters and Molison, assuredly he needed now a trouncing from Constable, strong language and all, for his ruminations as he looked out over the roofs and tree-tops. "You damned fool," one can imagine Constable roaring at him, "can't you see that you are putting that weight in the wrong balance? And you a book-keeper!

Don't you know the Debit from the Credit side? Huh! You deserve all you get! You, too!"

Mrs. West, having cheered her lodger and made exit, came into the drawing-room where Ethel was dispassionately wetting her finger with tongue-tip and then dabbing it on what she called a "bump," a microscopic inequality found under her chin. She looked up at her mother; their eyes met and stayed. The little acerbities of yesterday were nothing.

"How is he?" she asked.

"He's all right. You've had a little difference, I know, but it's all right."

"I think we'll go for a walk," said the girl. "Silly—moping indoors."

Her mother understood this to mean: "Do you think I should ask him to go for a walk?" and so she advised: "I think I would poke my head in, at any rate."

And Ethel did, without making any perceptible sound in opening the door, looked at his back, he still standing in the window, and said: "Hullo."

He turned round and smiled. He did not know on what footing they met this morning; she would decide.

"Well," she said, "I've come to see you." She smiled at him. "You won't think I'm running after you?" and she bubbled over with merriment.

"Oh don't be silly," he replied, and looked foolish.

Her eyes seemed to calculate a moment. "You know you weren't very nice to me," she went on. "George," she added, almost under her breath.

He raised his eyes and looked in hers; she was very pretty, sweet and fresh, and he felt seedy and all in the wrong.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"That's all right," she said coming close to him; and then, "Oh, I wish I could tell you," she whispered, "how much I feel that I am all yours—George"; she spoke his name after a pause in a way that made a sick disturbance

in his heart. "And I was hurt at the way you treated me at first on Friday night. And on Saturday you went away without even good-morning to me."

"You did not come in," he replied, and felt, very self-conscious, that he must look as stolid and as heavy as Peters.

"How could I? I did not know until you had gone that you wouldn't be home till late," she told him. "And I sat up for you, too," and perhaps she believed that she had waited up in the hope of seeing her beloved. "You know, George, some girls would take a pique at the funny way you behaved on Friday about my mother and Alice. The way I come to you now shows how I forgive you."

He stared at her as though he had not rightly known her till now. She opened her eyes wide to his gaze, holding up her head—and he tried not to embrace her. But as she gently half-turned, so that her shoulder touched against his breast, her face upheld to him, he was almost distraught, and—"Aren't you going to give me something?" she asked. "Just as a sign—to me?"

His arm encircled her, he stooped and gathered her close, kissed her on lips, on cheeks, on chin, her head turning away at last, and she sighing with an expression oddly changed; there was a hint of inscrutability on her face; it reminded him of the face of a statue, faintly suggested alabaster, despite its pink and creamy hues.

"I'm so happy, George," she sighed. "I was afraid that all the result of my coming to you to tell you how my sister had hurt me was to make you think that my people were anxious for me to get married, wanted to get rid of me—Oh, I assure you some families are like that. I know!" and she nodded her head, and looked very engagingly wise. "I wouldn't get married because of anybody worrying me. I wondered—I did wonder, and perhaps it was wrong of me—if perhaps you had only been playing with me. But," her hands were on his shoulders,

"I know now, when you kissed me like that—that it doesn't matter what people say."

Everything that had been was, at this moment, like an evil dream in Murray's mind. It came to him suddenly that he was not, maybe, absolutely sound mentally—not mad, but unstable. That way he had of arguing over things in the morning when he was dressing—sometimes even of speaking aloud the phrases he should have spoken, and had refrained from uttering—perhaps that was sign of a kind of craziness. Perhaps he was imaginative too. It was balance he needed, and what better incentive to gain balance than to have this dear, confiding girl to take care of? He had read somewhere of "taking roots in life." Here was the meaning of that.

She was still waiting. The kisses which he had impulsively given were not—he understood suddenly—what she had asked for. She had been thinking of their last talk, and it was the engagement ring she meant when speaking of "a sign." What a cad he was! Yes, it was true—what he had heard someone say—"it is responsibilities that men try to evade."

"I'm not good enough for you, darling," he said; "I'll try to be."

He put fingers in waistcoat pocket and fumbled there among the paper, tearing it, fidgeted and fidgeted with his right hand, taking hers with his left; then he drew out the ring that had been in her mind when she asked if he had nothing for her. Even as he kissed her she had known that, though he misunderstood, his sense of honour would cause him to realise anon that they were, by that token, engaged. He put the ring on her finger, unaware upon which it should go at the moment, putting it on her second finger, for it was his own second finger that it almost fitted.

"You dear boy!" she said, standing transfixed, her eyes wide and unblinking, and thrust the right finger up.

Her breath gave a little intake when at length the ring

was safely on, and she whirled on her heel; then suddenly remembered something, whirled back and embraced him, again whirled away, danced from the room, and skipped like a fairy to the drawing-room. She waved her hand under Mrs. West's gaze, and began all excitedly a confused story commencing, "I just put my nose in and said, 'Hullo!' and——," but her mother took her by the shoulders and spun her round.

"That can keep. You go back to him," she said, bringing Ethel up abruptly in her dance of glee as an excited child is stilled by a watchful nurse.

There was an expression on Ethel's face as of consciousness of a misstep, but a mere touch was sufficient guidance for her. After all, she had come this length, hadn't she? She tossed her head, but was too radiant to do so much more than playfully. She was as old and as wise as she would ever be. She knew the way. And when her mother twisted her round she danced back to her affianced—and from his look, even as from Mrs. West's, fully understood the error of her impetuosity.

"I just *had* to show it to mummie," she said. "One's mummie is always one's mummie, you know." And as the baffled look in his eyes gave place to tenderness, "She's not a bad old sort," she went on. "And do you know I believe she said those things you didn't like just because she is very fond of me. And she thinks a lot of you, too—George," she added, in that almost whisper.

And as he put his arms round her again, she leaning to him, furnishing, fittings, and all the materials of the room seemed unrealities. She was just a very sweet, open-eyed, dear little woman for whose sake he was going to make a comfortable niche in the world. That was the situation, he considered. That was the truth of it all, shorn of his crankiness.

## CHAPTER V

"Sit down," she said at last.

He sat down, and ever so sweetly she plumped upon his knees, that were now hers by right, and, arranging his neck-tie, began to pour forth prattle about herself and her relatives; for it was but seemly that the man she was to marry should know more about her now that he had definitely pledged himself with sapphires and diamonds.

"You told me once that your father was a professional man. So is my sister's husband. So was my father, but he speculated. He had a very remunerative post."

"Remun——" corrected George, tapping her cheek.

"Remunerative, yes," she said.

"Remun——" he repeated, "not renum——"

"Yes, that's it—remunerative. It was a slip of the tongue." She pouted slightly, apparently at an end, although having only begun.

"Quite, quite," he said in a wheedling tone, seeing he had hurt her sensitiveness.

"He lost a lot of money," she went on then, reassured; "and that is why poor mummie had to let rooms. My sister Alice is rather like my father—he was a very handsome man. She had to go out to business because we could not both be at home. But," and Ethel gave that little nod, brought her head up again with stately motion, "she was in a shop where the assistants were all ladies."

"No men at all?" he asked, with a queer feeling that it was a child he dandled on his knees, and that he should produce his watch, entirely oblivious of how wise she was in other ways.

"Oh, yes," she replied; she looked at him shrewdly to discover if he were jesting with her, but found his expres-

sion not suggestive of any *arrière pensée*. "But the assistants—well, the females, then—were ladies. Now do you understand?" and, sitting there on his knees, she gave again an engaging little sidewise nod, held her head so, half-smiling in his solemn eyes.

Strange how he seemed to be in the presence of other existences, as though they were really not alone in this room; it was to him, for a moment, as though his scholarly old father, whom he dimly remembered, raised his ghostly head and glanced on them. Nay, it was in some queer way as if a host of ghosts were with them, looking on, unwinking. It was perhaps a pity that she had not given herself fully earlier; and, yet, how can an innocent girl give of herself to a stranger until he has, as it were, promised security? If she were not careful at the beginning of things he might not be attracted, might not return again, might (in such a case as this) be engaged otherwise on her visits, have an appointment—"so sorry, but have to go out!" Then he would never get as far as this—so could not reasonably (or even unreasonably) be expected to feel himself committed, under obligation, to marry and settle.

"Of course, she can dress well now," Ethel continued, freely voicing her thoughts as they linked one to another in her mind, "for her husband has lots of money."

Her little face was lifted to him, the eyes half-dreamy, half-vivacious. She straightened his tie again, plucked the buttons of his waistcoat, prattled on. He missed, or did not follow, the account of some other family connection, but as she thrust her pretty face forward to point the moral of her talk she fully arrested his attention again, and he had the moral, if not the prologue:

"So you see *ours* is a good family too," and she looked at him keenly to ascertain if he had got that. "If I had gone to business," she added, "I would have gone to —'s also, like my sister, because the assistants there are all ladies."

She repeated that, as repetition seemed necessary. He evidently did not fully realise the significance of such significant matters. Though she had never heard of Matthew Arnold, she was going upon his theory that what you want people to understand you must tell them, not once—but once, twice, and again.

Murray nodded. He had the desire for a smoke, even put hand in pocket absently and held his pipe.

"Why, whatever are you feeling for?" she said. "You don't mean to say you would smoke when I'm telling you all about myself as I've never told you before! Oh, go on, silly—smoke," for he had withdrawn his hand from the pocket, and having registered her half-playful objection she could now give permission. "I don't mind smoking, though I don't like to see a man smoking a pipe in the street; I like cigars—except," she added, "on holidays and in the fair week."

It would appear that he had to get to understand her. His brows puckered as he turned her remarks over mentally—and he did not need to ask, "Why that?" but realised the reason for the view. He smiled and took the argument.

"But, of course," he said, "if a man smoked cigars all the time you wouldn't have him desist in fair week because the ploughmen in town smoked them then."

She went prettily blank before this. It was not an argument she could follow, though, to be sure, that was neither here nor there. Her view, she believed, was right, but it was nice to have a clever lover who would one day discuss politics, and so forth, with husbands of friends, and show himself clever before them—over these things that did not matter.

"Desist!" she echoed. "What funny words you use!"

His knees ached by now; and he realised that they were not on terms with each other that would admit of him saying, "For God's sake, my dear, get off my knee."

He smiled a faint smile, somewhat like that a man gives on entering a booth and finding that the poster outside is humbugging and the show within a catch, a mere test of one's bonhomie or capacity for being, as they say, "sold again"; it was a slightly wry smile, as it struck him, in a flash, advancing thus toward matrimony, that in the only marriage worth while a man should be able to pinch the end of the dead-weight at such a moment and say, "For God's sake get off," without fear of consequences. But she prattled on. The passing *frou-frou* of the mother's Sunday silk brought from him a little push to her waist and, "Here's your mother coming."

She shook her head. "She won't come in," she said with certainty.

Nor did she—just called, in the hall, "I'm off to church, you young people."

"All right, mummie."

When Ethel rose to look at her mother from the window, to see how she was arrayed this Sabbath, Murray rose too, stretched, walked to and fro, and then, with the grimmest smile of his life, seated himself at the table, with his legs tucked under. It has been said that life is *tragi-comedy*, but there are moments when it seems like a broad farce of a tragedy. Ethel, turning, to return to her vacated seat, pouted. Murray, flush to the table, was filling his pipe with something between a glare and a grin for the pipe bowl; but at this juncture there was a ring at the front door bell, and, anon, another. Ethel listened, and no sound of an answer to the summons being audible—"Wonder what that girl is doing?" she said, and departed to open.

She was gone some time, during which Murray fell into a mood much like his bad morning moods that plunged him into fume and fret over the mismanagements of yesterday. Suddenly he expelled a small sound of disgust, presumably at himself.

"I suppose no man likes the idea of settling," he said,

with a kind of spurn for the last word, trying still to tell himself that it was the "settling" he found so appalling. His brain always worked like that; you remember how he fumed audibly over Molison and Peters on the Saturday morning when really he was fuming voicelessly over matters much nearer to him. "Ah, well, I suppose everybody *settles!*" he communed to himself.

Ethel swirled back. "It was Alice," she told him. "Just dropped in on the way to church; either she's late, or mother's early."

She was still holding, moving, her left hand in a self-conscious manner, clearly not yet accustomed to what some call the symbol of serfdom. He looked at that symbol, to him, of serfdom, nodded toward it, and—

"Did you slip it on again just before you came in?" he asked.

"Never took it off," she answered, flaunting at him. "Why should I?"

"You told me that when you saw her you would——" he began.

"Oh, so I did!" she said. "I forgot." And then, with a confiding little gesture toward him, "No, George, I must always be honest with you, mustn't I? It was not really because I forgot, it was because I am superstitious. I think it is unlucky to take off an engagement ring—except to wash. I thought of that the moment after I had told you I'd take it off—for once or twice, anyway—to please you. I know you object to superstition. Oh, maybe I did forget it too!" she veered. "Anyhow, I wouldn't take it off, because it's unlucky!" she said, with finality. Then came another veer. She wagged her head and bantered, as far as to voice, though her eyes belied the bantering accent, "I must say, all the same, that you're a funny lover not to want me to wear the ring." He felt irretrievably mixed. "Oh," and she nodded at him, peering at him, reading him. "I noticed the way you took a pet on Friday night. Now, didn't you?"

"About what?" He smiled, and found he was looking down at her as he might look at a child that utterly bored him. He would have to realise, as soon as possible, the distances apart they were—although, of course, she was a very charming, pretty girl, and all that sort of thing.

"When I said I was glad you had not bought the ring that day, because I was superstitious about Fridays."

"Oh, I don't think so, my dear," he answered. He was irritated. So he was going to be esteemed as one who "took a pet" now, in the very moment of making new resolves of broad-minded acceptance of differences (as he told himself these differences were) between male and female!

"But you did!" she cried out, suddenly beaming upon him, and having a first taste of what married women she knew meant by "managing your husband." "I was reading an article the other day where it said that all men are just like children to women, and I could see you did."

The "where," instead of "in which," jarred him more than the pronouncement. Odd that she had never before seemed so—well, illiterate! Perhaps—it occurred to him—he had done all the talking formerly.

"Never mind," he said. "What did your sister say?"

"She wanted to know when the wedding was to be!"

"Oh, she did, did she?" he said, expecting sympathy from Ethel in his indignation at the unseen sister's interest, in view of Ethel's, not only tears over earlier interference of that sister's, but expressed resentment at the interference.

"You needn't make that face at her!" remarked Ethel, and then quickly she added, "I told her to mind her own business."

"Was she angry?"

"Oh, no. I smiled when I said it, just like this," and she showed him how. "She could take it or leave it."

He looked—and looked away.

"What's wrong now?" she asked.

"Nothing, nothing! Oh, well, it's for us to decide."

"Of course," she agreed.

He rose and strolled to and fro in the room, and neither spoke for a space. Suddenly she trilled a laugh at him—for she had a laugh. "Sit down!" she broke out, the words coming laughing from her. "Why do you keep walking about? You look as if you were trying to get somewhere!"

He was at the end of his beat window-wards, and wheeled.

"Feel as if I was," he muttered, with a laugh too, and leant hip on corner of window-sill, as if to sit there.

"No, sit down here," she said, "by the fire."

He sat where directed. The men some women wish to marry are men they half despise, and she—once more upon his knees—chattered till lunch-time, for now that they were engaged she had a very lust, it seemed, to let herself go, to show him what he was engaged to. The disclosure would have horrified him had he not felt himself committed; but, being committed, he did not wish to consider the disclosure too carefully—he would emulate the ostrich for his ease. The rattling of dishes brought her from her chatter, to which he responded nodding, and saying, "Oh, yes"—"Is that so?"—"Well, well," raising his eyebrows now, wagging his head anon, all which seemed to satisfy her. She slipped from his knees to the hearth-rug beside him, and the maid, entering, set the places for two.

"Look!" she nodded toward the table, indicating the two sets of cutlery, the two napkins, her head on a level with the cloth as she beamed upon it. "That's Mummie."

He glanced round at the table. "Oh," he said, seeing that they were to lunch together, "but your mother won't lunch alone, will she? She had better——" he hesitated, for he had some kind of courtesy, as well as the requisite sense of honour.

"Oh, she'll be——" Ethel began.

Mummie put her head in at the door.

"I'm going over to Alice's for lunch," she said. "You two can look after yourselves."

Sitting erect on the hearthrug, Ethel looked at her mother. "Was it a good sermon?" she asked.

"Splendid! And you should see Mrs. Kinghorne's new hat!"

"What's it like?" said Ethel.

"Oh, you'll have to see it!" She wagged her head at Murray. "You see what you're in for now," and she laughed cheerily. "Hats! Well, good-bye—I'll leave you young people alone."

When Mrs. West departed the two young people looked at each other, both wide-eyed. Neither spoke. They merely stared owlsh, until Ethel began to blink—blink—blink, as if dust were in her eyes. She pressed the eyelids shut, ran a finger under one eye, under the other.

"Eyes sore?" asked Murray.

"Eh? Oh, no—yes, a little. Don't you ever feel your eyes like that?" She squeezed them shut again, then opened them, and, sitting back on her heels, commenced to hum.

The maid entered again, set the final dishes, and—

"Quite ready," she said, timidly, and went nervously from them.

To Murray the room felt a little on the stuffy side, so, before sitting down to the repast, he opened the window wide. Ethel had her back to it, and presently, over soup, she humped up her shoulders in a little shrug. Anon she turned her head and looked round.

"Well," said Murray, reverting to a subject that had stuck in his mind, "it is all our own affair now. I mean the date for the marriage day. No one can decree that for us."

She made no response, merely looked round at the

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window again, gave a little audible shiver. She desired attention.

"You might shut the window behind me, please, George," she said.

"I'm so sorry!" he cried, and, leaping to his feet, he walked across and closed it.

"Mother often says how thoughtful father was about things like that," Ethel added, as he returned.

He sat down again, with a squaring of his shoulders, a movement backward of them, as if trying to broaden his chest—or to shake off a weight from his back. There seemed no reply to make to that remark. And as he had no reply, there was a lull. Ethel ate, and was mute. Murray, for the life of him, could think of no subject for talk, although the silence was very much of the kind called dead. It was as antipathetic to him as the speeches he had been hearing, and been involved in, to-day. He could not hide from himself a sense of shock at the open-mouthed crunching of his wife-to-be during that dead silence. The licking of a thumb (but, oh, it was a dainty licking, and some might have found it fascinating) in this dead silence was harassing. To his horror, he discovered that his instinct was to yell at her a command to eat less audibly, and to use her napkin. There was nothing of even merry pre-nuptial (to say nothing of splendidly and deifiedly ecstatic pre-nuptial) feast about it. He felt like a man performing the operation known as "eating the leek."

Meeting his gaze she smiled sweetly, all unaware. He responded wanly.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

At her jolly inquiry he crowded a vast deal of thought into a second, and replied, "I've been thinking, Ethel, of applying for a post in Calcutta." For in that crowded moment, before replying, he had thought (had taken it upon himself to think), among other thoughts, that travel might make a great change in her. And the Indian

situation had, truly, been in his mind during the last worried days. After her question he groped hurriedly for a thought to put forward and found that.

She raised her head and stared at him, fork held in abeyance, little finger erectly twisted.

"Travel and seeing the world is a great thing," he announced.

"Oh! if one had enough to travel," she said, "and come home again—so as to be able to say one had been to places—but——" she observed her fork, ate, and paused.

"A situation abroad often pays well," he continued.

"You are making five pounds a week now where you are," she spoke with a tone as of informing him; and he had a feeling again of being brought up unexpectedly. When had he told her of his earnings? Yes, long ago—as an aside, an accidental, in some other talk. "I think you are very ambitious," she said, and gave him an arch glance.

"I am," he agreed. "I am ambitious. And I have not learnt two languages for nothing. The other day the boss came into the office and asked if any of us, by any chance, knew Italian, and I translated a letter for him. He said to me, 'You may go far,' and he was quite right. I am not going to stick where I am."

She looked upon him with demeanour almost matronly. "Do you know, George," she said, "I think you are awfully simple. I think you are awfully easily put upon. He was only trying to get your soft side because he wanted something extra out of you."

"Oh, no," Murray declared. "He is a fine chap."

She was annoyed at being contradicted, especially upon this occasion, when he might have seen the tender and eventful significance of the lunch. Why, it was as if they were keeping house together already. He should not argue; he should give her her way.

"So you think," she said, but without heat, and con-

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tinued to munch. Then, "What made you think of going abroad just now?" she had to inquire.

"Oh, I don't know," he replied. "It came into my mind." The onlooking ghosts, if they were there, doubtless shook their heads and turned away, it not being permitted to them to advise and say, "Part! Part! And immediately!"

Murray took advantage of a shaft of sunlight that illumined the little cupid-handle of the dish-cover to say (having had enough of the strain of this engagement-day luncheon—rehearsal of wedding breakfast): "We should go out for a walk. We haven't had any air all day. We must go out after lunch."

"Yes, the sun is coming out," she answered. "All right—if you wish it I'll go and get my hat on."

She put hands upon the table preparatory to rising, and in doing so accidentally tilted a salt-cellar, spilling some of the contents.

"Oh! Spilt salt!" she cried, took a pinch daintily between thumb and forefinger and threw it over left shoulder in the accredited method by which the Unknown Fiends are placated and renounce their right to torture the one who has accidentally spilt salt. She did not so much as glance at Murray after having put things right in that way, but, the office over, ran off to dress for the street. Before the day of engagement she might hide from him her superstitions, since he did not care for them, but now—has not a woman, as she had always heard, to manage a man? And again why should he be allowed to make a fuss over such slight matters? And again, could he prove that such were not (on the other hand) weighty matters? How did he know they did not signify? And, beyond all that, why consider his view at all? It was now his place to consider hers.

"My God," said Murray, walking to the window and looking out when he was alone, "we" (though really he meant "she" of course) "are pretty primitive!"

The day had advanced far enough beyond lunch-time for the factory girls to be now abroad in their Sunday attire. They were passing in the street below. But though Murray was not beyond twinkling at girls on jolly mornings, business-bound, he never twinkled from his window in the manner of some youths—having sufficient, shall we say, sense of shame?—or if not that, at any rate (which is a different matter) sufficient appreciation of the adage regarding the bird that fouls its own nest. Yet, as he stood there to-day, fresh from the disappointments of his engagement lunch, he found the delicate tip-tapping of their feet going past, and their conscious flaunt, and spread, and ruffle as of plumage, almost fascinating. He felt a rush of the devil-may-care, somewhat such as is felt by a boy at end of term when door-bells and knockers are well-nigh irresistible, or such as elates Jack ashore. To be alone in his room again (it is a sad fact to chronicle, but so it was) gave relief, relief so tremendous that it was but a step to abandonment.

When one of the passing girls, in that insouciant way they have, glanced up, saw him, met his eye, and hers stayed, he—though he did not smile—did not remove his gaze. Nor, thereat, did she, but tip-tapped on with new verve in glance and tread, head turning. She had an oval face, a fine if longish nose, a glint of, to him, pleasant vagabondage. Others had their alert heads turned toward him. The American comic-paper artist would have drawn them with shafts striking out of their eyes to indicate the jovial and “cheeky” performance to the young man at the window. They gave the miserable Murray a feeling of elation with their frail Sunday tread, infected him with a desire to throw the cap over the windmill. The tall serpentine girl paraded back again upon the opposite pavement, less casual in her leer. Murray stared stonily at her and smiled wanly—then considered: “How primitive we are!” And that “we” was for himself. Outside the window, in so far as the sex

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problem was concerned, were flounce and trip and turning head and sparkle. Inside——

"What's wrong with you, Murray," he thought, "is simply that you don't want to settle. You're one of those fellows that wish, as the moralists say, to evade the responsibilities of life." His gaze did not follow the tall serpentine one. He turned his back on the window. "No, I'll be damned if it's that," he said suddenly. "It is not because I don't want to settle—it's because I don't want to settle with her!"

"Are you ready?" came Ethel's voice as she entered to find him pacing to and fro, lost as in an evolving of the carpet's pattern. "Hubby!" she added quietly, as he gave back her smile.

## CHAPTER VI

THERE was something wrong with this walk, but in a new way. He felt weighted as he had not felt formerly. There was no interesting talk. He was entirely unaware that in the earlier chats by the way he had made conversation, and she had had the task merely of giving back to him, in other words, what he said. He would point out to her birds' nests, or a hiding field mouse, and tell her all he knew about birds and eggs, and the denizens of the hedgerows; but to-day she was the talker, that is when there was any talk, and her themes were adult.

She told him about Mrs. Kinghorne (whose hat Mrs. West wished Ethel could see), and about the Kinghorne girls, and how they "put on airs." He found himself noting her freshly. There was something odd in the way she drew erect, passing other pedestrians that they met; and it appeared to him (maybe not without foundation) that many looked curiously, going by, from her to him—

and back again, repeating the dual glance with puzzlement. He was aware to-day, as he had not been aware in previous rambles, how she took stock of the attire of any more expensively dressed folk who were afield, studying their costume as deliberately as if it were not on a living person but on a dummy in a shop window.

He was not the young man to thrash out the inwardness of it all, to consider whether she had always been thus—whether he had only now begun to see, had been infatuated before—whether the change was that, on former walks, he had set the talk and she had listened, whereas he was now the bored one. And though he did perceive this, and that, his trouble was now more of feeling than observation.

There was something inert and sodden in the atmosphere round him. An acceleration of the pace might have negatived the effect of that suggestion of etiolation on the spirits, with a hint of personal, vivifying movement, however sluggish this opaque afternoon might be that the sunshafts less cheered than showed up, far less illumined than exposed. Walls, hedges, and trees all seemed trying to look bright, instead of being brightened, so ineffectual were the sun-rays against what was like a general "spirit of not wanting" in the day.

Against that sense of the sodden (one had almost said sottish) George Murray wrestled, wearing himself out in the process. This was another point of dissimilarity between the present walk and prior ones. Those had surely been taken at a speed more akin to progress—or else he had been so glamoured as to be unaware of taking part in a walk that might more properly be called a delay! He had at any rate to tell himself to-day that he must adapt his pace to the capacity of this member of the gentler sex who had now slipped a hand between his side and his arm. He bent his elbow, as his duty in the rôle he had to play; it was now too late to shake off the finger-tips and say: "Come along. Let us have a

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walk!" She put her hand well round his arm, and leant upon him; so he found himself, on this suburban road, walking stiffly—like almost every other man similarly accompanied. He seemed to be two men to-day, one looking at the other; one thinking it was all right, in the course of life; the other slangily saying: "Now you've been and gone and done it"—trying, at least, to be chirpy about it. Every now and then went by them in twos and threes young men out for a walk, overtook them and passed swinging, paying no heed to them, going round them as if they were mere obstacles to be circumvented, with an arm flung behind back to prevent collision.

Slowly these two newly affianced crept on, Murray visualising the road ahead of them beyond the next turning, and the next, and still on; and the thought of crawling over these various laps of road at this funereal speed set a-going something like panic in his brain. After much chatter about hats and the conceit of certain girls of the church-circle, she had fallen silent. To try to rouse her he pointed out to her a stately birch-tree by the road, less because it really appealed to him that afternoon—it seemed, for some reason, to have lost the appeal it used to have, in walks this way (twice he had swung along this road with Constable)—than to awaken her from her hanging trance upon his arm.

"Oh, yes—how pretty!" she said, in the voice of a sleep-walker, and looked at a gnarled elm.

And immediately, dragging on his arm afresh, thus jogged to speech, she took up another tale—the tale of the Guthrie girls, which had doubtless been nebulous in her mind as she walked, and was now given voice to.

"Our maid's mother sometimes does charing for them, and she says that since the Guthries got on better Mrs. Guthrie is very highy-tighty."

He was still looking absently at the solitary birch showing the beginning of foliage, a faint drift of leaves, dainty as maidenhair fern.

"And lies in bed," she went on, "often till after breakfast."

He caught that.

"Splendid!" he said, turning to her. "It is good to be able to have a long lie in the morning sometimes. I often think it must be awful to get up at the sound of an alarm-clock every day, and go to work at the call of a siren. So metallic."

She glanced up at him, then studied him.

"You weren't listening!" she exclaimed. "You know I listen a lot to you—I think you should listen to me." Then, noting a certain grimness in his face, she rippled her laugh. "A penny for your thoughts, old man."

As on a former occasion, thus questioned, so now, his mind briefly turned over much before replying.

"I was just thinking," said he, "how broadening travel can be, and if we went to Calcutta—to that job I spoke of—"

She loosened her hold of his arm. "Do you think I need broadening?" she inquired, looking at him in a way that suggested, "Who do you think *you* are?"

He felt inclined to snap: "Don't look at me like that. People will think we're having a row!" for he was horribly self-conscious suddenly. Instead (having gone thus far he would go on easily—make the best of it) he tapped gently her relaxing hand. With a softening of her face she met his eyes, and—"We would be married if you got the situation? We would both go?" she said in a low voice, that low voice of hers that had rich notes in it.

That, in his mind, was not the point—obvious; so he merely nodded in response. "If one does not read," he went on, "travel can be almost as good as reading. You see, there are so many things to see, and seeing them opens one's mind." She appeared to be considering his every feature as he spoke. "I need not stop at Calcutta—it would only be a three years' contract. I believe that

there might be an opening in Rangoon later. I've always hoped to visit the East, too."

"Yes. You told me that once before when we were walking." She was diverted by a passing muff. Her head jerked abruptly, her eyes keenly pored upon it. "Of course these jobs are very remunerative in the East," she said, in a tone that might be statement, or might be query—impossible to tell.

He decided to pronounce the word correctly some other time. It is aggravating to be corrected for pronunciation. Doubtless he had his mis-pronunciations. Live and let live—and not be petty—and one could get along very well; he was a cranky beast. She would pick it up.

"Yes," he answered. "And after the contract had expired, if you did not like Calcutta, why—I need not stay. We could"—his dream evolved—"come home round the world, too, by China."

"I couldn't stand China!" she cried. "The women pinch their feet there, too, wear tiny little shoes. I was at a lecture once where the lecturer said they did it to please the men. He said that in all ages men had ground down women to please themselves."

He of course asked himself if this was what worried him, if he was wanting to grind down Ethel to please himself.

"Yes," he said, "I'm afraid men are rather selfish. But wouldn't you like it, Ethel? Wouldn't you like the voyage on the P. and O. boat?" Almost unconsciously he adopted the air of a nurse who tries to cajole a child to sup its porridge and milk by drawing attention to the pretty spoon.

"The P. and O. boats are very stylish, aren't they?" she asked with a momentary vision of seeing herself in one of those cabins that she recalled from shipping companies' posters.

They had come to a row of old houses set back from the road. Evidently it would be by no means correct to say that this theme of his engrossed her; it seemed to

have fallen into the category of tittle-tattle for the walk. She dragged, staring in at all the windows of these houses as they went along, and in the garden of the last one Murray saw a girl, head half turned, glancing at Ethel with an expression of annoyance. It was all there—"These Sunday strollers staring in at the windows!"

"My dear," he said, lowering his voice. "My dear," for she did not hear.

"What?"

"Do you know that you are staring in at all these windows?"

She pouted; she hung back; her face went heavy, but she did not release his arm. If the walk had been slow before it was slower now, painfully so, and he felt enraged. He wanted to say: "Come along! Come along!" but instead he, too, slowed down, and as he did so, without moving her head, she cast him a knowing sidelong glance and walked more slowly still. The flash of his rage declined to a smoulder. She dawdled. For him it was a case of poisoning now on one foot, then on the next. He felt more and more self-conscious. He imagined that everyone who passed perceived disruption. Would to God there were disruption. It was worse than that.

Two girls giggled, and he was glad. She would walk more quickly then, he thought. No, she only looked at their chiffon ruffs and their titters stopped like that! He, of course, did not understand. All he knew was that she did not accelerate her steps. He continued in his restraint, and in the painfully slow progress. At the next corner her advance was so slow that he stopped dead, and there going by was a familiar face and a dainty form. It was one of the early morning girls, she who favoured dark attire and flounces, for whom he acted as a kind of clock. Their eyes met—and hers had a long, serious gaze. Hardly knowing what he was doing he smiled pensively to her. Ethel looked at her, then at Murray.

"Which way?" said she, her face blank, biting the words.

"Oh, aren't we going straight on?" he asked coldly.

"I wasn't sure," she explained. "I stopped to see which way you were going to turn."

"Oh, that was it, was it?" said he, with a tone implying, "I am glad to have an explanation." She pouted and dragged again. There was now no one near. "Ethel," he said, "you really should not behave this way just because I reminded you not to stare in at those windows."

Her black brows arched, her eyes opened wide, and she raised her head slowly, but said nothing. She did, however, consent to move at a more reasonable rate, though it was in stony silence that they completed the remaining portion of the homeward circuit. No, not a word passed between them until their arrival at the house, and then, as she walked into his room with him—"And now I am going to make you very sorry for misjudging me," she said. "I did not walk slow because I had taken a pet. I walked slow because my hat was wobbly."

He looked at her, puzzled. "And you only found out then that your hat—oh!"

"What do you mean?"

He opened his mouth to try to speak again; he closed it; he tried a second time, but it was all too petty, too trivial to talk of. And a week later the wedding-day was fixed.

## CHAPTER VII

THE younger men in the office gave little novitiate perkings of their heads, one to another, over the developments of Murray—*Mr. Murray* to them—not only after, but in the days immediately preceding, his marriage. He had fallen into a way, said Rumour—more than Rumour, indeed, in a small place like Dundee—said

Witness, of what is known as "nipping." They thought it odd, these young men, that one on the brink of so romantic a matter as marriage should thus change.

The less juvenile noticed, also, but they more with a shrug than with elevated brow. Constable said nothing; Harvey's only comment was not upon the "nipping," but upon the prospective marriage. "Hullo, Murray," said he, when the news went round, "you've been and gone and done it too, I see." Taylor, happily engaged, was vexed for Murray's sake; happily engaged, he knew that a man does not take to "nipping" at this juncture in his life unless for some deep reason. He was worried for Murray's sake before the event—for the girl's after. One day, in Murray's absence, Peters drawled, "Doesn't it seem queer to you fellows the way Murray makes a bee-line for the pub. before he goes home?" Molison turned at his desk to inform them, four square, that he thought it was wrong to begin that business now.

"It is a great pity," murmured Taylor, and Constable glanced at him. Taylor was about the only one of the clerks who did not consistently exasperate Constable.

"Alcohol taken as a beverage," began Molison, "is very wrong, and what I say is——"

"Oh, you make me tired!" broke out Constable. "It is the only way to take it. Men that don't smoke are no use to anybody—that's flat! As for men who flee from liquor as if it was Potiphar's wife—pah! I'm not bigoted—I don't say I've no use for teetotalers, but this medicinal and beverage piffle about liquor makes me tired. It is too damned weak for anything. A man does not need to have D.T.'s just because he has a nip of whisky."

"It is very wrong—very wrong!" repeated Molison, wagging his head.

"So are most things in the nature of nepenthes," answered Constable. "Especially for sensitive men."

"Ah don't understand what ye mean by nepc 'h'," said Molison, "but what Ah say is——"

"It's something you'll never feel the lack of," said Constable.

Murray, returning, caught this, and it arrested him on entering. "What are you chaps talking about?" he asked.

"Booze," said Constable. "I am trying to explain to Mr. Band of Hope Molison that he's got the wrong end of the stick about booze. I know plenty of men, jolly fine fellows, who can take a stiff noggin. This blue-ribbon panic at the time of usquebaugh gives me a pain."

"Still, it is very dangerous," persisted Molison.

"Oh, dangerous!" cried Constable. "It's a 'cert' it's not dangerous for you! I have known men to whom it is dangerous—the kind of men who try to put a little wall of what the beadle called 'daft dizziness' between themselves and Sunday School superintendents like you. But it couldn't be dangerous to you. Why, man, what have you got to be robbed of by it? You've got all to gain. It might—I don't say it would—but it might vivify your mental parts now and then."

"Now he's getting it," laughingly commented Taylor.

"There he goes again—rude," murmured Molison to Peters.

"Not much of a gen'leman," replied the Aberdonian.

But Murray, by now sitting at his table, was thinking of another side of Constable's talk.

"It is certainly a great waste of money," remarked Peters.

Taylor, smiling faintly, glanced at Constable. That would catch him! It did! He raised his head and glared at Peters with devilish joy.

"Now we are getting near your intimate opinion," he said. "But it is no waste of money to you! Oh, not for you, my boy. Fifers and Aberdonians can always find somebody to stand them a drink," he whooped.

"Mr. Constable must always be what might be termed forcible," chirped Harvey.

Taylor chuckled quietly to himself over the fracas; Murray sat heavily apart. There was an air of expectancy for Constable to continue, as he generally did continue after such a remark; but he disappointed them on this occasion, marched smartly over to the wall and took down a file. Perhaps he would speak after he had found in that what he sought; but no—he hung the file up again, marched back to his desk, and completed the writing of a note. Harvey looked up under his sparse towey brows and smiled.

"Always forcible," he murmured again.

After tossing his letter into the post-basket, Constable went on with his work; he liked to disappoint them. Murray felt that Constable would understand it all if only he could express it, but he never would express it—he was not that kind of weak man. In the evening, as a matter of fact, he did say to his belligerent colleague, "Have a drink?"

Constable shot him a long, searching look.

"No," he replied; "thank you. Not with you in your present mood. Would feel guilty. And if you take my tip you'll chuck it until you settle whatever is on your mind—dry. Good night."

Clearly, it occurred to Murray, his disordered state was evident—at least to Constable. He wondered in what ways he showed it. Molison and Peters, however, who had followed them out of the office and overheard Murray's offer to Constable, were willing to have him stand treat to them, Molison explaining over his glass that he took it medicinally, while Peters expressed the view that a nip in the evening was a good thing. They irritated Murray, and he wished he had taken Constable's advice instead of extending the invitation to these men. He preferred Constable's attitude. To drink with Molison and Peters was to turn the spirit into ditch-water. There was something sanctimonious about them. What was happening to him? Walking with his affianced, talking to

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his affianced, he repeatedly wanted to leave her, to say, "Oh, shut up!" Now, even while lifting glass with the conventional "Here's luck!" he wanted to knock these fellows' heads together. A glass with Constable would have been different; but Constable, whose view was—or so he had heard him say once to these moralising youths—that there was "nothing wrong with a damn good booze occasionally," had most grimly refused to accompany him to-night. And here was he having a nip with two aliens! Funny world. As they set down their glasses, he said, "Oh, well, I must get off home."

"Care for another?" asked Molison, very tentatively.

"No—not for me," replied Murray.

"Sure?" said Peters, turning away from the bar.

"Sure," said Murray. They came out into the street, and, with a "Good-night, good-night," he hastened away—only, once round the corner, to drop into another poison, nepenthe (or whatever it might be for him) emporium and "have one" by himself, a thing he would never have dreamt of doing had Constable been with him at the other place. That solitary dram recalled to his mind, with a sudden vividness, the sips he had stolen from his mother's secret store. It was, apart from these, his first solitary tipple, and he imagined that the barmaid served it in a way that convivial nips are not served.

This was before the marriage. After the marriage he often "had one" by himself, without any heed of what barmaid, or other occupant of bar-room, might think. There was no doubt about it, that Murray, as the juniors noticed, was changed by marriage, even as by the expectation of it, and the truth is that the morning crankiness he sometimes knew, already referred to, seemed to be growing up. It now outlasted breakfast. It was like a funny little crabbed man, sitting in some niche of his brain and poking out a head often to say things that might sound cynical, and yet, by Jove, you knew they were true too, thought Murray.

His mother had not been pleasant at all about the marriage, though he had not expected her to be. She wrote to him that she was astonished that he had not his head screwed on better than to allow of his marrying his landlady's daughter, that she supposed the first schemer to whom he had told what his income was had roped him in. That on the one hand. On the other was recollection of how Ethel's mother had read him a little homily, hinted to him that she thought he too often looked as if he had been nipping, diffidently told him that she had spoken to Ethel seriously about it, and that "Ethel, the dear girl, says that she believes you won't be foolish after marriage. She is much devoted to you, you know. I should be awfully sorry if you didn't make Ethel happy—for we are a very united family," all this in her buxom, big way, without any snarling, wholly kindly.

He was utterly appreciative of the worldly wisdom of the old lady while she spoke to him, but, a-shaving in the morning, he must needs be inclined to sneer at the memory of the advice. "United family!" he muttered. "People do talk rubbish—and if one sees it is rubbish, then, as Constable says, one is called a cynic!"

One morning, a few months after they were married, Ethel exasperated him by picking up a magazine (her home weekly that gave advice on crochet, antimacassars, face-massage), attracted by a picture of Somebody's Food Baby on its cover.

"Oh, the little dear," she said, kissing it.

"Silly girl," he commented, not at all heatedly, but in a tone as of one speaking to a child—each, it would appear, being a child to the other; though her wisdom, in the fields where she was wise, was doubtless infinitely greater than his, in the regions where he fumbled.

"I would love to have a baby all my own," she pouted.

"All your own?" he asked.

"Yes—all my own," she repeated, in a tone merely as if he had not heard and had asked for repetition.

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"Well, there is plenty of time," he pointed out; each new disclosure of his wife seemed to puzzle him as though, indeed, he was an uninstructed child. "And I know some very happily married people who have no children."

She opened wide those great eyes of hers and stared at him. "I can't understand what people get married for unless to have children," she said. "I would dress my baby in such pretty clothes. My sister thinks her little girl is the prettiest child in Dundee."

He pondered this stolidly all day long; and at night he mounted to a secluded bar-parlour that he knew of.

It appeared that he always found something to brood over now—and magnify. There was always a reason to give himself for not going directly home when the office closed, but for visiting bodega or bar. He had brooded himself, to-day, into annoyance at a prospective litter of kids, all further ordaining that he stay where he was for life—settled, tied to carpets and bedsteads, to sideboards and rocking-cradles and cribs. The house that he had rented was on the hill, "For I must be near to Mummie," Ethel had said, and the situation in Calcutta was not applied for. "Oh, not at once, dear; perhaps later, some other chance will come. I must think of Mummie. It would cut her up so much to lose me altogether. I'm the last one, you know. We won't be selfish. We'll stay near her to begin with." All such speeches and decisions he raked up, to add to the mountain he had made of her morning's gush over the Food Baby.

As he advanced into the bar-room, a step behind made him turn his head, and he saw two girls gliding past into one of the farther sitting-rooms. They smiled invitingly as he glanced round.

"Now then, eyes front!" said the barmaid. He looked at her, smiling. She shook a finger at him. "Remember Lot's wife!" she added.

An unusual lady! He bowed pleasantly, asked for his nip, and then sat down, at the far end of the counter,

upon the last of the row of tall stools. He thought he was the only occupant of the place, but he was hardly comfortably settled, when there came a little laughing chuckle from the rear of the bar-parlour that he had thought was vacant.

His gaze inquiringly traversed it. Nobody! Then the barmaid said, "What are you laughing at over there in the corner, Mr. Ambrose?" and Murray, by puckering his eyes at a shadow by the farther wall, discovered that the irregular outline of the shadow on the floor showed two small promontories—the projecting feet of a man sitting there. One of the promontories withdrew with a slight shuffle, and as one foot of the unseen went back his head came forth into light.

"No," he said, "I was not belatedly laughing at your little comment to the new arrival, Miss Sturrock—I was merely laughing over a private thought."

"Can we share the joke?" she asked.

Murray blinked, and awaited Mr. Ambrose's answer. He scented promise of a pleasant interlude before dutifully going home. But Ambrose delayed. Murray looked at the barmaid—new to him. He had not been here for some time—not, he considered, since that day when he bought Ethel's engagement ring. She was much more interesting facially than the soprano and contralto who were here then. He surveyed her while she stood there in expectation of Ambrose's answer. She was slightly withered-looking, her age a puzzle; had something about her suggestive of what is called culture.

"Well," came Ambrose's voice at last, "I don't know that it is entirely innocuous."

"Oh, you can speak before me," declared the new barmaid.

(One could not "speak" before Ethel—not at all. Paralysing though it may seem to the enlightened, she had, the other evening, given evidence of how careful one had to be, and of how, with marriage, her respect-

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ability was increased. Murray, instead of going for a homeward nip, had bought a book to while away the evening—"The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Tales." He left it on the sitting-room table, and later, after a call by some of Ethel's friends, sought it in vain. "Where is that book I brought home?" he asked. "Oh, I put it away in case the visitors should see it."—"Nothing wrong with it, is there?"—"Oh, perhaps not, George—but—well—well—the author's name seems so—well—rude." Murray had no sense of humour large enough to balance his tongue-tied horror. Yes, in those early days it had been no love-story—it had been a story hardly of infatuation. It had been simply a streaky story.)

"You see," said Ambrose, "the world is such a funny place that, although it can smile over what is called an indelicate story, although"—he seemed to be seeking for expression—"although it can be flippant about certain matters—oh, dear, oh, dear, it does hold up shocked hands if anyone is serious about them."

Murray, still looking at the barmaid, Ambrose being invisible again, save for his feet out-thrust from the niche, saw her smile faintly. She gave the impression of appreciating the elderly man in the corner.

"You're quite right," she said. And then—"Well, Mr. Ambrose, I have never yet heard you say anything that a woman of the world could suffer from."

Ambrose made himself evident, bending forward farther out of his niche, and raising his hat; Murray saw his reflection in the mirror behind the strange woman of ivory and wrinkles.

"That is the beauty of travel," said Ambrose, his bow accomplished. "One who has travelled laughs instead of smirking."

"Or else is sad," put in the barmaid, a reply which hardly entered Murray's consciousness. He had, after Ambrose really got into his speech, fallen into the manner and attitude of a courteous third, head slightly bent, as

one hearing, but not in, the talk. That last remark, the barmaid's, did not enter deeply because the earlier one, Ambrose's, had entered, with a personal thrust and stab.

"Yes," went on Ambrose, "travel is good. I have never regretted my hare-brained, youthful running away to sea on the whalers. Never told you about that. Oh, it's an old story. It is another world before you clear the bar, and as for Herschel Island——" he paused.

"It seems like a little island away off in a cold hell, I suppose," suggested the barmaid seriously.

"You've got it, Miss Sturrock! But as for Chesterfield Inlet, I could write a nice little treatise on 'Civilisation Among the Esquimaux,' from what I recall of that."

"Pretty tough?" asked the woman.

"You got that word in America," snapped Ambrose, going off at a tangent.

"Yes," she said, in a tone that would forbid question regarding her travels to all save the blatant. Her life was not for discussion.

"I know the East better," continued Ambrose. "Calcutta—Bombay——"

Murray filled the pause. "I would like to visit the East," said he. "I had the chance of a post recently in Calcutta. Can't tell you how I should like to visit the East."

"Simla, too," added Ambrose. "Do you know India, Miss Sturrock?"

"Yes—I have been to Simla," she answered, casually.

Ambrose, leaning forward in his niche, elbow on table, so that his face came within the sphere of the lights above the bar, looked at her, and there was a hint of curiosity in his eyes.

"But what were you laughing at?" she said, and brought him back.

"I? Oh," he sipped his glass. "I was just laughing at people—people up in my little village. And I think," in that odd manner of his he bowed to Murray, "and I

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think the gentleman recently arrived, sitting upon his stool—Mr. Stylites, I shall call him—I think I can speak before him, too, for I think he is”—there was just a perceptible pause—“still a gentleman.”

Murray turned his head stiffly and peered at this man in the niche. There had come, on this occasion, as on the last, a moment when Ambrose in his corner seemed uncanny. His accent was suave. Murray could not be sure that the slight pause was not accidental; but whether or not—why the “still”? Then Ambrose went on, and Murray let these issues go in hearkening to the rest:

“I was just laughing, sitting here, thinking over the villagers—thinking over the disparity between what they think and what they say. Indeed, I might well laugh over the disparity between what they mean and what they say,” he brought out parenthetically. “I have a set of rooms in a hotel there,” he explained, throwing it off like side-issue, “and my landlord and his wife, if you talk about children, point to their kids and say: ‘Oh, you would never think it, but that boy—that boy has cost us eighty pounds in doctors’ bills.’ That’s the way they look at life—though what I was really laughing at wasn’t that. That’s preamble! I’ve got on to it that they absolutely hate to see a couple married for long without children, peer at them going past and comment: ‘How long have they been married now? It isn’t right. What did they get married for?’ One might get puzzled, looking on, between the phrases ‘little blessings’ and ‘encumbrances.’ I used to be puzzled,” and he gave his silly “He-he!” and added, in that naïve manner into which he fell at times: “I was just laughing because yesterday my landlady—I must tell you there is a woman she absolutely hates—well, yesterday that woman passed down the street.” Ambrose craned forward, and bowing to Murray said: “And Mr. Stylites being a gentleman, and you, Miss Sturrock, a woman of the world—a traveller, different from your predecessors at the altar of

Bacchus there, who would have giggled at me—I may say that this woman was incontestably what the Scriptures call with child. What I was laughing at just now was the unholy glee on my landlady's face when she spotted that fact. It was as if she had said: 'Ah-ha! Now you are landed for the doctors' bills like the rest of us.' It wasn't disinterested pleasure at all; it wasn't pleasure of any kind. It was downright malice."

The barmaid nodded. "I know what you mean, Mr. Ambrose. There's a lot of that. But do you know what the average people would call you, Mr. Ambrose?"

"Well—I don't know. I have been called many things in my time. What would you suggest?"

"They would call you a cynic."

"Cynic! Cynic? Now why, Miss Sturrock, should they call me a cynic?"

"Oh, I only mean," answered Miss Sturrock, "that that type of person, when you see through them, call you cynic!"

"That's very good—very true," replied Ambrose, and sagged back in his niche. And Murray thought to himself: "Constable isn't alone in the world, with his views. Other people see through things too. I wish I had known Constable sooner—or that he wasn't so abrupt always. And this queer person!"

Sitting there on the high stool, he felt that it was all unreal. Who was the man in the niche? On this visit, as on the last, his speeches got him on the raw. He slid from the stool, and raising his hat to the strange barmaid, who nodded to him, he looked at the dim figure in the corner and said: "Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said Ambrose.

But, outside, Murray could not go home; indeed he had not made that summary exit with any intention of going home; he wanted to think. It was a moonless night, with a mere spattering of stars. The pavements were sticky, black—and reflected, at regular intervals, the

street lamps, and here and there the few remaining shop lights in watery gold, like gold on gun-metal.

It was one of the promenading evenings, when the crowds seethed in Nethergate and High Street. He felt as though prisoned, unwilling party to a scheme of things that just were, without sense or reason. From the hum of talk, and peals of cackling mirth, he turned down river in the direction of the docks, wandered along the dock fronts, heard Tay suck and gurgle as on a former evening when he was as a truant evading the rigours decreed. That man Ambrose had certainly got him on the raw! He was married and settled—and settled, by God! He had discarded Calcutta for his wife's sake—or for her mother's. It didn't matter much which. It was discarded.

He went over all this, leaning on a rail on the wharf-front. He considered how the married sister, Alice Burnett, had badgered Ethel about him; considered how, not so long since, Ethel had called her mother an "old silly," whom he was not to treat too seriously; he recalled certain former "huffiness" between mother and daughter—and yet he was still here in Dundee, because Ethel didn't want to leave Mummie. Yes, that was the way of it. Before marriage she might come the length of playing with the suggestion, talking it over—was once almost enthusiastic. But after marriage: "Oh, we can't go. You're doing very well here. Why are you so restless? I couldn't leave Mummie. You should really remember that she is all alone now, and I must think of her." He had tried to tell himself that it was sweet of Ethel to think so of her mother; but it was Murray all over that he should now hark back on the whole tangle, after hearing Ambrose talk in the bar-parlour, and it was Murray all over, too, that he could come to no end anywhere. He was like a squirrel on a wheel.

"Damn her mother!" he thought. He hadn't married Mrs. West! "Don't believe the old lady would mind!

Ethel doesn't want to go abroad, that's all. Quite satisfied here—house, furniture, maid." And this morning she had spoken of wanting a child. "I can't understand what people get married for unless to have children," she had said. He could see it all coming! The next stumbling-block to accepting a billet abroad would not be her mother, but a child.

"I'm fixed! I'm stuck!" he said, and was smitten suddenly—for climax to that consideration—with a longing for a society in the midst of which he would not feel himself ever, and always, balked. Constable was right in thinking him a man who should avoid alcohol.

He walked back to town again, evading the stretched hawsers of barques and brigantines that loomed up in the docks and raised a mesh of masts and yards and riggings against and above the black sky-line of the city front, along Dock Street, with its parallelograms, here and there, of lit windows. He wanted to hear that man, Ambrose—from whom he had fled—talk again. He must have spent some time upon the wharfs, or else he had gone thither at the hour when the evening crowds most profusely poured forth, for, on returning to the bar-parlour, he found it thronged. Another barmaid was now assisting the unusual one—this one a usual type, a little miss of the people, who, at home, would say, "Ah dinna ken," but across the bar said, "Aw! I dawn't know," what the ribald in Scotland call "hoor's English."

Ambrose had departed, but the laughter that arose in the bar-room seemed friendly, and a relief, whereas the laughter, but recently, on the streets, had worried him. Chink of glass, popping of corks sounded. Two young men he knew (one in an insurance office, another employed in a rival shipper's) hailed him to their table with alcoholic conviviality. "Come on, Murray! What's your tippie?" And, joining them with alacrity, it was with a shock that he heard, anon, a voice droning, "One o'clock, gentlemen. One o'clock."

He started. He came out of what he was sure—though he could not remember what it had been about—had been a long and most brilliant talk; then perceived that this announcement of one o'clock came from the potman, was his method of making the toppers pay attention to his summons for their departure. It was, of course, actually two minutes to eleven. He roared with laughter, realising the joke. Hilariously he shook the hands held out to him of invisible, or at least filmy, well-wishers. He felt tremendously happy. He had got away from his burden in some mysterious way. Faces smiled round him and dissolved. The face of Miss Sturrock swam up, looking at him oddly, and he doffed to her.

Then he saw a man in an apron holding a door open for him, and he went out of the door, entirely willing to please, brought to a consciousness, because of the waiter's jocular grin, that he had, in excessive urbanity, raised his hat to the waiter. He dimly knew he had been worrying, found himself in the fresh night air, veered along pavements familiar, yet oddly changed—amusingly changed, indeed. He laughed at them, laughed at the cracked "la-la-ing" of the old town clock, waved his furled umbrella in the air so that a member of the doss-house order, in a doorway, hailed him with, "Going fishing, sir?"

He saw the joke; he thought the loafer was clever—very clever, possessed of imagination—for it had been raining, there was water in the gutters, and he was flourishing his umbrella as he wavered along the pavement's edge. Stopping, he tendered the loafer a cigar, told him twice that everything was all right, twice because he had added, after the first time, that it had been damned bad, couldn't explain how bad, and he did not want to leave the ragged person with a sad thought.

"I wish I could afford some of your cure," said the down-at-heel one.

Murray felt in his pockets and gave him his last sixpence, then went on, laughing joyously over the fishing

simile. A woman came out of a dark entry on the other side of the way, and made for him straight as a die, and toothlessly gibbered; "Hullo, my darling."

"Very sorry," said Murray. "Very sorry. I am on the homeward way." He moved on. "On the homeward way—fishing," and he hastened his steps.

"Oh, you — — —!" she cried, pouring out a string of abuse after him.

The incident half-sobered him. He ceased fishing. By an effort of will he levelled the pavement, which had been so whimsically erratic. He arrived at his home, and entered the sitting-room, where a light was still burning. Ethel was not there. He sat down on the table, his hat on the back of his head, and, gazing at the remains of the fire, a falling grey ash, he repeated to himself, "Hullo, my darling! You — — —!" pondered it, repeated again, "Hullo, my darling! You — — —!"

The door opened, and entered his wife in a dressing-gown. "Hullo," she said.

He turned round. He looked at her. He took off his hat and bowed deeply, still sitting on the table.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"A very wise remark," said he. "A very wise remark. As you say—oh! I've heard such a funny thing, Ethel—such a funny thing."

"Don't speak to me!" she blazed. "You'll be sorry for this."

"I am sorry," he said. "Intensely sorry. But I heard such a funny thing. It is all there—absolutely all there, as they say. When I was coming home a woman crossed the street and said to me, 'Hullo, my darling! You — — —!' It's all there, Ethel."

Ethel, looking on his face, was afraid.

## CHAPTER VIII

BUT her fear decreased presently when, from her bedroom, in which she walked softly to and fro, perturbed, horror-stricken, she heard a movement in the sitting-room, and then all cessation of sound. Tip-toeing across the hall, the door being slightly open, she peeped in at the hinge side and saw that George had lain down on the couch. So she returned to her bedroom, and sat there with arms folded round her dressing-gown, distressed for herself. What a thing! He might do her an injury, for he looked more mad than tipsy. She would let him sleep now, and be thankful he had fallen asleep. What a thing for anyone to see so soon after their marriage! He could have no respect for her to come home like this!

Bitterly, and with a wry expression, she whispered, "*His* family! He might be going home to a back street of Hawkhill, a court at a close-end off the Scouringburn. I expect he staggered too—though I don't know. He shows it in his eyes very readily, I noticed that last time we had supper with Alice and Jack," and she frowned over the memory of that evening at her sister's, and the excitable, the too eagerly joyous manner of George there, when his eyes had shown a dancing hilarity.

About an hour later, feeling cold in her vigil, she rose from her seat upon the bed and tip-toed back again to look at him, glancing first round the door, then entering stealthily. There was nothing ferocious in his aspect now, but the veins of his forehead were distended. She was both infuriated and chagrined. Also, she felt herself as a martyr. It was with something of the "heaping coals of fire on his head" emotion that she drifted away, her lips set close, to find a rug, which she cast over him lightly, so as not to disturb the alcoholic sleeper. She then left him, and wrote a note to her mother, which

the maid would take round the first thing in the morning, and, having done this, returned to the bedroom and locked her door before retiring, shivering, to bed. The morning would bring its own counsel.

As for the sleeper—the chirping of the city sparrows woke him with the first wan light of day. For a moment he wondered where he was, then remembered, rolling over and peering at the walls, and at the window set in an unwonted place for his opening eyes. For he had lain down there with perfect knowledge of what he was doing. "The thing may be all a tangle," he had said to himself with a lisping utterance, "but I can't go to the bedroom like this. It's not the thing!" He now rose and drew the blinds on the new day, and all the city seemed as dead as Pompeii, a confusion, a labyrinth of cañons and gulches bisecting each other, mile after mile of cliffs with dead windows in them, like a weird freak of Nature—a quaintly castellated desert, a Bad Lands, inhabited only by tribes of dusky sparrows. Their sharp chirpings smote on the grey cliffs of houses and ricocheted like little stony tappings.

As he looked out on the lower roofs of that town, and the banks of mist swathing the Fife coast and shrouding the river, under a sky all grey save in the east, where the most ethereal streaks of primrose crept and ran smouldering through the grey, he felt an infinite depression. His thoughts were not clear; indeed, emotion, not thought, was dominant. He could see some factory chimney stacks beginning to volley fresh coils of smoke, thicker coils of smoke, and the smoke did not rise well; it delayed above the chimneys and subsided down to keep the roofs dark in tone, and to make the sparrows drab. Then suddenly here, there, yonder broke out the sirens and steam whistles, one leading, another on the instant joining—and there was an immediate following of impossible to say how many, wailing of morning.

As they ceased he seemed to hear a murmur below.

Ethel always kept the windows shut so that the curtains might not be soiled, but he wanted to breathe as well as to hear, and so threw the window open. He could close it before she rose; he would have to be more than usually careful about little things of this kind, her whims, with this big matter to express remorse for. Yes, there was a faint whirring sound below him, and he could hear feet pattering and running throughout the city. Even under this window footsteps passed. He heard a girl's voice say, "Hullo, Teeny, you're late!" and another voice responded, "Aye. Ah slep' in this mornin'. We mon run," and the sound of a second pair of feet came up. The first girl's voice reached him, with laughter in it, "The looms will be running loose," and down the street, running and shrilly laughing, they departed.

"The looms will be running loose," said Murray. "Yes, they can't leave the looms."

His dead father might have made an essay out of that, to read to one of the literary societies of which he was a member. Murray seemed to feel things, but to lack expression. He walked up and down the floor now, murmuring to himself, "The looms will be running loose." It was very cold. Shreds of the dark morning mist fluttered in the draught at the window, the little pin-points of moisture visible—almost like steam. The maid would not be up for another hour, so he passed into the kitchen and, finding firewood, laid and lit the fire there, also in the dining-room, doing all this very quietly, his mind much employed the while in an attempt to re-construct exactly the scene of last night after his return.

Ambrose might speak to the travelled barmaid without any deference to that spirit which demands a "d—d" instead of a "damned"; Ambrose, he thought, might even tell that barmaid, sitting there discussing, in his queer, withered, philosophical voice, of the incident of "Hullo, my darling! You — — —!" But George would have to apologise to Ethel, not only for his

condition, but for recounting that story, not because she would see in it the significance that he (deranged) saw, but because it was rude to repeat such a thing to a lady, showed lack of respect for a wife. Oh, yes—and it did show that, but not in the sense she would mean.

The following out of these threads of dubious argument as he pattered over the fires gave an aspect of something like cunning to Murray's face. He paused, watching the dining-room fire flicker up. Would he have told her of the episode, he asked himself, had he been sober? No! There was no getting away from that. Poor Ethel! My God, what a mistake! He should have bolted, as that chap bolted last spring, the chap who left the string of carriages from the house of the girl's father to The Pillars all for nothing; far better to have bolted than let this come. But he hadn't bolted—and here he was, and it had come to this grey morning. He recalled the little homely Mrs. West had delivered on the smoking concert habit, as she called it, just before the marriage. She had told him, "I think Ethel knows all about it, but she is very fond of you, and believes in you so much that she expects you will do no more of that when you are her husband." What a hideous disappointment for Ethel!

He would make some tea and take a cup into her. That little maid was always late. He would tell Ethel how sorry he was. No, he would make no excuses—this because it flashed upon him to tell her that he thought he was far too sensitive, imaginative perhaps, brooded too much. The cat, that had been watching him from a chair, now humped, stretched, jumped down and rubbed against his legs—or the kitten rather, a little roly-poly of a thing—and he suddenly had to restrain himself. Away went his self-condemnation. He had an impulse to raise his foot and kick the cat to the other end of the room.

"George, my boy, you're half-crazy!" he said.

The inane why and wherefore of the impulse was this:

he had been recently trying to add Spanish to his list of languages, because in a shipping office the more languages one has the farther one can progress. It was by aid of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* that he had been furthering his knowledge of that tongue; and now and then, enjoying that classic, he had translated parts to Ethel of an evening. If, perhaps, she had seen the book as no more than a collection of more or less funny stories, deeper significances evading her, she had at least heard of Sancho Panza. And here comes in the kitten—for when that tubby beast was given to Ethel by a friend the question was what to call it. "I think we will call it Sancho," George had said, stroking its little, black nose while she held it in her arms. "Why would you call it Sancho?" she had asked. "Because it said 'Sank Ooo' with a little mew when I gave it the milk?" And he had looked at her with astonishment as he answered, with just a touch of dryness, capacity for which was in his nature: "Sancho, my dear, is a character—a character in a book. The full name is Sancho Panza."—"Oh, well, I didn't know," she had said.

And that was why Sancho Panza, the kitten, came within an ace of being kicked the length of the kitchen this morning, even in the act of rubbing against Murray's legs, wholly friendly—the while he was occupied upon a consideration of how ill he had served his wife.

But Ethel now, awaking early, gently unlocked her door and came forth in her dressing-gown to see that Murray was roused before the maid should enter the sitting room. Seeing the vacant couch she wondered for a moment if he had gone out, then heard the maid stir in her room, and realised that the sounds issuing from the kitchen were made by her husband, not (as she had thought) by the girl. He had made ready the tea and prepared the tray when she appeared in the doorway and stood looking at him, chilly as the morning.

"I'm just bringing you some tea, Ethel," he said.

"Oh!" she replied haughtily; and, wheeling, she tripped away to rat-tat-tat on the maid's door, then entered their common bedroom, whither George followed. She looked at the tray in his hands, over her shoulder, as he came in at her heels, with something on the verge of a depreciating sneer, a blend of smile and sneer.

"I hope you noticed," she said, "that I put a rug over you. I don't want you to catch cold and be ill, I can continue to think of you, though you think so little of me."

"Yes, I noticed that. Thank you. Won't you—won't you——" he looked at the tray in his hands, looked at her, he standing there almost lumpish.

But she passed to the mirror and began upon the dressing of her hair, the wide sleeves of the dressing-gown and night-dress falling from her arms. He glanced at her back, then abruptly at the glass, his gaze drawn thither because of her keen scrutiny. She at once evaded her eyes from that meeting, so that he had only the merest fragment of a moment to perceive her deeply-considering expression, might even have been mistaken in his reading of it, so transient was it. As for her back—all that he had offered to him now was a stately disdain.

"It won't happen again, Ethel," he said. "I've had a long, long think this morning."

She made no reply.

"I seem to have been worrying terribly over things. Do you know, sometimes——" he put his hand to the top of his head—"sometimes I think I don't belong here at all. I don't understand. I'm not going to worry over things so much; I think I brood too much. I am just going to take things as they are."

He was looking at her for some kind of response, expecting her head to turn; then he looked again in the mirror for at least reflected response, but she did not meet his gaze there. She was not looking at him. She was simply smiling the faintest smile, a smile as cryptic to

him as to many has been that cryptic smile upon the death mask of the unknown girl found in the Seine.

"I don't understand things," he repeated. "I think I am—perhaps—imaginative, too sensitive."

"That," said she, "is no reason for your behaviour. I did think, when I married you, that this sort of thing would end instead of getting worse. Mother begged me to consider the step very seriously. She was worried; but I told her that I believed that for my sake it would not increase."

He stared at the carpet, unaware that her eyes were now upon him as she coiffed her hair.

"Do you know what is wrong with you?" she asked, still watching the down-gazing man in the glass. "It's conceit. You don't know how very near you came to having me chuck you altogether. You got it into your silly head once that I was running after you, and you can't deny it. But all men are conceited, and it was a case of give and take. I should think you *are* too imaginative!"

Thought after thought came into his mind as she spoke, but none found expression. Why he said what he did then say he hardly knew: "I would like to begin all over afresh, Ethel. I believe I could get an agency now in Bilbao, with the Spanish I have."

"Go abroad?" she said. "I nearly gave in to you about going to Calcutta, but I'm very glad now that I didn't. My married brother in Australia says that men who drink here are far worse abroad. I'll tell you what you *will* do if you go on like this; if you don't get discharged from the office altogether—you say they think a lot of you there—you'll not get the step up into Lyons' place when he goes abroad and have an increase in salary and a room of your own. Molison will get it instead—a man you think is a fool! They may keep you on, but they won't put you in a more responsible position. Instead of going on brooding away to yourself, and thinking you can teach

me—oh, I'm quite aware you try to teach me!—it would be better for you to stick to your last here, like a man."

Her coiffing over, she came to the table and lifted the teacup.

"You are quite right, Ethel," he said. "That is just what I've been thinking this morning."

"Very well," she replied, sipping the tea. "And I hope you realise that I've taken this better than many wives would. I haven't even asked you to apologise."

They were at slightly cross-purposes again. He thought he had been doing nothing but apologise; she was really asking an apology for something not so far mentioned, and was waiting now for him to say, "What for?" Of course he did not. He felt it was no moment for any argument. He had naught to do but apologise. Her worst acerbities, this morning, would be utterly natural. There was a long silence. Then she put down the cup.

"Are you not going to apologise," said she, "for that unrepeatable language you used to me last night, about what a woman said as you were coming home? Quite unrepeatable! I never, never thought when I married a man who considered himself a gentleman, and of good family," she interjected, "that he would repeat such language to me."

He stood transfixed, re-living the end of last night, seeing again the face that came up out of the darkness, hearing again that, "Hullo, my darling! You — — —!" It was no use. When he had tapped his head in that way while trying to explain to her, he was perhaps as near as he would ever come to announcing the root of his trouble, and what has been called his cranky morning mood clutched him again. Ethel seemed suddenly far off, although standing within a foot of him. Worlds were between. She saw in his eyes a light blaze up in a dull way, so that they looked somewhat as, last night, they had looked when she had a sudden fear of him.

"Well, you need not mope now," she said, and going

to the dressing-table she took up the note she had written to her mother. "Look at this. I wrote to Mummie last night, I was so worried about you; but it would only vex her. I am going to destroy it." She tore it into fragments. "It would only make her wish that she had had her way when she talked so seriously to me before we were married. I am going to manage it myself."

Murray thought he must, indeed, have something wrong in his head, for, after all his contrition, and expression of contrition, he felt an impulse to shout at her, or hiss at her: "Oh, yes, you can manage it all yourself!" With horror at himself, he restrained that impulse, and decided he was undoubtedly cranky somewhere inside his head. It would be advisable, he considered, for a man such as he to abstain from liquor. He seemed to hear once more, as though it were tremendously meaningful, "Hullo, my darling!" and then the "You — — —!" The same kink, or faculty, gave him again, over a constrained breakfast eaten in silence, recollection of, "The looms will be running loose."

"Well, I must go to business," he said, rising. "The looms must not run loose."

She frowned, puzzled. It had occurred to her that perhaps that deranged look in his eyes had been "put on"—in an attempt to make her timid. Was he really *distract*—to such an extent as this?

"The looms!" she exclaimed.

He turned, and their eyes met as she ejaculated the words so. But his eyes didn't look mad now. It was the extreme sanity of them, in conjunction with this remark about "looms," with which he, in a shipping office, had naught to do, that disturbed her. She stared at him, still sitting haughty, but thinking his brain must be affected. He wasn't, clearly, "putting it on." In the doorway, half shamefaced, half like one baffled, he gave a curt nod—then abruptly departed.

## CHAPTER IX

THERE came to Ethel, in the days following, a sense of power which she enjoyed, and of triumph, on beholding this man subdued before her, so careful, more than wontedly careful over even little things—that were the great things in her tiny mind. She made new laws—such as that he must not knock out his pipe in the hearth (“It is only more work for the maid”), or that he might (this was less a law than a suggestion, a hint of lack of thoughtfulness), when leaning back in the easy chair in the sitting-room, put a newspaper behind his head, to prevent the hair-oil from marking the tapestry. Or she would draw his attention to the fact that when filling his pipe he dropped some shreds of tobacco: “Tobacco is enough of an unnecessary and selfish expense without that!”

But though he accepted all this sort of thing easily, allowing her the little naggings because of his memory of the disgusting wrong he had done her on that night, the evening came when (in a mood of disappointment over something or other—the imp in the bottle could always provide a reason) he must once again seek the jollity of the bar too assiduously and once again come home with divagating steps, and once again express contrition in the morning. Not that history repeated itself in details. Her method of accepting that second apology was tantamount to spurning it. “Of course, I have heard all this before,” said she—at which he glanced at her redly, and made no efforts to eat the leek to an end, allowed that comment to terminate, instead of extend, his protestation of remorse.

To her mother, Ethel told now, upon the recurrence of tipsydom, of that first time, and told it in tones that made Mrs. West open her eyes wide and say nothing.

There seemed an implication of, "And you are to blame . . ." although to be sure Ethel did not say so. According to her lights Mrs. West had not been at all "out of the way" in the part she had played in marrying off her daughters, but she was more agitated than indignant at the implication, for on the one hand Ethel had come by a new forcefulness, and, on the other, her mother was too greatly vexed over the news to be in a mood of self-defence. She told herself (looking back on what she called "the courtship") that she had merely left them alone, no more than that; still, perhaps she was somewhat responsible. She clapped her daughter's shoulder, fussed over her, was genuinely upset, and Ethel had her first taste of the pleasure of being pitied. She accepted that—her mother's pity—instead of hurrying on to deepen her mother's sense of personal condemnation and regret. Then, suddenly, seeing she had won the pity, she veered again and said: "I should think you *are* sorry for me. You absolutely set your heart on me marrying him."

"Oh, come now, come now," said Mrs. West, who was very fond of telling everyone that they were a united family, who perhaps believed they were, or thought that the constant proclaiming that they were might make them so. She was now disturbed. A stubborn look came on her easy, rosy face, for she was hurt at this acerbity between them. She did not argue out reasons for her next remark; it came quite naturally—she was not of those who diagnose themselves, self-critical.

"If it happens again," she stated, "I shall write to his mother! She thought herself too good to come to the wedding; she can come to Dundee and talk to him. I should very much like to meet the lady and let her know—oh, very nicely—that the Wests are not accustomed to having their men come home drunk like navvies. I shall write to her on the next outbreak."

In the glance between mother and daughter that

followed, an onlooker might have considered that perhaps there was a certain element of truth in the united family phrase; there seemed at least a kind of bickering understanding between them.

But it appeared as if there was going to be no "next outbreak." Murray was mighty tame. Luck, too, was with him in a way that luck is not with the toper in the moral tale; for on the day following this second lapse from rectitude his employer called him into the private room—not, as at the moment he expected, gravely to tell him that he had heard of last night's escapade, but to offer him the place of Lyons (who was going to Calcutta) at an increase of two pounds per week.

This was news that delighted Ethel, though she felt that she must not appear to George as if it more than mollified her. Neither was utterly frank with the other, for Murray on his part told her the increase was but of a pound—this to save himself from her comments on the amount he spent of what she called his "pocket money." He had decided to desist from all "morning after," or we should say now "year after," reconstructions of preceding events, to desist from all broodings over his twisted path, to be less of a prober into what had led up to the present, to him, frequently rasping collaboration—if the word collaboration may be used. He had decided, in a word—from a different point of view of his resolves—to be more of a dual personage. Dangerous decision! Perhaps on some "morning after" of the future his determination not to hark back might fail and, harking back, he would realise how vain was this policy. For he had still (as he considered it) "crankiness" in his head, and though he was content, made himself content, to be on terms with his wife of, "No—not because it says 'Sank Ooo'; a character in a book," without adding, "A book I was reading to you yesterday," he knew that (however much he blamed himself for a shadowed home, and called himself a brute to his wife)

she was mighty little of a human being or human companion for him. Much was lost, and he could not stand the loss. She was of the same genus as Peters and Molison, it seemed. Even if Murray tried to make talk with her over office days, and discussions there, before he had more than begun she cast her vote for Molison. She had never seen him—maybe had him pointed out to her, but certainly had never spoken to any of her husband's colleagues. Constable she apparently hated. He was conceited, she said, hearing these office stories; he was intolerant.

"My dear girl," said Murray to her once, his recapitulation of the chatter of the day at the office thus going a-glee, "it's Peters and Molison that are intolerant. Can't you understand?"

"Oh, well," she replied, "you haven't repeated the story properly, then. From what you tell me, I say that that Constable is conceited and rude. You don't want me just to agree with you, do you?"

"Bless you, no."

"Very well, then. And my opinion is that Constable will come to no good eventually."

Murray "shut up," and felt a horror lest Constable might come to no good. How she would crow: "I told you so!" He had met plenty of men, jolly men, always able to laugh and say, "I wouldn't worry about that," who showed quite clearly on their jolly faces that they were not abstemious. When things worried them they said: "Come and have a touch"; and his pound a week, of which Ethel knew nothing, went in "touches," "spots," "nips."

Time passed; their first child, a girl, was born, and the new policy of duality still "worked." If he was late of coming home—well, that was explained as occasioned because of his increasing responsibilities; but he was now well known in more than one bar, or bar-parlour. He used to like to go up to the —, in the hope that Ambrose would be there in his niche, for Ambrose would

talk of things that he could think over when his wife was telling him of how she had "cut" Miss Kinghorne, now Mrs. Fairbairn; and he had the knack, while thinking his own thoughts, of firing off responses to such chatter that seemed sufficiently sympathetic—though he was as little interested in her gossip of Mrs. Fairbairn as she had been interested, in earlier days, in his admiration of a birch tree, or, in more recent days, in his readings of *Don Quixote*. But Ambrose could still stab him unconsciously, as of yore. The old man gave him, a fright one night, discoursing upon liquor, holding up a glass of a new brew or blend that the proprietor wished that connoisseur to sample, by saying:

"Funny the difference between the Scots and the English! Funny their attitude towards pubs. Take, now, what is called by ancient usage the gentler sex. If you see a woman going into a pub in London, it doesn't follow that she's—you know what I mean. I don't say in the neighbourhood of Park Lane that it's considered the thing, but generally speaking. Here"—he wagged his head—"if you see a lassie slipping into a public-house—well, there she is."

The rosy proprietor laughed. "Very good, very good—I must remember that. She's—you know what I mean—and there she is. Very good."

"No, no—I'm quite serious," declared Ambrose. "And in England they don't look upon liquor as a fearsome thing the way they do in Scotland. It's a beverage, instead of—" he remembered suddenly that he was speaking to a publican, in Scotland, and paused.

"A snare of the devil, a b—— pitfall," said the publican for him, chortling.

"Exactly! I suppose it is national difference. You'll see a Scotsman hanging on to a lamp-post assuring everyone that he's all right, and that he can, what he calls, 'take it or leave it.' But the Englishman—I speak of them in the bulk—he simply takes it and leaves it."

The proprietor laughed again, but Murray—though he smiled—was thoughtful.

"I think Scotsmen," continued Ambrose, "have got too much poetry in their natures—too sensitive or something, too much what's called Celtic, perhaps; live in a land of mists, and like to get a mist between them and the arid rocks. I came across a remark in a book the other day to the effect that a Scotsman without the consolation of religion would drop into the public-house."

"And a very good place to drop into," announced the proprietor, with a wave of his hand and a final half-chuckle departing to his duties.

But a lot of this talk stuck in Murray's mind, and not for the best, he being as he was; it endowed him with a kind of fear of his method of putting more than a mist between himself and the arid rocks of the world. On one, two, three—yes, four!—occasions now he had overdone the thing and gone beyond diaphanous vapour; and on the third time (it may be mentioned) he had not expressed regret until the evening of the day after, while on the fourth he had not expressed regret at all, not because he did not feel it, but because of disgust at himself that once again he was in a position where such expression seemed necessary.

One evening, when a new barmaid appeared, he said to Ambrose: "Do you remember, sir, a long time ago, there was a most unusual barmaid here?"

"Oh, yes. I remember her. Very interesting. Some mystery there. Most unusual. Could cotton to an idea. Reminds me of something I read once about a man who was introduced to a remarkable woman in Paris. He was a scientist, and she talked to him as if she knew all about his experiments and work generally." He gave his hand a little wave in the air, comprehensive. "After she had gone, this man asked someone who she was, and was told, 'She? She used to be So-and-so's mistress,' a famous dead scientist. Things are different,

of course, in France—parents making matches, not successful." He spoke in jerks now. "A man wants to talk to a woman sometimes—intelligent mistress better than unintelligent wife, eh? He, he!" and he laughed his stupid little giggle that was not in keeping with his remarks at all.

"My wife," said Murray, "my wife remarked to me the other day that she thought I ought to go to church now because we have a kiddie. I said to her, 'But we were no great churchgoers before!' And she said we had to do what was right by the children—whether there was anything in it or not. Now what is the sense in that? If we don't know it's good for them, how do we know it's not bad for them?"

Ambrose nodded. "Yes," he agreed, "the phrase 'it is usual' is one of the most irritating, and to do a thing because it is usual is to do a thing because one is a sheep—though it may be all right, mark you—may be all right."

"Exactly. But, besides, the parson of the church that we sometimes go to is called the drunkennest parson in Dundee."

"I know," nodded Ambrose, drawn for a moment out of a self-contained mood that had come upon him, "a nose like Falstaff—or was it Bardolph?—a mouth like a beer-stoup."

Murray was on the point of saying, "I couldn't put the case to her as I put it to you, but I said to her, 'Well, I heard the other day how many bottles of whisky he gets through.'" But he didn't. He merely sat staring, remembering how she had responded to that, "Oh, did you, indeed?" and had laughed a cutting little trill of laughter at him. Ambrose, however, objected to hearing about men's wives. He took out his watch, looked at it, and rose.

"I'm so very sorry," he said. "I have an appointment—I must run."

After he was gone the potman came to take away his

glass and administer to the little table the formal rub with a napkin.

"I saw you were chatting with that gentleman Mr. Ambrose. It's not everybody he'll chat with. There's some people come in here and sit down beside him and begin to talk, and it is always just the same. Doesn't matter if he's newly come in himself, or if he has been here an hour—he takes out his watch and says, 'Oh, dear me, I have an appointment, I must run. So sorry.' A very civil gentleman. Very clever, I think, too, though I can't understand a word he says. Got a screw loose, I think."

Murray looked at the potman coldly, from head to toe and back again, and froze him.

"There is no screw loose about him," he said slowly, valiant in defence of Ambrose, but cut to the quick at the thought that the old man had had to play the "very sorry, an appointment" trick with him—miserable, sunk in despondency.

The potman said, "Don't you think so? Well, of course, perhaps you know him better than me," and departed precipitate.

Behind the counter, seeing Murray now alone, the barmaid, polishing a glass, tilted her chin and made some weather comment. There was no one else in the parlour, so he walked over and sat on one of the high stools and had another glass, chattering rubbish to her like any young jackanapes. She smiled in his eyes. She held up her hands and examined them—knuckles, palms; she locked her fingers, and with elbows on counter stretched forth her clasped hands. And when Ambrose looked in again an hour later, Murray was humped, with red face, on the stool, patting the girl's hands, and she was saying, "Oh, fie! What would your old lady think?"

Murray had felt cut off, dismal, after Ambrose's departure, and in the slough of despond after the potman's account of Ambrose's way of retreating from

undesirables. Now, fuddled, yet not so very fuddled, he tried to get himself—seeing the old man again—into the condition known as “not giving a damn.” But it was no use. He slid abruptly from the stool, muttered, “Well, I must go!” raised his hat, and was gone.

He did not fish to-night on the homeward way. There were still too many people about, and besides, he had been practising the dual personality. It would take a load to make Murray fish now. The fresher air outside attempted, to be sure, to bowl him over, but he combated it, managed to walk with only the slightest divergence, and that just occasional, or perhaps it should be said perennial—for at every six paces, regular as clockwork, he veered, a queer thing for anyone walking behind him to remark. Six paces, and then a side-slip; six more, and another. They announced how long he could hold perfect control of his legs.

He thought he succeeded admirably, though he was aware of a sharp scrutiny now and then from passing people with a chapel look about them; and once a young woman, glancing at him, suddenly stepped away to the side. He had just put arm behind his back, so as not to bump her in passing, and her frightened swerve worried him. He raised his hat, executed a deep bow and, with a lisp, assured the bit of pavement over which she had sped: “Nothing to be afraid of—absolutely all right.” When he reached home, with the change again into heated atmosphere, he collapsed on the floor in the hall, heaved a sigh, tried once to rise, succumbed, fell asleep, and snored there like a pig.

Next day, when he returned home (for he had to go home, despite the scene, or rather lack of scene, of that “morning after”—Ethel had been merely sphinx) he found his mother there. At sight of her, terribly placid, with her piercing, metallic eyes, Murray was suddenly infuriated. He realised how much the old life with her had affected him. Her eyes smouldered without ceasing

to pierce as she noticed the flash of hate; there was an additional tightness about her chin.

Ethel was trying to retain her appearance as of a sphinx while yet asking for pity. She had not expected a mother such as this, and she was really a little afraid of those gimletty eyes that had made her quite unable to tell her story to Mrs. Murray senior as she had meant to tell it to her when sending the urgent telegraphic summons that morning, after George's departure. For she sent it herself, without asking further advice from her own mother. The eyes had pierced unflinching when she said, finishing the account of George's downfall: "And I thought it better—for his sake—to wire for you." They pierced unflinching when she added, feeling that Mrs. Murray, senior, was a woman of deep, private views, tremendously virile, uncannily deep: "My mother is terribly cut up about him. She was afraid of—of this. She didn't want me——" but the eyes riveted, and Ethel had to raise her head another inch or two to get out: "she tried to dissuade me from marrying him."

George's mother did not say, "It is a pity she did not succeed!" for she was non-committal. She merely let her gaze go at that from Ethel and, sighing, but grim, looked round the room. She did not ask to see her grandchild, merely sat there awaiting Murray's return. Ethel shed a tear or two, and Mrs. Murray, senior, looked upon them as tears of vexation. She was as hard as flint herself; tears were neither here nor there to her. Nobody could bamboozle Murray's mother.

With her son she was not frank. On his arrival (after her dry, "Well, George, here I am to see you at last," in response to that flash in his eyes of which she was highly conscious) she spoke some words that might lead him to believe that her visit upon this especial day was accidental.

"Ethel sent for you," he said, defiantly, in reply to her indefinite attempt to make it seem otherwise.

"Ethel has *told* me since I came," said she, and then,

her burning eyes never leaving his face, she poured forth a cold-voiced rating and condemnation of the grown man, her son—which began with texts of Scripture and ended with a dissertation on the monetary view, and upon the selfishness of spending money on liquor that could be better spent on wife and mother.

He was like a censured child, anon like a rebellious child. "It's in my blood!" he blurted out, defiant.

"What do you mean by that?" she answered with a tremendous burning placidity.

And he could not say, "Look in your own heart." Ethel remained in the room all the while, standing, looking on, with the air of a heart-broken schoolmistress hopeful that an erring pupil, being given reprimand by the head, is profiting.

"Your wife tells me that it is by no means the first time."

Because of the way his mother had, in course of her cold homily, kept on parenthetically commenting, "I can't understand a son of mine being so uncontrolled," that morning crankiness was restive in him. He was a-stir, a-seeth, deep within. He felt murderous toward her, enraged against Ethel, and horrified at thought of the child that would now be sleeping. A child, too! There was a child to the tangle.

"I don't know but what I would suggest that you get away from this town," his mother went on, "get away from your cronies. Get a situation abroad."

Ethel made a quick movement then, a turning of her head from Murray to his mother.

"It is not cronies!" he shouted. He saw the situation as utterly ignominious. Having thus shouted, with a nervous gesture he produced his pipe, put it in his mouth, and as the women looked at him, their eyes moving as though they were automata, it struck him that his pipe bore relation to a baby's sucking bottle.

"What is it then?" asked Mrs. Murray, senior.

He did not answer, and she turned and looked—merely looked—at her daughter-in-law. Ethel trembled, stared this way, that way, seeking for escape from something she could not name, then suddenly saw the sofa, rushed to it, and throwing herself thereon, burst into tears, burying her face from sight.

"My God!" muttered Murray, and bit upon his unlit pipe so that the mouthpiece cracked. He was within easy distance of tears himself, though maybe they were alcoholic tears, for that last bout had unstrung him. But his mother was still metallic.

"Quite so," said the terrible old lady. "Quite so. So far as I can see, you've both made your bed, and you can lie upon it. My train goes at 7.35. Perhaps your maid will get me a cab."

\* \* \* \* \*

There were other incidents like that, bickerings, not mendings. Another child was born four years later, a boy (conceived, perhaps, in one of the periods of interlude when both were inclined to make the best of things), and there was a long spell for Murray without outbreak. Then there was a scene between husband and wife over who knows what, ending with: "Oh, very well, I'm going out." And a response of: "I suppose you will. I do not think you ever loved me. I have my babies to love me now."

There were two warnings, or cautionings, from the chief at the office, for Murray—as the years passed—did not handle his dual life with entire success; and then there came a certain night, the night on which the promising young man was discharged by the chief who had once said to him, "You may go far." He was in liquor then, but he seemed to be in more than liquor by the time he reached home that night. Perhaps thus, at a loose end suddenly, he had attempted to do some kind of mental stock-taking, and had gone back over too many old ledgers—ledgers closed and unnecessary.

He came home and stood with his back to the fire, his eyes odd, the stupid brightness in them; and he fumbled ever and again in the right-hand pocket of his waistcoat. The girl of eleven sat quiet, giving him sidelong glances from her strangely precocious eyes. The mother looked at him, then looked away and wondered. He stared at those in the room, but seemed not to see them, seemed to peer through them. It was the little boy, of seven, who made his eyes come back again to something like normality.

The little chap stood by the window watching his father, wondering what was wrong with him, for Murray mumbled broken sentences that the children did not understand, while he fidgeted with thumb and finger in the pocket. Ethel paid no apparently keen attention as he spoke thus to himself, wore an expression like that of a nurse, just slightly tense, in the room of a patient who babbles in delirium.

"Daddie," said little seven-year-old, "why do you keep on feeling in your waistcoat pocket like that?"

The drunkard's eyes found a more rational focus. He removed the fumbling thumb and forefinger as one admonished, and taking stock of those in the room, he said: "Oh, yes, of course, of course—of course!" and he peered through the mist of drink at the little boy.

He was now a thing of terror one moment, and of puzzlement the next, to his children looking on and being shaped.

## BOOK II

### CHAPTER I

As the boy grew, there grew in him the little paladin feeling for his mother. He used to prattle of the days to be, when he should be a man. "And I will get a carriage and pair for you, Mummie," would be the grand climax of those infantile prattled pæans; for carriages and pairs, seen from the windows, or in walks abroad, always seemed to attract her; and the good people in her moral tales for youth, who began by loving and obeying their mummies, almost always drove out of the story behind spanking high-steppers. She performed her duty to the children, taught them the Lord's Prayer and the Decalogue, with special stress, for the little boy, upon the Commandment regarding swearing—a blemish of papa's; had there been one against the spilling of tobacco on the floor while pipe-filling he would have had to repeat it also, for, to the point of agony, she hoped Ted would be unlike his father.

Papa was a puzzling animal. Teddy saw him once, when coming smartly into a room, brought up abruptly by catching his pocket on the door handle; and papa raised his fist, as if to hit the door. Teddy crowed with delight, and papa, turning, twinkled on the boy, then bellowed with laughter too. But mummie said, "I always tell you, George, to put out the lapels of your pockets. You look so much smarter with them out, and you always have them sticking in." For a moment, Teddy remarked, papa again looked much as he had looked when the door-

handle brought him up, stopped laughing and glared at her so—then expelled a little gust through his nostrils in a way he had, though he did not raise his fist to mamma.

Once Teddy raised his fist to Mabel, the girl. She had found that she could torment him, derived much pleasure from so doing. It was not physical torment that the youngster objected to. When he was pretending to play the bagpipes, with a stick in his mouth and a pillow under his arm, and Mabel—saying, "Silly boy!"—smote with a forward thrust of her open hand at the end of the stick where it showed in the pillow-case, driving the other end into the back of his throat, not then (not on any such occasions) did he want to hit. It was when she kept chanting to him:

"Grey eyes—beauty,  
Do your mother's duty.  
Brown eyes—lie a-bed,  
Pick a pie, and tell a lie,"

over and over again, that he raised his little clenched fist. His mother, seeing the gesture, ran and caught his wrist. His father was in the dining room, reading *Gil Blas* in the Portuguese, and the constant reiteration of the rhyme, or adapted rhyme, had been worrying him. When he heard Ethel's voice in angry condemnation, he came into the room in that brusque way of his in time to catch the close of his wife's little lecture to the boy, she still holding his wrist.

"That's right, my boy," he said. "You must never hit a woman."

"She keeps on nagging me," answered little Teddy, chin on chest.

"There is no excuse," said the mother.

Murray glanced at her as though annoyed. Then he gave his short expelling gust of breath through the nostrils, and in a voice that made Teddy look up at him with wonder and interest (as he looked with wonder and interest at the ordinary manifestations of Nature—snowflakes

falling, rain drip-dropping and dimpling in its own pools) he said, "Doubtless, my boy, doubtless. But this is one of the things that a little man remembers—he must never hit a woman. You'll not forget that, Teddy?"

The small boy's brown eyes widened, and he nodded his head solemnly, two or three times. Daddie, looking down on him, was satisfied, and went back to the dining-room.

"Now," said mother, "what have you never to do?"

He did not say. He stared at her, and something in his left side expanded and contracted, expanded and contracted.

"Now, now! Tell mother what you have never to do."

He glanced at Mabel, then back at his mother, aware that both were waiting. An emotion in the nature of outraged modesty awoke in him. (Perhaps Teddy felt somewhat as did his father on that evening of arraignment when he stood baulked before Ethel and Mrs. Murray, senior.) He looked from mother to sister again, back to his mother, Mabel waiting, his mother waiting.

"Never—to hit—a woman," he repeated, and then burst into tears.

Ethel left him to his tears, thinking to herself that through them he would learn his lesson—as perhaps he would—and little Mabel remained passive, until they were alone, when she began, without audible speech, to move her lips at him. She went round him on tip-toe, little arms stiff at her sides, fingers extended, and took up a position in front of him, so that when he blinked up he could see that she was moving her lips.

"Don't know what I'm saying!" said she.

This was one of the games she had invented, one of those pleasant games of the Heads I win, Tails you lose, variety, in the invention of which she showed a clear gift. He had no desire to know what she was saying, and, seeing that he didn't want to know, she let the words come out, whispering, "Cry baby, cry—stick a finger in

your eye." He raised his fist a little way, but, instead of hitting, decided to stop his tears.

She was a strange child, that same Mabel. Ethel used to look at her occasionally, doubtful, with a kind of foretaste of fear; for the little girl's grey eyes were apt to change from limpid to metallic at the rush of a mood; and then they were coldly piercing in an unpleasant way, at once fevered and grim, reminiscent of the eyes of Murray's mother. This slightly uncanny child (trained to consider herself ruler over Ted, censor of his doings when they were out together) used, as the years followed, to astonish Ethel often. She would take up a phrase of her mother's and repeat it with fleering accents. "We are a wonderfully united family!" she would chant after squabbles with her brother.

Once she chanted the phrase, as she skipped with her skipping-rope in the square hall of the flat, soon after a minor scene between mother and father (over the spilling of tobacco while pipe-filling), and the mother in the sitting-room, listening, was seized with dread, realising the little lady's comprehension. The voice went on and on, and Ethel was on the point of going to tell her to desist when the chant suffered a variation, or addition:

"We are" (skip, skip) "a wonderfully" (skip, skip) "united fami-lee" (skip, skip) "except for" (skip, skip) "la-la-la!"

"Stop that noise, Mabel," the father's voice ordered.

An uncanny little beast!

"Except for—la-la-la—papa!" ever so gently she sang before obeying the order.

But to turn again to Ted. Once, during a long period when papa did not come home looking "queer" (a period when a dread of something unknown, incomprehensible, could reasonably dwindle for the boy—for there was no doubt that he was afflicted with a childish nervousness on seeing his father's eyes when in that condition), the

mother was singing to herself in the bedroom, dressing for the afternoon. Teddy was looking out of one of the front windows, watching a flight of pigeons flying in circles over the grey roofs and (when they veered in further circles clear out of his field of vision) simply staring, rapt, at the gusty smoke eddies. He was also listening to his mother's voice crooning, and, he hardly knew why, at the sound of her singing, he began to cry. Then, with the rustle of her dress, he was suddenly aware of her in the room behind him. George had been clear-eyed for many weeks now, in the mood for remembering her with unexpected presents; and she intended to suggest an outing for the family that day, hence her attire—for she was, of course, of that walk of life in which one dresses for the street, but, indoors, allows anything to do, unless visitors are expected.

"What are you crying for, Teddy?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Oh, that's a silly little boy!"

"I was thinking," he said, "of Mr. Brook." Mr. Brook was a tailor and cutter on weekdays, on Sundays a Sunday School superintendent.

"What about Mr. Brook?"

"He told us about people dying—and I was thinking that some day I wouldn't hear you sing."

Actually, one suspects, that was not exactly it; suspects that there was, perhaps, early intimation of evanescence come to the child, with the mother's singing.

Ethel's eyes were tenderly misted at that halting explanation. "You love Mummie as much as that?" she asked.

He nodded his head.

It being a period during which Ethel talked to her husband—things going wonderfully well—she told him, after lunch, when they were alone, of what the child had said. He listened with deep interest, shook his head

when she came to the end of the narrative; his face was shadowed.

"My God!" he said. "What a sensitive kid."

"George! I do wish that you wouldn't be blasphemous—eh—blasphemous like that!" she corrected him. "I have so often spoken about it."

"It's not blasphemy, my dear; it's not blasphemy," and he blew his little gusty breath.

"Well, I think it is," she replied, stiffly.

"Huh!" he said; "you can't understand anything."

There was a tautening movement of her mouth. The lips went close.

And there was no outing that afternoon. Mother sat and cried alone in the window-seat, and wouldn't tell Teddy why she wept, for all his tugging at her gown and at her hands held to her face; and Mabel in a corner turned her head and frowned with jealousy at his inquiries into the mother's humid state.

"Silly! It's dad, of course," she informed him.

Ted pouted at mention of his father, thought him a cruel man, and crept away to peep in at the dining-room where Murray sat reading, heels on table. Having made a face at his father's back, he crept back to his mother again. Daddie so seldom made mummie cry when he was clear-eyed, as to-day, that Teddy felt shaken regarding the pleasantness of even the clear-eyed version of his father.

Teddy usually liked his father very much when he was just a little bit odd—grave defect in the child—for when daddie was just a little bit queer or odd he was "jolly" as well as being "decent." He would poke his head round the corner of the door on arrival from business, and if Teddy was alone in the room would crow like a cock. Or he would come into the room, rosy, clapping his hands together, catch the legs of his trousers with thumb and forefinger of either hand, pulling them out baggily, and say: "Houp-la! Here we are again!" The first time

he acted so, and broke forth with that ejaculation and announcement of arrival, Teddy shrieked with delight, and then asked: "What did you do that for, dad?"

"Oh," said his father, "you must see the original!" and after supper, which he washed down with half a syphon of soda-water and two cups of coffee, he carried them all off to the circus, and on the way back caught mummie's elbow at the crossing of the streets, and said, "Look out, old girl!" Mummie's eyes were all meshed and netted then.

As a rule Teddy was afraid of him when he was really, and solely, queer—not just jollyish queer; but once even when he was really queer, red-eyed and red-faced, with one eyebrow going up and one coming down (ever so funny, although Ted dare not laugh), dad's arrival was as the arrival of a beneficent angel. It befel thus: Mabel (who was studious) sitting to one side of the table stewing, had told Ted (who was cutting figures out of an old magazine to stick upon blocks of wood) not to breathe so heavily. She then put elbows on table, propped book freshly before her, and thrust little fingers into her ears. Suddenly she took her hands from her head.

"And don't shake the table!" she snapped.

Ted gathered his magazine, figures, pair of scissors, and retired to the window recess, to make shift upon the little table that stood there. A coal-cart was coming up the street, and the coal-man—not calling "Coals!" but obeying the letter of the law and shouting, "Ho-ho! Ho-ho!"—saw the little boy at the window. He winked to him. Passing carters often winked, or waggled their whips at the kid, and Teddy nodded a response. But this coal-man seemed to be different from the others. Down he frogged off his cart, grabbed the one remaining sack near the bottom, and zig-zagged it to the cart's edge. Teddy was panic-stricken, all anxiety to catch the man's eye and launch him a definite negative shake of the head. When the coal-man gave him no further opportunity to

communicate, but turned about, his back to the sack, preparatory to shouldering it, Ted frantically tried to open the window. The coal-man elevated his arms, grasped the top of the sack, jerked it on to his back, and walked like a half-shut knife to the flat entry. Ted fled from the window.

"What are you doing?" Mabel rasped. "How can I learn my Latin? How can I pass my exams.?"

But the boy paid no heed, ran to his mother, encountered her crossing the hall, and stammered out to her that a coal-man was bringing coals, and that he had not signalled to him. She glanced down at the perturbed kid, suspicious.

"Then why is he bringing the coals, if you did not signal?" she asked.

"He winked to me," explained Teddy, "and I nodded."

"You said you didn't."

"I didn't nod for him to bring the coals. I nodded to his wink. I tried to shake my head, but——"

Heavy steps were upon the landing, and the maid, who, to evade unpleasantness, pursued a policy of taking no sides in this united family, greatly busied herself in the kitchen. There came the dull tap-tap of the coal-man's toe. It sounded a trifle fearsome to the child. The maid pretended not to hear, so Mrs. Murray opened.

"My little boy," she said, confronting the humped coal-man on the landing, "tells me that he did not signal to you."

"Oh, but he did!" answered the man.

"I don't want coals."

"Well, the boy signalled me."

"The boy says he did not," she said in her best stately manner.

"He was in the window," came Mabel's voice; and Teddy, looking round, found that his sister (with her instinct for monitress) had come from the sitting-room to give evidence.

The mother had a new hesitancy; but the coal-man now glanced down the flight of stairs, for someone was ascending. And he who thus arrived was Murray. He came up agile, and stood fast upon the landing; he met the coal-man's eye; he peered at the group within.

"He winked to me," said Teddy, "and I just nodded my head like that—but it was only because he winked."

"What's all this?" demanded Murray, drawing himself up.

"The boy signalled to me for the coals," answered the man.

Murray glared heavily into the hall of the flat. Mabel disappeared backwards into the sitting-room, half closing the door; and Ethel realised what her twelve-year-old daughter realised—that the period of the father's respectability had suffered intermission. He was red of eye.

"Did you signal for coals, Teddy?" and the stunned blear of the father's eyes slightly cleared as he looked down at his boy.

"No, daddie."

"Then get to hell with your bag!" said Murray.

"The boy signalled," retorted the coal-man gruffly.

"My boy says he did *not*," replied Murray quietly. He was only a little bit in the red-eyed condition.

"Well, his mother thinks he did," growled the coal-man.

"Do you, by any chance," remarked Murray, raising his head and looking at Ethel (past the uncertain coal-man) as one looks at a menial, "do you by any chance want coals—though Teddy did not signal for them?"

She hesitated. The maid, now in the background, answered: "No, sir."

"Thank you, Emma. Depart with your damned bag. I did not look at your cart when I was coming in, but I rather sushspect it is your last bag, and you are in a devil of a hurry to sell it and get home. I know the tricksh of you fellows."

The man gave a sidewise glance at Murray; there was a caught, a roguish smile of effrontery in his eyes.

"All right, sir," he said, and went off clamping downstairs with his unwanted sack. The maid discreetly withdrew, instead of coming to perform her office of holding open the door.

Ethel walked away haughtily, and over her shoulder she fired: "You think a lot of me to use language like that to a coal-man when I am present!"

Entering, Murray closed the front door with one hand, putting the other on his son's shoulder.

"We're sush a united family," he said thickly; "sush a united family, Teddy, my boy."

And Mabel, peeping out from the sitting-room, whither she had receded, was consumed with jealousy at sight of the caress.

## CHAPTER II

It continued to be a nerve-racking, upsetting household, from the trivial affairs to the large ones. Even in preparations for a children's party there could spring up little flickers of trouble that developed into sereing flame. There had been a lot—to cite that children's party instance—of fussing and arranging of Teddy's Eton collar for him, while Mabel stood by demurely, ready to go forth, requiring no sartorial surveillance.

"And what have you to say, Teddy, if you are asked to have another piece of cake?" his mother said, at last making him trig.

Murray, who was looking on at the preparations for departure, prompted, twinkling at his son: "Come away, Ted! Surely you know you are to say, 'I'll have four.'"

Solemn little Mabel was horrified; Teddy lost the

almost shame-faced aspect that the maternal dissatisfaction with his appearance had induced and the question (as from a humiliatory longer catchism) had completed. He crowed a chuckling little laugh.

"George!" Mrs. Murray broke out indignant. "What a thing to tell the child!"

"O Lord! No humour!" Murray used to mutter to himself at times. But there was something more than humour wanted.

The father had really made his flippant reply on Teddy's behalf, because he realised that the boy had known all such proprieties years ago, that the look on his face now was that of one suffering ignominy; and Murray had a natural inclination to offer salve (if only the salve of laughter) to anyone suffering ignominy.

Even a little matter such as this, then, was occasion for the assertion of what the lack-humour house of West esteemed its dignity; as Murray discovered when, after the youngsters had gone, he made some remark to his wife. There was no mistaking her erectness, her pause before replying and, when she did reply, the cold monotone of her brief answer.

"Oh, got 'em again!" he thought wearily. "Got 'em again over something or other."

When the children came home from the party they found their mother weeping "because your papa has gone out in a bad temper." And it was then that there rose very distinctly in the son's heart anger against his father.

"What is it?" said Teddy. "Why did he make you cry?"

"Oh, it's just father!" answered precocious Mabel, looking more elderly than ever to-night because she had been so stately at the party.

"You don't understand, my boy," sobbed his mother, "and I had so hoped that daddie would stay with me while you kiddies were at the party."

"Never you mind, mother. I'll soon be a man and

take care of you. I'll make my way in the world and take care of you," and the boy, now eleven, fondled her hand.

"You!" cried Mabel, and laughed. She, too, had a laugh. "You! You can't even take prizes at school!"

Teddy fell back dejected, and Mabel felt a sense of power; she could make her brother's face lighten and darken at will! But the mother dried her tears.

"Bless you, children," she said.

She had turned her handkerchief into a wet sop, crushing it in her hand, and Teddy began to weep softly—he hardly knew why. Turning, Mabel glanced at him, but, to his relief, she did not say, "Cry, baby, cry!" this time.

She was a quaint child, standing very erect in her high buttoned boots, her hair drawn back and tied with a wide satin bow. It was when she was about the age of thirteen that one day she suddenly gave the household pause. The mother was sewing in the sitting-room; Teddy, now nine years old, was playing at being a sailor, with imagination, and a walking-stick for ship's tiller, in a corner of the dining-room; and daddie was bang in the middle of the hearthrug in an easy chair toes against the mantelpiece—like the picture, Teddy thought, on the cover of a yellow-back novel he had seen on a bookstall. If he ever sat in a chair that had been left in front of the fire in that way, his mother always said, "Don't be selfish! You mustn't sit right in front of the fire, Ted."—"Daddie sits there."—"Yes, but that doesn't matter."

Murray, sitting there now, turned his head and gave ear. In the neighbouring room Ethel canted her head in much the same way, putting the sewing in her lap. Evidently Mabel had heard a knock, or a ring, that had not reached the others; for what caused all three to cock their heads, arrested, was much less the sound of a visitor than the accent of her voice, greeting that visitor. It seemed not her voice—most remarkably not her voice, but a newly-invented voice that spoke—

"How do you do? Yes, come in. Yes, thank you. Very well, except poor mother."

The visitor was apparently ushered into the sitting-room.

"Who's that?" said father to son.

"I think it is the minister."

"O-ho! Is it?" said Murray.

He was highly amused; and, to the delight of the boy, he fell straightway into a mimicry of the divine—or less a mimicry than a travesty, a grasping of the essential comic points. Mimicry is the lowest form of dramatic art, not at all beyond the attainment of chimpanzee and orang; and it has to be acknowledged that the periodic toper brought imagination to his task, sitting there with his feet now tucked under the chair, acting the divine for his own fun and his son's delectation. Mabel came in, in the midst of this, to announce, with pert air of rectitude toward her father, and glance of disapproval for Ted: "Mother sent me to tell you that Mr. Tannadice is here."

Murray smiled. "'As the auld cock craws the young cock learns'; he quoted the Scottish proverb. "What happened to your voice a little while ago?" he inquired, delaying her upright exit.

She thought, poor misguided child, that her father was vulgar to speak Scots, much as there are still utterly holy people, in that land in which Calvin once gloomed, who would condemn as indecent beyond excuse any lover of antiquity and literature who might quote one of the old, amazing bottle-songs of Scotland, such as the inimitable "Toddlin' hame."

"When?" she asked. "I don't understand, father!"

"That's all right, kiddie—that's all right. I'm only joking you. I'll come in presently."

She turned away again, her errand accomplished, her manner that with which she turned away, on breaking-up day, from the prize-giving table after her last prize had

been presented by Sir Somebody or Other; for one of the penalties you must expect, if you have a title, and do not ride to hounds, is to be commandeered to give away prizes. With a final travesty of the way that the Rev. Mr. Tannadice would probably rise and bow (rising and bowing so), then winking to his son, Murray followed Mabel; and when he opened the sitting-room door his smile suddenly broadened, because, behind him, burst the whole-hearted and joyous laughter of Teddy, filling the house.

"How do you do? That's my son. Something tickled him," he said, extending his hand. "How do you do, my dear sir?"

Now this was not his natural manner, though the Rev. Mr. Tannadice was not to know that; but Ethel knew, and was offended, and the precocious girl child, whose eyes held much of the fevered calm that shone in the eyes of Murray's mother, sitting bolt upright and proper, backed by the satin bow, raised her little head, and drooped superior eyelids at her father. Ethel swept from her chair and hastened away to summon the hilarious boy to make his bow, and he entered, subdued, behind her.

"Come along, Teddy, come along," said the father, twinkling in quite his wonted way, as the parson might think; Ethel, however, knew that inwardly he was convulsed with mocking merriment. "It is only dear Mr. Tannadice."

The spirit of fun had taken Murray to-day from the moment he heard little preciosity, in unctuous accents, commenting, "Except poor mother." And he did not see why he should not be play-acting too, as well as everybody else in the droll world. He was in that mood.

But Teddy could not carry it off. He, now presented, twiddled his fingers, looked at the floor. His father glanced at him, then gave little snorts through his nostrils. It vexed him to see his son in shy state. But there was deeper cause for behaving this way, deeper

than Murray admitted to himself; more than a spirit of fun actuated him. His own friends were always frozen with hauteur from the house, the few—that is—that he had made not in bar-rooms, and had, now and then, invited to supper, Taylor, Constable, and others met in business. They did not say (one never says), "I can't stand your wife, Murray!" She was on principle distant to them, because, for all she knew, they might be confederates in his dramming evenings. Taylor she just tolerated; Constable she hated at sight. He called but the once, and though he was the kind of young man who could smoke and rave till midnight with a friend, he left, pleasantly, an hour after supper. As the children grew up the visitors had been more and more drawn from that circle whose meeting-place was the varnished church, presided over by the Rev. Mr. Tannadice. To be sure, they were not addicted, these friends, to liquor; but, to be sure, none of them would have found any merit even in the talk of Ambrose; and none of them would have shuddered at, "Do you call him Sancho because he says *Sank ooo*?" They were all inclined to be censorious of glance and accent towards Murray—for his nose, the fact is, began to bewray him as a friend of publicans!

And so Murray used to have his little private merriment with them—as now. It was more his nature to be merry with them than haughty to them. But his wife did not like his attitude at all. She was indignant with him.

"Such an example to set the children," she said, after the parson's departure.

Her husband, still twinkling, answered, "Pooh! He didn't see. He's so humbugging himself—old Bardolph!"

"That's very stupid, I think," Ethel gave her opinion, drawing herself up, "inventing a silly name like that for him because you like to jest at him."

"I heard a great story about him the other day," he said, ignoring her comment. "He asked a deacon how

his wife was. 'Better, thank you,' said the deacon.—'Ah!' said old Tannadice, 'that is good. Of course, she must still be careful, with a complaint such as hers, in this weather.' But he must have been a bit off his guard, for he turned to another of the deacons and said, when the first one had gone, 'What is wrong with his wife? I really forget. Oh, yes, quite—that is it. Sympathy, you know, the main thing is sympathy! A few kind, solicitous words go a long way with the people.' How's that for a humbug?"

Ethel could not understand why he flied and chortled over the anecdote. "I don't see what's wrong," she replied, coldly. "I think it was very nice of him to ask after her even if he had forgotten what her malady was."

"Oh, God knows, perhaps you are right," said Murray. "Ho-high-ho!"

He wandered about the house, restless. He could not settle again to his interrupted volume—French or Spanish—looked out of the window, rattled keys and loose change in his pockets, glanced at the boy, irritably hopeful.

"Come for a walk, Ted?" he suggested.

Teddy nodded, his eyes big (it was as if he and his father had a private understanding—one big boy, one little boy, both going out for some fun), and dashed off to get his boots on.

"Where are you going?" said his mother.

"Out with dad."

"Oh!"

Dad waited in the hall, and when Teddy returned, somewhat subdued, Murray called, "We're going out for a walk—Teddy and I."

No answer.

"Ethel—we are going for a walk."

No answer.

"Dad says we are going for a walk," said Teddy, running into the sitting-room to tell his mother.

"Oh! Well, don't keep supper waiting."

He came back to find his father on the outer landing, twirling a walking stick while he waited, snorting through his nostrils vigorously.

"Co-ome along!" said Murray gaily—with a difference.

So they set off, and found that the clogging haze of the town (it being blent there with unobtrusively but none the less relentlessly down-driven smoke, making the houses drab) was, afield, a haze of chiaroscuro and enchantments, even by day. In the city night was necessary, with its street lamps, to give an air of magic and expectancy in place of melancholy and listlessness.

"That's not a bad view, Ted," said the father where, at the cresting of a roll of land, over a low hedge, could be seen an undulating expanse wavering down, and up, patterned with fields and ending in a shoulder of open hill that glimmered through the mist somewhat as stones gleam under "gurly" water.

"It is like the coloured plates in my *Robinson Crusoe* when the tissue-paper leaves stick to them," answered Ted.

Murray glanced down on his boy with interest. Here, swinging along, the little chap had forgotten his feeling of discomfiture in the felicitous open air, had lost his subdued look.

"Just!" agreed the father, as Ted turned to him for ratification.

But he continued to look down at the boy with a hint of worry in his eyes. How much did the kid understand of his father's tipping ways? The kid had seen him—well, seen him pretty "squiffy," and it wasn't right. It wasn't right for Teddy's sake. He was an interesting boy—as witness, thought Murray, that remark about the landscape that greeted them at the ridge-top. A pensive-looking kid he was, too. It was not much the father did to illumine his boy's life; what he did at all was spasmodic, too often in moments of remorse, almost like sops to himself—he considered—for in remorse he was not

apt to give himself the benefit of any doubt. That *Robinson Crusoe*, for example. He had been "oiled" when he bought it for the child. It had button-holed him from a window in Whitehall Street, reminding him of his own boyhood, and he had said to himself: "Mustn't forget I'm a father. Poor little devil up there must have some Isles of the Blest to wander in also."

The poor little devil's appreciation as he bent, lost, over the volume, had been large, thanks to Murray. And now there was something of the same exuberant expression on the youngster's face.

"How do you like *The Three Admirals*?" Murray asked, speaking again. That was the last book brought home.

"Not as much as *The Three Midshipmen*," answered Ted, hesitatingly.

No need, thought Murray, to probe into the kid—like a priest behind the lattice instilling evil with the appearance, or even intention, of bringing forth good. Not but what he would have liked to ask Ted why he hesitated in his reply. "I believe," he mused, "it was some kind of inherent *savoir faire*—didn't want to seem to belittle a gift. Can't ask him, though; that's the line of action taken by fond parents who raise prigs."

"They grow up, you see," explained Teddy.

"Yes. One should never grow up," the father said. "I remember that is how I felt with *The Three Musketeers*, when they passed on to *Twenty Years After*. I've never got *The Three Musketeers* for you, Ted. I must."

"Will you? A chap at school told me to read it."

Another life! Another circle of friends! "Chaps" he did not know! If some of these "chaps" saw him when he was "squiffed" they might jeer at Ted.

"Any of the chaps ever ask you about me?" he questioned.

Ted did not seem to understand. "No—o," he answered.

"Oh! Just wondered. Sometimes boys ask each other what their father does—that sort of thing."

"No—o," said Ted; and then, "Now we're coming to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains."

That, thought Murray, might be from Ballantyne, or it might be from Twopenny Dreadfuls. He knew that Ethel whacked Ted once for having a Twopenny Dreadful in his school-bag; but his own views on Twopenny Dreadfuls were not of that order. Ethel never read anything—save *The Home Monthly*—but she walloped Ted, according to the usage. It was usual for boys to buy booklets of adventure at twopence or a penny. It was usual for their mothers to look in their bags for them, find them, leave them there, ask the boys if they had any of the obnoxious pamphlets in their possession and, when the boys said no, tell their fathers to punish them for having lied, and for having read. Ted had the dual punishment from his mother, because Murray, when such matters were reported to him, saw no occasion for reprimand—unless for reprimand to Ethel. "If you knew he had it in his bag, why did you ask him? Do you *want* him to lie?"

Ted did lie, for his intuitions were keen, and he realised, when asked, even on the first time of asking, if he had any of the awful things, that he shouldn't have them; but his instinct was not sufficiently fine to know that his mother had already spotted them, thanks to a hint from Mabel, who had caught sight of a glint of barbaric colour (such as no school-book cover offers) showing through a chink in the school-bag.

Even the "Dreadfuls" were cause of further estrangement—or antagonism rather—between the parents. Once, coming home into the midst of a lecture against these fictions, Murray said: "Have you read the thing yourself?" The mother coldly informed him she had not, but that it was a "dreadful."

"Let me see the innocuous novelette that has caused this gloom," said Murray. He ran through it in half-an-

hour, feet on mantelpiece, little Mabel waiting very subdued, expectant. Ted hoped for the best. She had her eye on him, and knew that, if the worst came and the father decided he was culpable—then she would shoot him a glance of "ha! ha!"

But he gave it back to Ted just before supper, and said: "It is rather poorly written. I must get you something in the same vein better done." (That, indeed, was the jog to Murray for *Robinson Crusoe*!)

The verdict amazed the mother, was final sign to her of the utter lack of right paternal instructor in her husband. She argued also that Ted should study at school and win book-prizes as did Mabel.

Yet, even when he did win a prize there was trouble. Mabel always chose her own books, highly informative books that would be helpful to her in winning others. To Ted it did not occur to do so; and he took what was given him—*Masterman Ready*—upon that red-letter occasion. However, if he had no shelves of books upon Wild Flowers and How to Classify Them, or upon the Heavenly Bodies, or Fossils, he was able, coming along these swinging by-ways to-day, to turn a ruined farmhouse into Rocky Mountain House, and to imagine that a burn they crossed by a bridge was a wild western creek that they forded. He had gone on with all this imaginative, topographical reconstruction, privately, trotting along by his father's side; but Murray had not forgotten.

"And there, by Jove, is an encampment of Indians!" said he.

"Don't you like the smell of the wood-fire smoke, dad?" asked Ted. "Blackfoot Indians they'll be, so near the rolling foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Away over there are Crees," and he waved his hand.

Murray considered. "Let me see—am I right in thinking that over there," and he pointed up to the Sidlaws, "there are Indians called Stoneys?"

"Yes."

"What is the authority for this?"

"Your old atlas has the names of the tribes printed on it."

"Of course it has! I'd forgotten!"

They halted on the little bridge by united, unspoken consent, to look over at the whimpling water—and also to steal glances at the tinker's encampment, which was pitched in a kind of No Man's Land corner of a barren field where the bushes were left to tangle. They seemed very, very far from grey streets, disconsolate tenements; and—as they had been mounting all the way from home—the air had here a more crystalline feel. Murray suggested what he called, to Ted's amusement, a "circumbendibus" home—"so that we won't have to go over the same roads again. It irks to go over the same roads again—like forming habits."

So they swung off for the homeward journey, and round (to Ted at least, for this walk was new to him) unexpected corners came upon thatched houses, fronted by simple gardens, half homely flowers, half currant and berry bushes; and once, at a little hamlet in a hollow, with an old churchyard and ancient graves, Murray led the way aside—and with his walking-stick poked and rubbed the moss from mouldered dates, that had once been deep-chiselled, but by the erosion of the surface stone were now hardly visible, the whole surface worn down by ages of weather; and pottered about, a new kind of father altogether, a kind of oasis of a father, so that Teddy looked up wondering.

Suddenly his father, turning from these memorials of the forgotten, said: "Ai—ai—ai! Ai—ai—ai!"

"What is it, dad?" said Ted, looking on him puzzled.

"Eh? Nothing—nothing—nothing!" said Murray, and he came out of his reverie and beamed a smile on his son, squaring his shoulders; and in a new voice chanted, in jolly key: "Nothing, nothing, nothing," as if it was the o'ercome of a gay song. "Come along, you whipper-snapper!" and with sudden jauntiness he led off again

—a quaint, incomprehensible father. "Not getting tired?"

"No."

"Good!"

Ted never forgot the place, the impression of the moment, the feeling within him, brought to birth in the fresh air, under that afternoon sky with blues like the inside of an oyster-shell, and the beginnings of a sunset blur in the west, and rooks cawing, and a tenuous greyness just drifted over all.

"Dad!" said Ted suddenly, as they again took the road. "You said you would buy me *The Three Musketeers*. How much will it be?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Will it be four and sixpence?"

"I daresay—some editions. But why?"

"Because I would like to read another book that's just come out. One of the chaps at school has it, but he says he can't lend it. I asked mother, but she says it is too much to pay for just a book."

"And twopence is too little!" snapped Murray.

"What did you say?"

"Speaking to myself!"

"Well—will you?" asked Ted.

"What is the book about?"

"About two men that are pursued by red-coats all through the heather of Scotland. There's a map at the front of it with the way they went marked. He showed me that. They shelter in a wood of silver birches, and they hide on top of a big rock that gets so hot that when a soldier looking for them puts his hand on it he pulls it away, and thinks nobody could possibly be hiding on top of such a hot rock, and—and it's called *Kidnapped*."

"I haven't heard of it. What's the author's name?"

"Robert Louis Stevenson," said Ted—pat.

"Um! I've never heard of him. I'm not up in modern writers; out of it a bit, I'm afraid."

"There is a picture of him in your *Review of Reviews*. Such a funny-looking man—like a musician. It's a most unexpected face after what that chap told me."

The corners of Murray's mouth twitched at the quaint phrase.

"What are you laughing at, dad?"

"Leave that to me!" said the father.

"You're going to get it for me!"

"How do you know?"

"I know!"

Murray smiled down upon his son, then abruptly looked backwards on the road and forwards, assuring himself with a quick glance that the road was vacant, and stepped, instead of directly before him, slightly to one side so that Teddy's knee bumped his. It was an old trick of the football field. Teddy dived forward, clutching air, and his father, grabbing the boy's collar, commented.

"Good life, Ted! What are you up to?"

"You did it on purpose!" whooped Teddy.

A little further on he edged toward his father, attempting a return, but Murray, alert, evaded him, and the first thing Ted knew he was again clutching air, and again his father grabbed his collar with a "Good life, Ted! What are you doing?" That was the high-water-mark walk—the best of all—the one he recalled most easily years after.

And this was the father who could be also a terror by night—was most a terror by night. Too often at the end of a restless mood such as that of to-day, which led to this afternoon's and early evening's wayfaring (generally, indeed), he would overlook the little boy, go out alone. And the mother would look so sad that Teddy would tell her once more how one day she would live in a big house and drive about in a carriage drawn by a pair of fine-stepping horses—chestnuts or dappled greys, just as she might fancy when the day came. "And if dad comes home like that, I'll lock him in his room."

## CHAPTER III

By the time Teddy was between sixteen and seventeen, and old enough to leave school, he realised that his father was what is known as a drunkard, no mere casual toper, and he understood better why Mrs. Murray's manner was often so distant to her husband. His father was, too, as his mother often told him, a very selfish man. "You mustn't be selfish like your father." Murray's interest now in his son's future was almost nil. He dismissed talk of it as but one more domestic nuisance likely to lead to a broil.

"If you had applied yourself to study," said his mother, feeling very acutely that upon her devolved all the worry on that head, "the way your sister has done, you might have won bursaries and gone to the University."

That matter—"application"—was a sore one with the boy. Every breaking-up day Mabel, laden with prizes, had come home to say: "And what prizes have you won, Ted?" She would show hers, at the mother's request, when visitors called. People who thought Teddy was left out in the cold would ask: "And now your prizes?" and he would look sheepish. He had begun well, but ended badly. In his first year there was one prize; in his second year there was another prize; and thereafter there were several years with only one for what, on the bescribbled form stuck on the cover, was called "General Intelligence." When the visitors read "For General Intelligence," clever little Mabel would always laugh and say, "I think it is such a funny phrase. Sounds like a dog!" The visitors would laugh pleasantly too, in the manner of sociable callers, and reply, "So it does. Never thought of that."

So Teddy, at sixteen-and-a-half, went to business. It

was only a year or two ago, at one of the well and fair interludes, that his father had said to him: "And what would you like to be, Ted?" But these interludes, not ever (at least in Teddy's memory) of great duration, were now—well, it looked as if they would be only memories unless one came along soon. The father left the whole matter of finding a situation for Teddy to the boy himself, and to his mother. He simply could not be interested. Ted (as we know) had shown a turn for reading, and his own view was that perhaps he might enter one of the big newspaper offices of the town. There was one that blazed the lights of its windows nightly (all warmly lit up) down upon the old Howff, a place affectionately called *The 'Tiser Office*, hardly ever, formally, *The Advertiser*, with a name for being the people's friend—a name deserved if by no more than the opening of its doors or (to be less grandiose) its columns to the pensive and homely songs of Alexander Anderson while he was yet "Surfaceman" by vocation as well as by pen-name. Another barrack of print was in Lindsay Street; going past there one could often hear a faint hum, and catch a tenuous tremble under foot, or in the air, of machines inside pouring out their certificated tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of sheets of printed matter—stirring new serial, cookery hints, language of stamps, fictional anodyne and culinary advice for the lowly—but always something in the way of reading matter, provided (to judge by the men and women coming and going, or leaning against its wall, ready to take up their duties) by a very jolly and bonhomous set of mortals.

Ted's mother—all the burden of the family now upon her—asked the advice of the minister. Mr. Tannadice, growing old in his profession, had a series of pigeon-holes in his mind with the replies all ready for the questions (spiritual and temporal) of his flock. With an air of consequence (his mouth seemed to be made of elastic) he said seriously, for he always treated the troubles of

his parishioners with gravity: "Ah! One moment. Has the young man shorthand?"

"No."

"Ah! That is one of the first essentials to-day in most businesses, and of course in journalism I should say it was the chief essential. I would advise that if he considers following that profession he should first of all apply himself to the study of—ahem—shorthand."

The tone suggested that he might have added, "Here endeth the reading of the First Lesson," and poor Ethel, feeling the responsibility very heavy, looked to be upon the point of tears.

"It is so difficult," she said, "for a woman to know. I am so troubled about it."

Mr. Tannadice had not seen Murray for some time now, and he could not remember whether she was a widow or not; he thought he had encountered her husband fairly recently, but with a large charge—um, um!—it was difficult to remember. He looked at her garb, noted that she was not in black.

"What—eh—his father—eh?" and he waited.

"Ah! His father!" she replied, and seemed again upon the verge of tears.

"Yes, yes. Quite so." He did not commit himself. "My dear Mrs. Murray, there are trials sent to us, trials to prove us. You have my sympathy—my deep sympathy. Yes. Well, you get the boy to learn shorthand."

Teddy having proved himself so indifferent a prize-winner at school, his mother was doubtful if he would be a promising shorthand pupil. He had already replied in a haphazard way to a somewhat cryptic advertisement, which she, feeling very helpless, had discovered looking through the "Situations Vacant" column. His handwriting was not so bad; he could calculate with precision if only no one stood over him awaiting the solution, strap of castigation—or "tawse," as they call it in Scotland—in hand; and with a very great determination to be his

mother's mainstay, to advance in life as his terrible father retrograded, he took (that application bearing fruit) as a stepping-stone, so as to be busy immediately, a post as junior clerk in a marmalade factory office, registering a tremendous resolve (the registration of resolves was perhaps hereditary) to study shorthand in the evening—nay, in spare time, too.

He was highly enthusiastic about it. The preface to the shorthand manual he bought suggested that one could (if one cared, or dared) make the signs to oneself while travelling in the tramcar—thus: p, b, chay, jay, kay, gay, and so forth. He read that preface aloud, and Mabel—now studying with a coach for her B.A. degree—trilled with laughter, and sitting bolt upright moved her finger high in the air before her, as if trying to see what it would look like to make shorthand signs in public places. Ted laughed too, appreciating the ludicrous.

There was, to be sure, necessity for somebody to be bringing in an income, for a month or two later the father was again out of employment. The new situation seemed not so easy this time to obtain, and the imminence of rent-day brought fresh anxiety. Murray, out of work, was sober. He had long since given over making resolutions to keep so, but it might be gathered that he was doing his best to wear some kind of sackcloth in these days when he pored upon the papers throughout breakfast, wrote letters between breakfast and lunch, and looked dismal all the tedious afternoon. During a strained talk with his wife (in the second week of his day-long cumbering of the home, of ineffectual letter-writing and of peering out of window for the postman) he jumped up and threw his pipe and tobacco-pouch into the fire. She, without hint of anger, but with a kind of prologue to panic, had put the financial position before him; and presumably he was going to do without everything but the bare necessities, though he did not say so. He seemed a trifle demented.

He really needed a new suit of clothes. Ethel commented so to herself as she marked him ranging about the house from room to room desperately. What was the matter with him? With a sinking heart she discovered. He raked in a drawer, found an old discarded pipe, stole into the kitchen and filled it with tea from the caddy. And an hour or two ago he had flung away his pipe and half-filled pouch! He was indeed a broken reed. She showed signs of nervousness; she looked worn. In desperation she donned hat and cloak and went round to see Mrs. West, meeting on the way Mrs. Kinghorne, whose bow was so intensely and superiorly distant that Ethel had a spasm of anger and agony over the thought that when one showed signs of going downhill people did their best to add to the ignominy. Her mother listened to all the story that she had to tell, listened with face barren of hope. It was, after all, only a new instalment of an old tale.

"I'm afraid, Ethel," she said, "you will have to let the rooms."

To herself Ethel thought: "A lodger! Oh, I can't." She shook her head. "He is such a clever man too," she told her mother. "Why! He can speak four languages!" Surely Mrs. West could suggest some way of getting employment for a man with four languages!

"Let me see," pondered the old lady. "Where is Bilbao?"

"I think it is in Italy. No, Spain. Why?"

"Well, I heard Jack saying that he had to audit the books of a firm in Bilbao. I am almost sure—why, yes, it's in Spain. I wonder if George could do auditing?"

"I'm sure he could, with all his experience as a book-keeper, and then as business manager. And he can speak Spanish—or translate it, anyhow. It is one of the first languages he learnt after we were married."

"It would get him away from his cronies here," said the mother.

Ethel had no long memory for some things, but she had a feeling now of having gone through this conversation before. Mrs. West clapped the back of her daughter's hand to arrest her straying attention.

"And it would save you from feeling that anybody thought you had come down," she added. "If it was to be a long job you could go with him—got a situation abroad, see?"

"The children——"

"The children could come to me."

"I wouldn't go with him—but I wonder if you could find out."

"I will. I'll make inquiries to-day, at once."

By the last post that night came a note from Mrs. West to her daughter: "Here is Jack's card—'to introduce Mr. George Murray.' I find the work is not in connection with his business. He was only asked if he knew anyone who could take it, someone with a good knowledge of Spanish. He rang up Moncur, C.A., while I was there seeing him about it, and Mr. Moncur would like your husband to call in the morning, at ten o'clock."

Ethel read this letter aloud to her half-demented husband. His hands fidgeted; he was either twiddling the second finger with the tip of his thumb, or holding hand half-closed and rubbing the palm with all the fingers in a quick, and to all appearances, unconscious motion.

"You went to see your mother," he said dully, when she ended. "Does she know anything about the job?"

"It is to go over some books in Bilbao that can't be brought here."

"In Bilbao?" he asked in queer tones.

"Yes. And mother thought that if you could get away from your—get away for a complete change——"

He nodded. "Yes, yes," he replied. "You told her why I am—er—out of employment?"

"She guessed, I suppose. No, I didn't have to tell. Well, she knew."

"Will she have told your brother-in-law?"

"I—I don't know. I don't suppose so. She wouldn't have to, though I expect he knows too. Oh, George, if you could only get this situation in Bilbao and begin afresh over there!"

He was very nervous; he was trembling.

"Yes, I'll go and see Moncur in the morning," he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

He was trembling so much next morning that he thought, on the way down to town, that he had better have a bracer before going to see Moncur, chartered accountant. He had one, for there was time; and then he bethought him that Moncur might be one of those who are dubious of an odour of early spirits, so he dropped into a grocery store and, instead of buying some coffee-beans, in a mood of foolish cunning, he bought chocolates, then, as they were being tossed into a bag, he said: "Would you mind giving me a coffee-bean? I am very keen on them."

The cold person behind the counter handed him a bowl of beans, price-ticket stuck on it.

"Take one," he said; and as Murray did so the shopman handed him the chocolates, adding: "I have known of an employee being discharged for having the odour of a coffee-bean." He raised a finger, shook his head. "The best plan is—don't take what makes you want a coffee-bean."

Murray's jaw tightened. "How do you know," he said, "that I am in a position to be discharged even for smelling like a distillery—let alone exhaling coffee-bean? How do you know? You jump to conclusions, don't you? How do you know that I am not keen on coffee-beans? You did not smell anything else." His face was suffused with sudden redness. "Or, if you did, how do you know that perhaps I am not going to see some damned temperance orator, and am hiding a smell of an early nip out of

deference to his views?" He poured it all out in a torrent. "Yes, by Jove, the best plan is not to take an early whisky that needs a covering coffee-bean if the next step is to have a snipe like you wagging a finger in one's face. You're in your shop now, talking to a man—not on your Band of Hope platform making faces at a hall-full of children. And how many times do you—a licensed grocer I notice—to oblige your old hags of customers, put down the spirits they buy as tea and coffee?"

The grocer gave heed to all this outburst with ineffable calm, hands flat on counter, face bland and smug.

"You are certainly not a gentleman," he said.

"And you are certainly an old woman!" replied Murray, laughing a queer laugh that made the shopman wince backward. Then, wheeling, he marched from the shop, amazed at himself.

"I must get a new suit of clothes," he considered, continuing on his way. "Yes, I must get a new suit of clothes. It's clothes that do the trick with grocers. I am at my last now!"

But if Murray had in many ways retrograded his old pride of punctuality survived. He entered Moncur's office as the town chime ended its battered refrain and the clock bell, after decent pause, began to count out the hour. To the clerk who came to inquire his business he bore himself austerely, to counterbalance (such was his notion) any malign effect of fading clothes upon the young man, a pretty youth who reeked of a season-ticket for Newport suburb across the water, and a fond mother in the background admiring his appearance at tennis and private theatricals, and paying his tailor's bills when the tailor could no longer be fobbed off. But the youth was civil enough after all; perhaps it was only that coffee-bean lecturer who was going to be rude to-day.

"Oh, you are Mr. Murray! Mr. Moncur left a message for you, Mr. Murray. He is sorry that he was called

out unexpectedly after arriving this morning. He told me to ask you if you would be good enough to call again later."

"Oh, yes. At what time?"

"He expects to be in before lunch—but he may not. He will be back for certain after lunch."

"Good. Thank you. Good morning," and Murray descended to the street again, and stood uncertain what to do, how to occupy the time of waiting. In former days he would have strolled on the docks, surveyed the ships, and dreamt of their voyages; even looked, not without some æsthetic enjoyment, at the rippling and flashing of the river. But he was waning away from these simple pleasures.

He strolled along towards The Pillars, and there was Molison, going to the bank, observing nothing, though his eyes were open. Molison had his table now, after all! It would have taken a runaway horse or a derailed tram-car to make Molison alert. Murray looked at him, met his eye; and as Molison did not nod Murray immediately sprang to the conclusion that Molison had seen but ignored him, and he was exceedingly wrathful.

"Ah—h!" he growled to himself. "And Moncur—very nice of Moncur, I suppose, to leave word that he was sorry he had to go out; I should be thankful for small mercies—ah—h! Might have fixed a time to see me later. Wants to make me feel that I am a hanger-on, that's what he wants to do. That's the way things go. Sorry he had to go out, but does not leave word of the hour for another appointment. Wants to see how badly I need a job, I expect. 'Did he call back again?' he'll ask the clerk.—'Yes, twice.'—'Oh!' he'll say, like that. No! I don't go back on chance to be told to call again. After lunch he will be in for certain. I'll make my second call then. Very good."

But when, after lunch, Murray returned to Moncur's office he was thick as to speech, glaring as to eyes; and

the sole result of that call was a very straight expression of opinion over the telephone, on Moncur's part, to Ethel's brother-in-law, and a hot letter from Jack Burnett to Murray, although (thought Murray, perusing it) they had met only a few times—"and yet, by God, one can't blame him." Anon, however, he must needs rave to his wife about "your whole damned family!" Then he flung out of the house, and Teddy told his mother not to be afraid—since he was growing up. She told him that she was afraid, for she did not know what his father would do next; she wept before the growing lad's pity. Bitter, bitter life! There was a question Ted had often wanted to ask, and he asked it now.

"Did he drink before you married him, mother?" His thought was that surely she should have known.

"Yes," she sobbed, rocking and weeping. "I thought that if I married him," she choked upon her sobs, "I might reform him."

"Don't you worry, mother. I'm not just a kid now. I can help you."

Mabel was not yet home. She had, that week, got a post as secretary to Professor Josiah Ingram, then in Dundee, employed upon his volume on the problem of housing the factory classes, and her hours varied according to how his dictating flow progressed—sluggish or in spate. She had wanted to continue her academic studies; had, indeed, dropped a hint that she thought Fate dealt cruelly with her in making her have to help to support her mother; yet she was intensely flattered by the post she had obtained when her father's dereliction decided that she must look for means of livelihood.

"And then there is Mabel," said Ted hopefully. "She is always saying that she thinks a woman's place is in the world as much as a man's, and that a woman is as competent to earn her living. She could help."

The mother was drying her eyes.

"Oh, indeed, yes—in that way Mabel could help more

than you; I think she is doing so already, isn't she?" and Mrs. Murray blinked away the last tears, and waited with suspense, but fortitude, for her husband's return.

But nothing terrible happened, despite the feeling of dread. Murray came back an hour or two later with the information that he had obtained employment—as a commercial traveller. It would be something to go on with, something to go on with, he growled; and on a salary of thirty shillings a week, and travelling expenses, the man who had four languages, and had once been ambitious, went from place to place wherever there showed factory chimneys and puffs of steam, extolling the merits of the Ajax washers and boiler packing—for a spell still trying to live a dual life, till the insolences of men of the Dogberry order, insolences that he imagined he dismissed on the moment of their menial delivery, mounted up pyramidal in his mind, stored there to await his morning-after cranky mood. He tried many stratagems to get past such persons without letting them suspect that he was in a position in which they could be rude to him. He would leave his bag sometimes outside an office door, make entrance thus unbranded, in the hope of being able to see someone of authority. For underlings are too often menials, and at sight of the traveller's bag they take it upon themselves to speak to the man carrying the bag in the way that they believe a real superior speaks to an inferior.

But, perhaps, it was not only this pyramid of aspersions and insolences that was too much for Murray. On the way home, one night a year later, his trousers splashed with mud upon the calves, as high as to the knees, he encountered Ambrose, whom he had not seen for long. Now, Ambrose had never been a friend exactly, far from an intimate; and Ambrose's last impressions of Murray were of a man a little maudlin on domestic matters under the influence of the national beverage; and, farther, one

who was a stroker of barmaids' hands. So he cut Murray dead. At sight of him, Murray had thought: "Ha! There's that man Ambrose—he will understand how I hate this rotten country of something worse than caste." Yet that was what happened—Ambrose cut him dead—and there you are! The imp in the bottle looked forth inviting; and the first swing-door of the first mere "pub" gave to Murray's shoulder. He drank himself into delirium tremens in his condition then, and coming home twenty-four hours later (muddy, and with wisps of hay on his trousers, and two dents in his hat), he danced up and down on the hearthrug like a jumping-jack pulled by unseen strings. Then he tried to light his pipe that had no tobacco in it, and Ethel, seeing, clutched her breast in horror, recalling the "useful information" paragraphs in the page called "Things You Ought to Know!" in the weekly paper she read. Biting her lips, and clearing her throat, she gasped: "Take care, George, take care—spontaneous combustion!"

Teddy came, fortunately, home at that moment (he was then nearly eighteen), and the father dashed past him, dashed into the big bedroom. Ted, looking after him, pursued, grappling with him, for he saw that his father's objective was the little drawer at the right-hand side of the dressing-table, where he kept his shaving outfit. Quivering like an aspen, Ethel helped in the wrestling match that ensued. Suddenly the dipsomaniac's mind seemed to clear, or he seemed to think that he should explain to those who wrestled with him.

"Let me get away from myself," he whimpered, panting.

"Come along, dad, come along. You're all right," said Teddy, wheedling, but panting too; and he talked his father to the bed, suggested to him to sit there and, the suggestion accepted, coaxed him to a prone position—instead of sitting there making an uncanny sound (suggestive of what pre-historic speech may have been like)

as though he were talking sentences backward. When Murray lay down he abstracted the razors, slipped from the room, and told his mother (who was now standing outside wringing her hands, running a little way toward the front door in some unformed plan of getting assistance, then running back again) to go to the chemist for bromide and ask a doctor to call. Then he went bravely back and leant beside the window, looking at his father. He marked the face bloated and red, the veins and neck and forehead and temples distended.

"What a life for mother!" he mused. For a brief passing moment he thought it would have been better if he had not taken away the razors. "Perhaps he will choke to death now," was the next thought that came to him, for Murray's collar was tight around the swollen throat—and Ted was unstrung. But the young man's actions belied his thoughts. What he did was to step over and pull apart his father's collar, and unfasten the top button of his shirt.

The doctor arriving then (he happened to be, fortunately, in the chemist's when Ethel entered for the bromide) commented: "That's right! Pooh! Alcoholic! Smells like a lamp!"—this last to himself.

There was a sense of relief to mother and son in having present one to whom these symptoms were in the day's work. And when Mabel came rustling home to the horrible place, so grim in contrast with the Professor's room of considerations, Ted was further relieved. He admitted to himself that if there was to be another wrestling match he would be glad of an extra pair of hands to help, for his father was strong, and as good as, or as bad as, mad. Now that the worst was over the lad shuddered at recollection of it.

## CHAPTER IV

A COUPLE of days later, nerve-disturbing days for the family, Teddy, in that room smelling of liquor, of the doctor's potions, and of vinegar and water bandages, guardedly answered his father's questions regarding what had happened; but he did not tell him he had tried to get out the razors—he merely said: "You were a little distraught." He omitted to describe to his still jumpy parent how he had, for first sign of the *débâcle*, danced up and down on the hearthrug; he only remarked: "Yes, yes—you were rather nervous."

"How—how do you mean?" asked his father.

"Oh, twitching."

But a day or two afterwards as Murray improved and still had many questions, Ted told him more of the truth.

"Do you know," said his father, having heard these details, "I don't believe it was myself I wanted to kill? I believe it was your mother."

"You said you wanted to get away from yourself."

"I take it that was the cunning of the madman. I was jolly well mad, Ted. Terrible, terrible."

But Teddy remarked a cunning look in his father's eyes then.

"Why should you want to kill her?" he questioned.

The cunning look went and there came a look such as a man gives when, as they say, he has let the cat out of the bag. He raised his bloodshot gaze to a corner of the ceiling and said: "Have you never heard that when people go mad they are apt to try to do away with those that they love best?"

The chronicler can make no definite statement of the reasonings or unreasonings behind. To Ted's ears there

was a doubtful ring in the words; maybe Murray himself knew not anything with certainty—his thoughts meshed, confused.

It was still clearly imperative that something be done; anything might happen. To be sure Murray, recovering further, seemed to decide to rail no more against any outward cause of his condition. In that stuffy bedroom where he now slept alone he considered his muddy clothes; they had been left upon a chair in a corner, untouched. He remarked, on the dressing-table, the emptied contents of his trouser pockets from a disrobing he did not recall. This would be two or three days after the night of pandemonium. He was too greatly shamefaced to ask the questions that these things suggested: "How did I come home? Did somebody bring me? Does everybody in Dundee who knew me know about this?" He asked, however, one question of Teddy: "What's the time?"

"About twelve."

Then he asked another, or made a comment that amounted to a question.

"You're not at work."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I thought it better to stay at home a few days, with you. I've sent a note to the office to say I am not well."

His father thought that over; then: "Mabel? Has she stayed too?"

"No."

"Still goes to Ingram's?"

"Yes."

"Are you staying here in case I do something desperate—for your mother's sake?"

"And your own," said Teddy.

"Um! How is she?"

"Not very bright."

"Um! You must go to work, Ted. I——" he pondered what he should do with himself, lost in gloom.

A Dostoevsky might care terribly to tell, at length, of these days after, as they were to George Murray. Louis Couperus would chronicle the "impossible" lower middle-class talks between Ethel, Alice, and Mrs. West over the situation, whispered talks that led nowhither, at sessions in the sitting-room, or in the now maidless kitchen. It is more to the second generation that we turn. For Mabel the little house (as in Scottish cities people usually call their flats), in the upper region of the town, was become utterly out of her sphere. She had for so long now been taking down to dictation the plans of the Professor for bringing the Golden Age to the tenement and the palace; for so long had she been accustomed to be treated by that nervous, bearded man, during the lull of afternoon tea, as a wise friend discussing (not without an occasional, "though of course I have not studied it at all"), that she felt, coming home, and entering the odour of vinegar and drugs that she had to make an abrupt change in herself on entrance so as to fit in.

Ingram's house, albeit rented furnished and with but few of his household gods around, and Ingram's sphere were so much more the house and sphere for which she was intended. Considering so, and looking round the dining-room here, her eyes alighted on her father's books, editions of *Gil Blas* and *Don Quixote* in four languages. To be sure they were there rather for the sake of their language than as literature; but her eyes filled with tears, looking at them and remembering the one glimpse she had had, from the doorway, into her father's room, glimpses of the scattered clothes, the keys and loose change and so forth higgledy-piggledy on the dressing-table. She melted to herself over the horror of it all.

"Oh, Ted," she addressed her brother, "it is borne in upon me so strongly that what we need is Legislation—State Legislation. I cannot tell you how terrible it is to me," and Ted had great pity for her, so woe-begone did she look; "the more deeply I give myself to considera-

tion of papa's downfall the more strongly am I convinced that, to save such as he from themselves, others must act. It is our duty to them and to the generation to be. Of course one, I suppose, would have to be careful not to tamper with the liberty of the subject; but we must not be hag-rid by a phrase. There would be other trouble. Oh, don't you see, Teddy, the tremendous, the terrible obstacles in the way? The brewers and distillers have so much say in our Government under present conditions that any suggestion to interfere with their profits, even now, is met at once by them—and they are strong. But something is far wrong. Oh, Teddy, as I look at these books here (I don't know if you can understand), but they say so much to me. They tell me of a man with a mind, capable no one can estimate of what service to his State, to humanity generally I should say; and just for lack of being saved from himself here he is in this dreadful condition," and she sniffed, and sniffed again, and her lip quivered.

"Don't cry!" said Teddy.

She sobbed a little, inwardly, biting her lip and blinking her eyes. On the one hand, here was her father, distraught, hopeless of himself; on the other, there was Professor Ingram. She could hear a kind of echo of his voice as he dictated slowly to her in the house in Tay Square. Oh, what would be say to this case here? If only he knew, dictating, as he came to the phrase, "this touches upon the drink evil to which I shall relegate a chapter in its place," if only he knew how the young woman sitting at the table writing while he talked longed to tell him all her story.

"Oh, Teddy, can't you see? It is all so terribly involved."

Teddy nodded.

"What is aimed at is a larger life for people," Mabel continued, "not a life more circumscribed. If only there were some understanding, some unselfish understanding

of the menace of alcohol, my poor father would never have come to this. For we have to realise that what is called sin is often disease. We have to realise that people are often born with parts lacking. In certain cases everybody sees this lack, it is evident to all, and the subject is, clearly, in the category of idiot, mentally deficient. But in other cases the deficiency is not remarked, save by a few. Still it is there——"

"And then there are the spiritually deficient," put in Ted, moodily, though slightly perturbed at a certain strained manner in his sister. He thought it could not be good for her to be in a state that made her look as she then looked. Yet he was drawn in to speak a word now, although he thought it was all futile talk—apart from the relief (he was not sure if he should not switch her off it) it perchance afforded her.

"Ah, yes, admitted," she said, "there is the spiritual. But how can the spiritual be nurtured if the material is allowed to go to seed?"

He was greatly worried; he was even willing to believe that he merely did not understand; he was willing to believe that she knew what she was trying to get at; but she had not arrived, and her manner was so tense that he feared she would have a breakdown, sob, scream, "or something." This, too, he told himself, was his father's doing. Her eyes were feverishly bright. Teddy might have tried to explain the effect of the shadow on the home, the skeleton in the cupboard (as his mother and grandmother West called it) upon himself; but he had not the words, or it was too vague. If he had attempted he might have said something like this: "I don't feel as if it is real at all, all this that we are living among. Even after we had wrestled with him, after the whole thing, I could hardly believe it. I did not sleep all night for fear of trouble, and next morning I dressed before dawn. The moon was in the west quite high when sunrise began, and there was a double light on the city. I looked out, and

not a window was lit that I could see, but that light of sunrise and the moon was over everything—and it came to me that it wasn't true, wasn't true at all, all this. Only the smell of vinegar-cloths convinced me, and his snores and grunts, and the queer way he started and cried, 'Who spoke? Who's there?' every now and then." But he did not say this; he remained mute, only thinking in that manner when Mabel fell silent.

"Poor Ted!" she broke out suddenly. "It is terrible for you, too!"

"Well, I'm really worried more about mother. It is too awful for her. It should end for her sake. It is not right—well, for a woman."

She looked with devotion on him through her starting tears.

"That's right, Ted. I'm sure you will be a good man. Oh, it is terrible how weak—how weak—men are. There should be legislation to protect them," she sighed, "from themselves."

"It's awful," agreed Ted. "It has cut me up badly—especially when I remember walks I've had with him before—before it got so bad. But we can't re-shape the world, Mabel. We've to think of mother. If you had seen her—I'll never forget it—the way her knees gave way under her after we got the razor from him. She was pluckier than I while it lasted, but after—I'll never forget it. When I saw her twiddling about in the hall, running this way and that, I felt that I could kill him! I can't forget how she looked then. No one should have power to bring another to such a state. I wish I was clever like you, Mabel. If I had only a bigger salary I would suggest that we got dad to go away. You and I could look after mother."

"Oh, I could keep the house going now on what I'm getting," she answered. "You are paying your board, and a little more——"

"And if I don't get an increase where I am now I'm

determined to find another billet elsewhere. I've been there more than long enough to have an increase. I wonder if I couldn't get into a newspaper office without shorthand. I get on so slowly—I'm afraid I let it slide to read. You don't need shorthand to take down to dictation Professor Ingram's——"

"No, that's different, he dictates slowly. I don't know. Oh, I feel it so much devolving on me."

"Don't cry, Mabel! Poor girl! I am nearly eighteen. I should be earning more. Don't cry, Mabel, poor girl."

"Don't! Don't! Don't pity me, or I shall break down altogether. Don't! Don't!" She pled.

He felt something in the air suggesting to him to yell; and he expected (for some reason) that Mabel might yell at any moment.

"Oh, I wish I could discuss it with someone!" she brought out in a low plaintive and intense voice, as if speaking to herself. She was in a kind of daze again, picturing Ingram. He had cast a spell on her; he was, she believed, a man apart, he would help her to retain her belief in man. If only she could talk to him about it all!

"What do you say to going to see Uncle Jack?" Ted suggested. "Just to discuss it all with him,"

"There is somebody at the front door," said Mabel.

The visitor was Mrs. West, and, after her arrival, when she and her daughter were talking quietly in the sitting-room, the brother and sister looked in on them.

"We're going to see Uncle Jack, mother," said Mabel.

"You'll be all right till we come back," said Ted.

"You're not alone."

Mrs. West looked at them both, tapped their air of being upon business bent. "Yes, you young people," she agreed, "you go and see Jack. He is a sensible man. Get his advice."

Ted blinked his eyes, for the picture of his mother

standing there wanly with his grandmother was too pathetic for him.

"Come along, then," said Mabel, and they set off.

Jack Burnett was in his office on their arrival, saw them at once, and listened with concentrated brows to the story, now the one talking, now the other; a tale of horror, of years of advancing toward the outbreak that now brought them to him for advice. He had only heard fragments of it from his wife; Teddy and Mabel opened his eyes to the seriousness of the situation.

"Do you know," he said, when they had finished, "that I believe your father would, quite of his own free will, consent to leave your mother? We might get him into some kind of dipso—well, nursing home, perhaps, something of that kind. Personally, I think if he went abroad——"

"He has often spoken to me of going abroad," Teddy interjected.

"He has?"

"Oh, often—long ago—when we used to have strolls on the docks. That year we went for holidays to the Clyde, too. He likes to look at the ships."

Jack was smoothing a hand over his face. "Look here—I'll come up and see him."

"With us?" asked Mabel.

"Come now?" asked Ted.

Uncle Jack glanced at his watch. "I'll come presently. You go back now."

"It can't go on—for mother's sake," said Ted.

"And then there is the awful example to my brother, too," said Mabel.

Jack looked at her sharply, then at Teddy and made a puckering of the corners of his mouth.

"Nothing in that," he muttered, with a little dismissing head-shake. "Enough to warn anyone for life. No, no example about it. Well, I'll follow you."

And, as they returned homeward in haste, Teddy

thought how fine his sister looked, how altogether "decent" she was to-day.

"You must have had a terrible time, Ted," she said.

"I shall never forget the way mother's knees gave way afterwards," he replied, staring before him.

She raised her head, and he saw that she was unutterably pained. Her face was set, drawn. Just when life offered her some pleasure, for she was enjoying her new work greatly, there came grim realities, clouds overwhelming, for, despite his feeling that all the care and trouble was unreal to his inner self, in another way it was too utterly real—keeping him from business, distressing Mabel, sending them out now to seek advice of an older, wiser head.

"Rotten!" thought Ted. "Rotten for everybody. Rotten for him, too!"

Having thus mused, almost spoken aloud, there came to him again (as all his life, when outer affairs clashed their worst, most strongly it came) that sense of the unreality of the outer confusion. It was not true—not really true. He was far nearer the truth about everything when reading, when cycling up the Carse feeling the wind, noting the massive clouds boiling up and over. This world of factory whistles and drunken fathers and, though that at present was a very minor matter, mothers who, even at their best, objected to books as waste of time, was not true at all. And the mass of unbelief in it remained all the way home, and was hardly shaken even, on entering the flat, by the hanging smell of drugs and vinegar cloths.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days later, after a long man-to-man talk, as Jack called it, with his chartered accountant (half-lawyer), "wife's sister's husband," as they say in Scotland, George Murray agreed to sign his name to a separation paper. The suggestion of going to a hydropathic for treatment he rejected.

"What! On other people's money? Oh, no! But I do feel that I should get away from Ethel and the kids—for their sakes. You are quite right. Willingly," he said, "willingly, for the sake of poor Ethel. I'm too old to go abroad now—I've made a mess of it."

He was the colour of lead, with blue semi-circles under his eyes, on that awful day when Burnett called for them in a cab—a wise man, he, with imagination of sorts. In the closed four-wheeler no one could speak because of the din of the wheels on the road, the ear-splitting rattle. Alice's husband sat blinking his eyes, or snapping them seems a better word, in a way he had when about to do some acute business; Murray sat erect, heavy, with a blend of shame and flaunting in his manner—oddly like a big boy, Ted thought, almost in tears in his corner, unable to thrust away pictures, and talks, from many walks with this father before his parent's cheeks began to bag and hang, and his fingers to show puffy. Mabel did not come to the lawyer's office, thinking it better to get back to her work, Ingram being clamant, and she feeling unable to invent excuse to get away.

Emotion had to be subdued in the office, because of the witnesses ready to sign the paper after it had been read and signed by George Murray. He read it with great calm, and courteously handed the pen to the clerk, who stood by quietly, scenting a tragic juncture in these lives. The paper was signed, the witnesses and Jack's legal friend discreetly withdrew; and on the instant that the four were alone again Murray held his hand sharply to Ted.

"You're a good boy, Ted," he said, "and I've been a poor father to you."

At that, Jack pretended to have something to say to somebody outside, hastened abruptly away after the legal man and the signing witnesses. Ted had to turn his back, and swallow hard, feeling in touch with things away and beyond him, as his father and mother took

each other's hands suddenly, and with a common impulse briefly clasped one another round the neck. It was unexpected. Teddy wheeled, and gulped. Next moment the door clicked and his father was gone. Through the plain upper glass of the partition that bounded this room on the corridor side, Ted saw the sudden opening of the outer door, and then watched, as though entranced by it, the slow closing; for the outer door was one that closed quietly, and slowly, by the device of an air-cylinder. He was brought back to the room by his mother's sob, as she sank down on a chair.

"Oh, I do hope, Teddy, that you and your uncle have done right," she sobbed. "And yet—and yet for your sake, my boy, growing up, it is not right for you to see these things. As I said to Jack when he talked it over—for the sake of my children."

"For your sake, my dear mother," said Ted.

## BOOK III

### CHAPTER I

DOUBTLESS it was to be expected that Mabel should grow up an "intense" young woman, with a slumbering fretfulness in her grey-blue eyes—eyes that could veer from a moist and painfully pensive aspect to a coldness suggestive of granite chips. She was much subject to internal upheavals, considerations too nebulous to be called views or beliefs, unless in a kind of dubious courtesy; and after her father's departure she would sigh often, head on side (the melting expression in these intense mottled grey eyes): "How sad life is!"

She could sentimentalise over the tragedy of her father when Ingram was dictating his chapter on the curse of alcoholic excess and, almost at the same moment, be nursing a grudge against her father as the fallen log upon her path to greater scholastic honours—for she had to work now, instead of studying, so as to keep the home a-going. The clash of her thoughts was tormenting to herself. Yet again, she viewed herself as highly superior to Ted in that she, despite the handicapping caused by her father, was very much in the world, earning a wage beyond his; and on that fact she plumed herself, grew aggrandising by reason of it. She talked much of the right and capacity of Woman to earn a living as well as Man; and threw off remarks to Ted on his lack of worldly progress; she was a very conflicting person, conflicting for herself and for others.

It was inevitable that she should attract, as associates, others of conflicting tendency, sleek and cutting women, whose education just sufficed to make them sure that for every opinion expressed by any one whom they disliked a negation could be cited by a great name. Bring forth the same name on your own behalf and they would cry: "Who's he?" or, if they knew not of what the disliked one talked they would say, on chance, having learnt that much in their learning—that there are many views on most matters: "But that has been disproved by other authorities, has it not?" A depressing, sterile business, not to bring in any other standard and say immoral. To such Ted handed tea and cakes when cornered, and from such he fled on any pretext—to walk to The Pillars and back for the contrasting and restoring joy of the illiterate parading crowds. Other friends that pleased her, that she drew toward her, were of the rude and argumentative order, women gone sour, with whom none could argue (despite their lust for dispute) because their vindictiveness was so much stronger than their intellect.

If now and then Ted made protest at the air of superior, the assumption of mistress in his sister, the mother arbitrated: "Come, come, Ted. It is not your place to be rude to your sister."

She might, of course, grow out of this mistressful condition, despite all the signs suggesting that it was her veritable self and no phase. Her definiteness of grasp, so different from Ted's light touch (the way she lifted anything was a thing to make one jump) she was aware of. They used to have little smiling arguments over that even in the vain way of relatives with nothing to talk about, yet talking; Mabel telling Ted that he should have been the woman and she the man. "Even the way you handle things is almost dainty," she would say. "I have a grip——" she arguing then upon the ancient theory that grace is feminine, and uncouthness masculine. But later, in some melting mood, she would exclaim: "I think

strength is always tender. I think the strong, silent men are always kindly," thus puzzling Ted for an understanding of, as it were, where she lived, what was her address anyhow. She was a baffling sister because he expected some kind of consistency.

Young people of her age, even amid circumstances far from unhappy, are wont to be preyed upon by delight in a shallow melancholy and, especially if they come under the spell of an idol whose task in life is the adjustment of wrongs (here, there, or somewhere else), are apt to wear the manner of rebels or martyrs, parrot their idol's phrases, and imagine the silence of their hearers signifies crushing or conversion; and so, unless some other antidotal emotion carries them off they become far less rebels than a kind of ineffectual disturbers of the peace in whatever circle they may move—that is if their circle be neither, on the one hand, crafty in search of ease, nor, on the other, impressionable to claims, without inquiry, just holding up admiring palms and ejaculating "Think of that now! How clever! Oh, isn't that clever!"

Ethel Murray, frankly, did not understand her daughter's "views," but she was willing to believe that they were all in perfect order if only because of the shelves of prizes, the degree, and now the salary accruing from the assistance Mabel was able to give to a man employed upon writing serious books. These were surely sufficient proofs! And Mrs. Murray was not out of the way in coming to this decision, was like ninety-nine out of a hundred of her fellow humans. You will recall how even the unknown Great Poet coming to Dundee to lecture had to have as chairman one recognised as important; for even if you are preaching the value of simplicity you must preach it in Astrakhan-collared coat, or from a motor-car—or who are you to preach a gospel, pray? Mrs. Murray was by no means unusual in her outlook; and Mabel was keeping the flat a-going.

Teddy also looked up to her, wished he had her brains,

her turn for understanding, for getting pat what were, to his simple mind, the unenlightening replies to the confusing questions in text-books and examination papers. He looked on her with admiration for her capacity to remember such facts as: "Neuter nouns of one syllable take *es* in the genitive, and *e* in the dative singular. Nouns composed of a neuter monosyllable, and another substantive, also take *es*," merely by puckering her brows and looking out of the corner of her eyes for a brief space. That, during his school-days, he had dreaded the return on prize-giving day ("Where is your prize, Ted? Oh! Didn't get one!") was neither here nor there. That sort of stinging was in the nature of the beast, her way; he wished she wouldn't be like that—but nevertheless was she awesomely wise. Ted seemed to be of those who imagine that a language is "picked up"; he never applied himself. The rules and regulations and, above all, the exceptions, always made him feel as if his head was full of cottonwool.

It was in a domestic debate on thrift versus extravagance that he had his first ray of hope, and was visited by a hint that even he who cannot tabulate the world may have right to enjoy it; and that to have forgotten what minerals the spectroscope tells us are in Mars need not mean that one has no right to raise one's eyes to the stars and enjoy. (It is a fact that in the period of the Great War many people saw Jupiter for the first time when looking skyward for Zeppelins, thinking that ancient planet was one with, for some reason beyond them to explain, an arc-light attached.) A bunch of daffodils in a florist's in Nethergate led the way to this debate upon thrift and extravagance, the depression of which was lit by that consolatory ray.

It was in the days when he was still lugubrious over the final horror of his father (the smell of vinegar not yet out of the house) that he was brought to a halt by the intriguing trumpets of the daffodils in the window. He

purchased a bunch, carried it home, hoping (once in the street, in full view of man) that no one would think they were for himself. A civilised youth, in a city, carrying daffodils was, he feared (the flowers now in hand waving from the end of the funnel of tissue-paper wrapped lightly round them, the small pins at the top falling out one by one), a subject for chaff if not ridicule. One of his fellows from the office saw him, and hailed him across the street with: "Going to see the wife?" grinned, and closed an eye. Well, that would do. Better a suspicion of an amour with some girl than to be suspected of admiring flowers to the point of purchase! If you knew his environment you would not think him hypersensitive.

His mother's objection to them, or hauteur toward them, was, felt Ted on arrival, soundly based, beyond dispute.

"Look," he said. "Aren't they lovely?"

"Yes. Who are they for?"

"I—I just bought them."

"Oh!"

"Anything wrong, mother?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" she said drily, in a tone that meant that there was something wrong, but that he should not require to have the wrongness indicated.

"There is, mother. What is it?"

"Well, I think you really should not spend money on unnecessary things like flowers. You know you are not in a position to do so."

To be sure Ted had heard his mother talk thus to his father; but the extension to him of these tones was something new. It gave him a sickening feeling of being suddenly grown up. Formerly, if she had cause for objection, she definitely and simply objected. There was a putting him at arm's length in this new method that almost stunned. To be found fault with was one matter, not devastating to the sense of maternal and filial relations; but to be suddenly grown up and simply objected

to—at arm's length—took half the gold out of the daffodils in his hand.

"I thought you would like them," he said.

She slowly turned her head, and, with drooping lids, considered him from the waist downwards.

"I thought they would make the house nicer—the sitting-room—more," he had fallen into a stammering condition, "more—well, cheerful."

"Oh!" and the tone was: "You did! You took it upon yourself to think so, did you?"

"I thought Mabel would like them," he hopefully added.

"That is a different matter," said his mother. "If she cared to buy a bunch of daffodils on the way home there is no objection. I really must impress upon you, Ted, that life is serious; and until a young man pays his way he can't afford luxuries." This was pleasanter, more direct, than mere objection, cause given, instead of estrangement. "Your mother only speaks for your good. You are growing up, and you should try to better your position. Look at how Mabel has applied herself. If you are not careful you will be just a clerk always. If you were really serious you would be practising your shorthand. I tidied away your shorthand books a whole week ago for you—and you have never asked where they are. You don't want to study—anything. And you are old enough to know the benefit of a language. I will say this for your father—that he did apply himself. You don't try at all to improve. At school, of course, you could not know the benefit of study—your mother is very willing to see all excuses—but now——"

"I do read, mother," he interrupted.

It was unfortunate that he had bought the daffodils when Mrs. Murray had been in a mood for crossing bridges before coming to them, worrying about the future.

"You don't read the right things, Ted. Look at that last book you brought from the Library," and she pointed

to a volume of Keats. "I've been looking at it to-day, thinking of you and your future."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's silly! It won't *lead* to anything. I read the verses where you had left a mark—let me see," and she went over and took up the book. "Yes, here it is. I needn't read it all again. I read it once, worrying about the way you waste your time——"

' Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter . . . '

Now, Ted, you know that is just silliness. You can't have an *unheard melody*. Don't you see?" she asked almost plaintively.

He looked at her with a slow upward motion of his head and something of horror in his eyes. Again, from different cause, he felt estrangement. He looked at her not just as his mother, but as a woman who was also his mother.

"Yes, I see," he said.

"Well, now that I've spoken I'm sure you will try to be more serious. I don't want you to think there is anything mercenary about it at all. It is only a question of ways and means, and, well—and fairness to your sister. She has worked very hard, poor girl, and now she is the mainstay of the house—she has obtained really renumeration employment. I think you should leave the buying of flowers to her—if flowers are to be bought at all. Well, now," in a tone gaily kindly, suggesting that she hoped she had said enough to bear fruit, and did not wish to overdo her advice, "we may as well put them in water."

Ted decided to make an attempt to win Mabel's benediction on the daffodils the moment she arrived, and ran upon her, while their mother was in the kitchen, with: "I say, Mabel, I hope you'll not think me extravagant. Mother says I shouldn't have done it, and she is quite right, I know. I know you're the prop of the house——"

"What is it?" she asked, raising her head and making a law-giver's mask of her face, accepting to the full his acknowledgment of her right to ratify or condemn.

"I bought a bunch of daffodils."

"Oh!" she laughed. "Where are they?"

"In the dining-room."

Mabel rustled in. "Lovely," she said. "Beautiful. I wondered what you had squandered on at first. You silly boy! Why, we'll have some in the sitting-room, too. Do you know, Ted, I don't think it is properly realised what an effect upon our lives colour has—brightness of surrounding. When you see in back streets off the Scouringburn, and such places, a little box on the window-ledge with flowers in it, it is an attempt in the right direction. It is the craving, the craving for æsthetic beauty in life, even though the poor people who fitted up the box and gathered the loam for it have never heard the word." She sighed, head sidewise, grey and netted eyes, melting and dreamy, recreating Ingram. With a blink, she inquired: "How much did you pay for them?"

"Twopence each."

"A shilling!" she said. Then, Ted's eyes on her: "Well, that's a shilling's worth of golden cheer!" She broke out in accents so false to his ears that he felt what the Scots call a "grue." The mother entered at this moment and heard her daughter say: "They are charming, Ted, you have the right feeling. To-day at Tay Square there was a whole clump of them on a table in a corner. Anything, anything to get away from the sordid"; this seeming rather for the mother than Ted—or a mere statement in air, to be taken or left. Mrs. Murray shot her daughter a quick glance; and Ted gazed at her in pity, thinking, "she feels all we came through these last years. It has been rotten for her."

There the matter closed, with Mabel sitting down to table very much the head of the house.

But there was needed more than Ted's daffodils to

brighten the home. Its tendency was toward conflict; and much depended upon Mabel's moods. Just when Ted thought her not only altogether clever, but, also, to be admired, there would come some incident that caused his mind to hark back and pause here and there (in something like his father's "cranky morning" fashion) upon earlier incidents in the same key, that made him think: "What a stinging nettle!" And as, when a kid, he had once (in common with the family) cocked up his head and listened, with wonder at its significance, to a new tone in his sister's voice, so had he occasion often now to wonder at her ways and changing manners.

If she frequently puzzled him, he was an acceptor of things as they came to him, without turn for grievances, so much unaware of *arrière pensée* that many times when he might have considered "Stinging nettle!" he quite failed to find reason for the consideration. There was still in him much of the boy who had laughed at Mabel's acting of the shorthand student in the tramcar, when he proposed applying himself to that study, seeing her travesty as funny, instead of realising that there was mockery in her humour. He had not noticed (reverting still to that incident) how the precocious little woman frowned when he laughed; nor did he notice, as time went on, and her skill in wrapping up in laughing comment some sneering raillery increased, how she eyed him thoughtful when he seemed only to see the fun, and miss the gibe. She wondered what lay behind his laugh at such ostensibly humorous remarks, wondered if he were really what she called "clever," and was thus gaining the victory by not giving sign of the cap fitting. This tendency to lack of frankness, in nastiness, is not merely feminine. Nor entirely feminine (if effeminate) the touch of that religious mania (that neurotic affliction fostered by the priesthood) which came to her like the measles, and added to her complexity in the eyes of her uncomprehending brother. She even took (while it lasted) a class

in the Sunday School. Ted looked on amazed. He could not reconcile the thing in his mind, thinking, like many ingenuous and unsophisticated people, that what is taught in churches must be what was said by the Great Original, not cynical enough (shall we say?) to realise that the priests and ministers of to-day might be as much anathema to The Christ as the priests and prophets of His own day. They were three very distinct individuals in that home.

When the proud mother told friends of her daughter's post, and they said "Your son is in business, too, isn't he?" Teddy, conscious of the difference in the spheres to which they went forth from the three-room and kitchen-house (as they describe such small flats in Scotland), would give his whimsical smile, and Mabel would answer for him: "Oh, yes, Ted is quite a man of affairs now. He is in a—" pause, "marmalade—" pause, "factory—" pause, "office!"

"Office," Ted would echo, and laugh.

But, sooner or later, even he must see the frown at his stupidity over such "pleasantries," at his flagrant incapacity to be hurt by a phrase spoken with smiling, elder-sisterly laughing eyes. The mother understood ("Oh, no, I said it with a smile!"), but did not take it upon herself to interpose any maternal "Now, now, Mabel!" After all, Mabel was the chief support of the household in these days.

The daffodil incident gave Ted the jog that would make him understand such remarks, and maybe find the "caps" to fit, despite the sister's apparent sympathy with him in that matter. Even the obtuse Teddy, growing up and learning of the beginning of manhood as he strolled smiling with his hat slightly a-tilt through a very jolly world in which he had defended his mother and just gone on—not stopping to shake hands with himself over the occurrence—a very jolly world of blue mornings with high white clouds, of busy days with the camaraderie of office

life (if of a little too much smutty joke and bawdy story lacking humour), of looking forward to the Saturday afternoons up the river, of being aware that there was something unfathomable, but pleasant, in the faces of the other sex, even the obtuse Teddy now perceived implications as well as statements. At the same time, ingenuous youth, he could not reconcile such nominal pleasantries, once he was aware that they were but nominal, really shrouded nastiness, with the general tenor of the Life of the Founder of the Church, Whose sign (of a crucifix) was, if not on the roof of every place of worship, somewhere about each building, if on no more than a hymn-book cover. And as he progressed in understanding, showed, if by no more than a wilting expression, that the caps fitted, so did his sister progress in offering them.

To the statement of her credo—that she believed in women working—came an addendum (in a voice suggesting "Though, indeed—heigh-ho—that's obvious!"): "But, of course, they *have* to!" and anon, contradictory, anticlimax to the addendum: "Whether they like it or not," followed by a definitely unpleasant little laugh. Teddy knew he had but a paltry thirty shillings a week (with promise of an increase soon) for Mabel's three pounds—but, at the same time, he wondered how so clever a girl as she did not see how illogical she was. If she wanted to be really nasty he could have given her so much better arguments! At any rate, she kept him subdued, though he hopefully considered sometimes that perhaps he only imagined (he well aware of his incompetence, and worried about it) that she intended as "knocks" all that came to him so. She would certainly have told him so had he made protest!

It was over Homer that he had a hard knock of another kind. Though the literary society at the church was much more fond of debate than of literature, and took under its wing such subjects as Free Trade *versus* Protection (these were the *casual* meetings); though,

when it came to mere papers read, as apart from debates, Ella Wheeler Wilcox or Ralph Waldo Trine were its themes (sparse was the attendance), there were still one or two who knew Homer. That was the only service the church ever did him—introducing him to Homer's "wine-dark sea," and the ancient bard's blue and open beginning of things. In a prose translation of the *Odyssey* he revelled; revelled to the vast amusement of Mabel when she discovered what it was he read.

"What do you know about Homer?" she demanded, looking at the book on the table.

His jaw dropped a little.

"I've just begun it," he said.

"Homer! And in a prose translation! Why, it can't be done!" And she launched upon him a causerie on the complexity of Greek accents, occasionally a little doubtful if her account of them would win the full hundred marks; but the dissertation sufficed to bring to Teddy's mobile face the look of one crushed—sad use of learning—and she ended in good English, with another trill of laughter: "This is really too funny!"

The mother did not understand, and held aloof; I mean that she did not understand the subject of discussion. She had neither Greek (like Mabel), nor any sense (like Ted) of that which, in Greek, Homer expressed well enough to bear translation (yea, if even badly) into any tongue. Mabel must be right, for Mabel was very clever, as the prizes testified, so she put in no comment till Ted, recovering from his crushed condition, said: "Well, you needn't put on so much edge about it. And if it's as bad as you say, I should think it would be pathetic instead of funny!"

"Now, now, Ted, what have I taught you about courtesy to women?" said Mrs. Murray, intervening. "And if you're not courteous at home, how will you be outside? It is very conceited of you to set up that way against your sister. She applied herself, and you never have."

"Yes, applied herself to accent!" said Ted, laughing.

A happy home! As surely (being on the subject of irrefutable testimony) did the prizes testify now to Mabel's rightness as did the absence of George Murray from his mother's grave testify—what it testified. For it was at this time, a few months after Murray escaped, if too late escaped, that she died. She was buried in the usual way. "Be married in England, but die in Scotland," says the adage. There was a decent post-mortem forgetfulness of the brandy flask under her pillow, a comment by the officiating cleric on the "testimony of the clasp Bible by the bedside of our dear departed sister in the Lord," and the impression went comfortably adrift through the minds of those who cared to discuss the affairs of others that the fall of George Murray had broken his mother's heart. There was no getting away from the fact, final evidence to flaunt any sad devil's advocate (if it be devil's advocate) that the son was not at his mother's grave. Murray was down—and out—another warning on the evil of strong drink. Had the licensed grocer who delivered the lecture to him upon a coffee-bean but known, here was great matter for head-shaking example from life. What a text for a Band of Hope meeting!

## CHAPTER II

WHEN Professor Ingram, his work upon the housing problem no longer necessitating residence in Dundee (where had been his headquarters for more than a year, interrupted as his work was with lectures that took him away often), asked Mabel to accompany him to Glasgow, a decision was arrived at in private discussion between mother and daughter that Ted should immediately look

for a situation in that city. Ted, informed of the decision, was unpleasant. His lack of ductility was often remarked by both mother and sister.

"I think I should stay here," he said. "I am getting the hang of office-work and learning book-keeping, and soon now I'm to get an increase in salary."

"It would mean leaving you alone," his mother answered.

Mabel read on his face sign of pleasure at the prospect. He desired freedom, she thought. And in gaining, as she considered, freedom for herself, she was not satisfied, but desired suzerainty over Ted. There was inclination toward sex-war in her, doubtless to be expected in the environment of that home; and Ted was a handy and convenient male upon which to whet her inclination.

"Well, I could go into digs," said Ted.

"Yes, I expect so," remarked Mabel with a laugh. "Men have no sense of responsibility. I know what would happen; you would get your advance at the office—perhaps!—and then you would only think of yourself. Oh, I don't complain! It's the way of men. Marry your landlady's daughter very likely!"

The mother looked with hard eyes straight before her.

"Not likely!" cried Ted. "I'm going to work through that office and get into a better one."

"And when you do you'll think only of yourself," prophesied Mabel.

"You wait and see. I'll be able to support mother entirely some day."

"No, you won't—you'll get married instead. I know. Men think only of themselves."

"Well, you need not fling it at me that I do little!"

"When have I flung *that* at you? It's your guilty conscience. I've never breathed such a thing!"

He looked at her long, considering.

"Haven't you!" he broke out. "All your school-days

you had the pleasure of flaunting at me that I never took any prizes. Always you were the gifted one. And now you——”

“Ted! Ted! You should not be rude to your sister,” exclaimed the mother. “She is the only sister you have, and it is very wrong of you to talk so. She is worried a lot, too, and you take everything so lightly.”

“Oh, that’s all right, mother,” said Mabel. “He got up off his wrong side this morning. That’s all!”

“Oh, well,” cried Ted, “let us get back to the beginning of this trouble, please. Mabel has told you then, mother, that I am to go to Glasgow——”

“What do you mean!” blazed Mabel.

“O peace, peace, perfect peace!” sighed Ted. “Let me put it then, without going further back than a minute ago— Mother has told me, a minute ago—just now—we can’t scrap about that!—to say nothing of who posted her to tell me—not to talk of the cabinet meeting at all—mother has just told me that I’m to go, chuck up my job because you are going to Glasgow.”

The mother folded her hands; it was a monetary question, as the main question of life had always been for her. These last years with Murray had proved, in a new way, what she had always thought, that money was the main matter in life. She had had to keep an eye on it, whittle expenses, go careful in these years, especially in the last period, when her husband’s thirty shillings a week and commission seldom came intact into the flat on Saturday. The commission was generally dispersed in bars before he came home.

“I think you had better try to get a situation in Glasgow,” she said. “I will be glad to leave Dundee. I’m always—always,” her lip quivered, “afraid of—— You have never seen him since?”

He glanced at her. So that was it! It was not as he had thought.

“No,” he said, and wondered why she had not to begin

with giving him the crux of her reason for wishing to leave. Perhaps she felt it too deeply.

"I had hoped," she continued, "that perhaps he would go abroad and start afresh. Your Uncle Jack has not heard anything of him in town, and he used to speak a lot about going abroad at one time."

"Look here, mother, are *you* going with Mabel?"

"I'll have to," she replied. "You see, dear, Mabel has applied herself and is the mainstay."

Ted stood tapping his teeth with thumb-nail. Odd! That was a trick of his father's when thinking. Then he put hands in pockets and with legs apart, brow puckered, stood staring at the floor.

"I wish you would not stand that way," said his mother, testily.

"Stand this way? Why not?" he asked, brought out of his considerations.

"Oh, never mind," she answered, tossing her head.

"Father used to stand like that," said Mabel.

He immediately came erect, brought feet easily together.

"I'm sorry, mother. Yes—I had better come with you, seeing you feel that way about him," for he had reconstructed the terrible scene of the wrestling bout, and realised that his mother must often have known a bravely unspoken dread of the father's arrival during another similar lapse, the honourable intention of the separation paper forgotten in a maniac's (or as good as maniac's) disordered whim to kill his best-beloved. He might turn up in Glasgow; no one knew where he was.

"Yes, I'll begin the hunt right away," Ted promised, very definite, eager. "I'll order Glasgow papers to-day and hunt through the 'Situations Vacant' columns."

The hunt was successful. By the time Mabel had to follow Ingram to his headquarters in Glasgow Ted had found a billet there as, nominally, senior clerk—senior signifying rank, not age!—in a manufacturer's warehouse,

the well-known Moir's of Glassford Street. Such positions in these offices offer themselves. The junior clerk or office-boy is serving apprenticeship and passes into the warehouse when his preliminary year in the counting-house is over. When the senior clerk leaves a new-comer may step into his place without, therefore, any flaunting of the unwritten law of precedence; and so, in response to his reply to an advertisement in the *Herald*, Ted was invited to step.

It was in the echoing vestibule of the "Caly" station that, one morning, he saw, suddenly close upon him in the crowds, his father. Ted was by now slightly under the influence of what Andrew Lang called the "if only" mood of youth from which his sister had never really recovered. He looked on at the meeting; he saw what he esteemed the drama in it; and he was flattered by the air of man to man with which his father, bearing down upon him, extended his hand saying, "Hullo, my boy."

There were other emotions, and one was of not wishing to touch the old man's hand! He did not know why—it was instinctive. The touch repelled. There was something unpleasant in it. Ted immediately felt all on his mother's side, very chivalrously and purely. Murray was markedly dapper, silk umbrella-ed, spatted, a hint on the loud side; but his hand, in Teddy's, felt puffy. He had developed pouches on his jaws—well-shaven jaws, however. Still the man to man air did much to give a suggestion of oneness of some kind. Also it was flattering to the youth, however genuine.

"How are you, dad?"

"So-so! I go up, I come down, I go up again." He glanced at his son's hand. "I see you are smoking a cigarette—take my tip and try a pipe. A chap in an office I was in told me he chucked cigarettes and got over a fagged feeling he used to have once. Please yourself, my boy; that's by the way—just a friendly tip. You look as if you are going into business."

"I am. I'm working in Glasgow now."

"Good. Very good. Congenial?"

"Oh, I don't know. I like it in a way. I thought of going into a newspaper office, but—well. I had to do something."

His father gave one of those little expelling sniffs just as of yore; the absurd little mannerism seemed to link past and present! His brow furrowed for a moment. "Yes, yes. Quite. How are you all at home?"

Ted surmised that Murray had taken it for granted that he was in Glasgow alone. "Last I heard, very well," he answered, for despite his father's grooming his was not the face of a gentle saint.

"Mabel ruling the roast now, I suppose?" asked the old man with an inimitable twinkle, ingratiating, pawky.

The boy was interested in the coolness of it, but the twinkle won him over. It became a searching twinkle, and he nodded. "Yes," he admitted.

"Thought she would," said Murray, tapping his boot with the ferrule of his furred umbrella. "I have always been a judge of character, though I mighty seldom directed things as that knowledge advised. What sort of job have you?"

"Manufacturer's office."

"Oh!" Murray tapped his son's shoulder. "Take my tip—go abroad. This island is a narrow-gauge sort of place, sort of minuetting instead of striding. But I am glad you are on your own bottom, as they say in the shipping-offices. Mother well?" he suddenly jerked out.

Ted looked at him, wondering how he felt—what it all seemed like to him. He nodded again in the affirmative. As there was a pause he said, "Are you all right?" with a thought in the background of how dramatically droll it was for father and son to be thus chatting.

"Yes. Got an interesting billet just now. I'm writing advertisements of a nostrum in French, Spanish, Italian. Found a use at last for my languages," and his face went

grim. He peered at the boy. He seemed to be looking in his face for something. What he said, after that searching glance, was cryptic to Ted: "No. You seem to have a face pretty much your own. Good-bye, my boy," and he shot out his hand. There was a quick grasp, he wheeled smartly, went swinging away.

Looking after him, Ted considered that it was not merely because the man was his father that it was easy to follow that figure through the moving crowd. How the back haunted! It had a character, or was it a brand? A hint of some kind of demonic possession in its swing, it seemed to Ted—of diablery, or of abandon—made him feel that he had done right in conveying the impression that his mother was not in Glasgow. He looked like a man who might "break out."

Ted could not forget his father all that day. What had made his mother marry him? What had she seen in him, in that way? And yet, he had not always been like this; Ted recalled an earlier father. But he recalled also how his mother had once told him that she had married his father with a view to reforming him. Perhaps he had, then, all along been shaping toward what he was now. Yet she must have loved him. He registered a belief that if a man could not of himself, before marriage, make himself at least somewhat worthy of a woman's love he had better, if he cared for her at all, efface himself from her.

These thoughts, and thoughts out of them, were in his mind all day, and brought him home reserved in the evening. His sister was generally home first, her work-day in the library of the celebrated sociologist ending with the cup of afternoon tea which she drank with him as token, from him, that she was there not in a menial capacity. It was a highly flattering post. Her earlier religious tendency had of late developed into a tendency toward talking, in a confused way, of telepathy, auras, table-turning, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, haunted

houses; and smiling patronisingly upon her mother's foolish way of, when she talked to friends about these matters, going on to speak of *her* belief that when a picture fell it signified something—vague—occult—as though there were any connection!

Mabel believed that she was (and maybe was) a character-reader. In an evil moment another intense girl, who dabbled in a spurious palmistry, told her that she possessed a psychic sense, and she was wont to test its strength upon Teddy, try to discover what he was thinking about. It was often very easy, needing no psychic aid, for he was a most open young man. To-night she was puzzled.

"What is our Ted thinking of?" she asked at supper.

He looked up. "Nothing," he answered, and shook his head.

She laughed.

"Professor Ingram and I were discussing to-day over tea whether the mind of any rational being was ever empty," she said.

"Oh, but I'm not a rational being," he replied, and smiled as he put his napkin on the table.

"Isn't he getting grown-up ways?" she said, head on side, and looking to the mother for confirmation. "I do think it is funny how boys in business imitate their elders. When they sit down to meals they do this," she shot her arms out in front of her, "and when they are finished they sit back like this, and put their napkin down like this—oh, quite definitely—young men of initiative—or imitation is it?" and she smiled at him. "I do think men are grandiose creatures."

The corners of Teddy's lips puckered in a smile; but sitting back, chin tucked down in his neck-tie, watching Mabel across the table, his eyes presented to her a hint that he was now having new thoughts. Even a stranger, one who had never seen him before, might have guessed so much by glancing at the youth. But his sister had

to bring in this superior psychic sense; she was plumbing him—with that—she thought. When they passed into the sitting-room Ted, still meditative, spraddled his legs, if not in the centre of the hearthrug, at least on it, and, with his back to the fire, stared at the carpet. A little irritated at the baulking of her psychic sense, Mabel exclaimed: "Have you no sensitiveness at all, Ted, to stand like that? You know mother doesn't like it."

"Sorry," he said, and glanced at his mother, whose head drooped, while there came, at the daughter's remark, an expression of infinite sadness to her face. He walked to the window. The day had been a typical Glasgow day for the season, with open enough, if not hilariously lit, skies overhead and greasy pavements underfoot—a day neither one thing nor another.

"He is like his father," said Mrs. Murray, shaking her head, observing the little splashes of mud upon his calves.

Perhaps it was because he was in his histrionic period, or perhaps it was because he had communed to himself: "But if she loved him she would not object to such resemblances," that he no longer kept his secret.

"I saw him to-day," he rapped out abruptly.

Mabel had a jump of pleasure. If her psychic sense, second-sight, or whatever it was, had not dug that out, she had, at any rate, known he was thinking of something, as the Scots say, "by-ordinary." She had to proclaim her knowledge.

"I knew there was *something!*" she said.

Ted looked at her again, curiously.

"You saw him?" asked the mother.

"Why didn't you tell us at once?" demanded Mabel.

"I thought," said Ted, "that it might worry mother." Mabel eyed him carefully; she seemed to detect a dryness in his accent.

"Did you speak to him?" she asked.

Now he, too, like his father, like most, had a part of

his make-up which on occasion, under anything like catechism, was apt to prompt a baffling response—as one might say, “If catechism is your forte I can give you occupation.”

“We had quite a long chat,” he told them, jauntily.

His sister weighed him. His mother slowly turned her head to look at him newly, as, from time to time, in the phases of their children’s growth, most parents, for some cause or another, have to take a revised view of the queer things, not themselves, that they have given birth to.

“What did you talk about?” said Mrs. Murray.

“He was mainly interested in what I was doing and how I was getting on.”

“I was always his favourite,” Mabel declared. “The girl is the father’s favourite, the boy the mother’s. That is a mere matter of eugenics.”

“Is that so?” asked Ted. “Of course, I know nothing of eugenics,” and he looked at his mother.

Mabel’s “psychic” sense for this sort of thing made her bring out: “A jealous little boy!” followed suddenly by the melting glance, lest he should close up clam-like if thus treated, and tell no more—and she was curious to hear. “Didn’t he say anything about mother?” she questioned.

“He asked how she was.”

“And what did you say?” Mrs. Murray inquired.

“He asked if you were well, and I just nodded. He asked how you were, Mabel.”

“Oh. What did he say about me?”

“He said, ‘Mabel, I suppose, is ruling the roost?’—or ‘roast,’ I forget which.”

She had a flicker of a look of pleasure, there, and gone. “And what did you say?” she wanted to know, her face grave.

“Oh, the obvious,” said Ted.

He turned to his mother, and she struck him as a tragic figure. He thought that his sister was often far from

"decent" to her, as he called it. She looked worried, harassed.

"What did you say?" repeated Mabel.

He glanced back to her with an expression of, "Still there? Still talking?" His head came up a little in response to the high, demanding toss of hers, and—"Why, the truth, of course," he said.

"Come, Teddy" exclaimed the mother. "Don't worry your sister. It is too serious a matter. Tell her what you said."

"I said 'yes,' of course," he responded. "What else could I say?"

"How dare you! How dare you!" cried Mabel, and clenching her hands where she sat she beat a tattoo with them on the arms of the chair. She could have wept at the injustice of it. To rule she loved—but she was forced by Fate to rule! She abruptly ended the tattoo, and her hands were hooked, like talons.

"Oh, Ted!" reproved his mother. "You shouldn't have said that. And it wasn't true!"

At that statement, Mabel's gaze turned slowly to Mrs. Murray.

"My dear Mother," said Ted, "I hold no brief for my father. I know, not only from what I have seen, but from what you have told me, of the terrible, terrible life he gave you. But I am hanged if I see the sense in carrying on this pretence——"

"Pretence?" asked Ethel Murray, her eyes angry.

"Yes. This united family nonsense."

"What do you mean?" said they both.

He looked at his sister. "Mabel knows what I mean," he said.

And that was the end of it, except that thereafter Ted was favoured with a kind of hauteur from his mother, and a stony flaunting, a monosyllabic aridity from his sister. He could not have explained it easily to anyone. One ventures the thought that if he had tried to explain

it, say to his father, George Murray might have said: "I know. I know, my boy." But to gain the sympathy of a drunkard is no high ambition.

## CHAPTER III

"I HOPE you have found pleasant rooms," said Professor Josiah Ingram to his secretary, over tea, tapping—as was his habit—with the spoon upon the lump of sugar in his cup, not stirring.

Rooms, quoth he—rooms. Ah, if he but knew!

"Yes, thank you," she answered, and her gaze was pensive and saint-like upwards—got at by a kind of rolling of the eye and fixing of the gaze.

If he but knew! If he but knew that his secretary was, if not the mainstay of an aged mother, at least of an elderly mother (parents always being older than their children, the prefix seems gratuitous), how he would admire! Rooms, indeed. No, there was no real freedom for her, she sadly considered. For still did she remain a clashing arrangement even to herself. She desired a world such as is not, a world in which the adage "You cannot eat your cake and have it too" would be an imbecile one, simply not so. She had her wish of being self-supporting, her wish of being of more consequence than Ted, though that she had always been to the point of surfeit, yet she craved pity from somewhere, anywhere, for being forced into the world where one has to work for a living. She inherited from her mother, or had, of herself, let us say (knowledge of what is called heredity being very fumbling), a passion for pity; and while she talked much of the emancipation of women from samplers and recipe-books she was beginning to doubt if she had chosen the better part.

She had visions of herself adored by the not impossible he. Yet, in college-days, she had joined the Old Maids' Club—of girls in their teens—really a young maids' club; and here in Glasgow she encountered, and accepted an invitation to visit, one of the members—a radiant, smiling mother of three. Mabel envied her. And after a visit, during which she googled extremely over the baby (first to the mother's pleasure, anon to her pity, and finally to her disgust), she harboured a grudge against the friend who had so shamelessly forgotten the Society's pledge. "You remember the O.M. Club?" she had asked. "Oh, yes. We were silly flappers, weren't we?"

Mabel would have been annoyed had Ted been the mainstay of the home; yet she had a snorting manner toward him over his lowly occupations and his apparent contentment as a clerk—for, though he was not contented, he had no grouch, was hopefully discontented, cheerfully and not despondently so. When he announced, after hints of her contempt, his hope of "getting on," in his jolly way, she seemed to wish to dash his dreams, she who a moment ago had complained that he had none, by telling him in plaintive tones: "Ah, the markets are crowded with labour. Life is the survival of the fittest. Application is necessary. The world is hard on mere youthful hope." She looked so sad over this statement that Ted thought it her deep view, and depressing to her, and strove to cheer her, saying that some day he would be able to look after both her and their mother.

"Oh, my dear boy!" she exclaimed, "I don't want that. Do you think I could ever be happy as a dependent?" And thus she eased him, adding in a way that he took no umbrage at, but was hurt by: "Though your suggestion is—well—too funny!"

The reason that he did not take umbrage was to be found in the fact that she seemed to him upset. He felt there was something behind—what, he did not know.

Maybe she was upset, for soon after the removal to Glasgow there was a queer scene one evening of which Ted knew nothing. Mabel came home before him, as usual, arriving lax, drooping, with an air of lassitude. The mother made some comment on her fatigued appearance, and the daughter suddenly, at that sympathetic remark, drawing off her gloves with a tug of submission to the dreariness of things, sat plucking them and stretching them between her hands, lip trembling.

"Whatever is it, Mabel?" Mrs. Murray asked.

"Nothing," Mabel quavered, and then began to sob: "Oh, you wouldn't understand. But all the time in Dundee he never mentioned his wife. I suppose there was no reason why he should, but—oh, I don't know! I can't explain! I think she isn't—she isn't interested in him. She's been away touring the world, and visiting relatives in Australia."

"Yes, yes, yes. Did you see her?"

"Ye-yes."

"Then wasn't she nice to you, dear?"

"Oh, yes. Quite," sobbed Mabel. "We had lunch all together to-day. She gave me this. It's a bu-bu—a cartridge-case with the bullet out and turned into a paper-knife."

Ethel Murray felt a sudden anxiety for her daughter's post, not because she gathered that the returned Mrs. Ingram disliked the secretary that her husband employed (there was no such suggestion), but because of the gift of the paper-knife, which meant the cutting of something. Still, it was a paper-knife only, not even a cake-knife, the blade inset being of ivory or bone. So she had hope.

"There, there, there," she said. "You're tired."

"I believe I am," agreed Mabel, and broke out sobbing afresh.

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Murray, sternly.

Mabel stopped abruptly and looked up at her mother

with sudden anger, complaining: "You shouldn't speak like that. I can't explain, but you don't understand."

"My dear, I only spoke harshly because it's the way to stop such tears."

"Oh!" wailed Mabel, and at that acknowledgment of kindly intention returned to her tears, and sniffed on until she decided that she was behaving foolishly; then dried her eyes, plucked with her finger at her lip for a few seconds as if thinking it over, and went away to wash, leaving the mother to contemplate the fact that she might some day marry. Well—she would doubtless marry a person of means, the kind of man who would take her mother, too, under his wing. Or perhaps Ted, by then, would be earning more.

Mrs. Murray felt, at any rate, more indebted to Mabel than formerly she had ever felt.

As for the visitors who came to the house to cheer it, the mother provided but few. Feeling the lack of friends she joined a neighbouring church so as to have converse with her kind. But the callers who came by degrees were (apart from the parson; or the visiting deacon upon whose beat, or district, the Murrays lived; or an old woman now and then with talk of ministers, and serving maids, and the weather, and illness, but what a nice man Mr. Somebody-or-Other was, "with such a fine way at a conversazione—you must come to our next conversazione") the callers who eventually were frequent visitors were all of Mabel's procuring.

Ted made no friends, an acquaintance or two; but none of these did he ever invite to his place of residence. With one or another of them he now and then had country walks, south by Cathcart Braes, or north by Bearsden—vulgar fellows these, as Mabel recognised by phrases he came by from them. She used to like, if he had been out all a Saturday afternoon, to say: "You weren't out alone to-day. You were out with one of your warehouse friends."

"I was, as a matter of fact. How do you know?" he asked one day.

"Oh, I know! I can sense things." The sensing was not psychic, whether she thought so or not. It was a very simple sensing—or really a very simple observing, for Ted was no opaque person, and he was also one who quickly took on accents or mannerisms from those he met. "I know by your gestures," she acknowledged this evening, when he seemed not easily teased.

"Do I take on other people's gestures?" he naïvely inquired.

"Take them on!" she ejaculated, laughing. "Why, anyone could tell when you had been out for a walk with somebody else. It would be obvious to the least discerning."

His naïveté sped.

"Then it isn't due to your psychic sense, second-sight, and so forth," he murmured—and that time she got angry instead of Ted.

Properly approached, he would willingly have acknowledged that perhaps the warehouse fellows were vulgar—but what of it! And he was not properly approached. The unseen warehouse friends, with whom occasionally he went into the country, were simply damned at a venture by his sister, wherefore he the more strongly came to consider vulgarity trivial beside snobbery. Actually they were makeshift friends to him, merely much better than (to Ted) the horrible old women, and more horrible young and middle-aged ones, that his mother and sister brought home—but makeshift all the same. Of reading, that meant so much to him, they were heedless. Two or three songs of Burns', a novel by Dickens, a novel by Scott, practically exhausted their talk in the direction of books—and was only ever entered into, a-walking with him, in an obliging sort of way. The cashier was an exception—a man called Caird, with a tendency to drop classic tags (not in Latin nor French;

he had fortunate limits that way) in his speech, in a quite taking manner. But with him, Ted being so immediately under his captaincy, there was a certain restraint in intercourse, though one Saturday he accompanied Caird to a picture show in Sauchiehall Street, and astonished that good man by his knowledge of whence came the quotation-titles of many of the pictures. "Man, you are a reader, are ye? Fine, man! 'Reading maketh a full man.'"

As for Mabel's friends—they came to the house chiefly on Saturday afternoons (first and third), friends of her student days, now in Glasgow, or friends again of these. Their talk was mostly of the high mentality of women, of their capacity to do everything better than men. In more genial mood they would speak of their college days in gushing accents, or, with much laughter, mimic and mock at some lecturer or professor—though, to be sure, when several were gathered together this last pastime was apt to lead to asperities, to pursing of lips, to a curious blinking of eyes one to another, to hauteur, and to a delivery of speech as if the speaker addressed more the tip of her own nose than the person for whom her words were intended; this because each of them held her own pet scholiast immune from derision.

In most genial mood they would give advice to each other on what to ask for to read at the library—those books that make some people happy for an hour, and that such folks have in mind when, in their conceited way, they declaim: "I like a book that makes *people* happy"; the kind of books that depress other people—for the sake of the devourers. They demanded a certain cogging even in their so-called "happy stories," what is termed the sentimental fallacy. The author had to play Judas at the essential places. It must be the dickered, not the honest book of "romance." And when they came to the nominally "realistic"—ah, then! The perennial catch-penny novel with a (ahem!) purpose—the novel to "expose"—

such as a certain sensation-exploiting type of the clergy loves to tout—set them afire, running one to the other advising an immediate perusal, hectic, excited, a-slobber.

They were all earning their own living—proud of doing so, and feeling hard-done-by for having to; all had a grouch, but none of them faced the cause of the grouch with stoic smile, cheerful about it. Miss Renfield was a kindergarten teacher; Miss Allinson taught music (a frightfully one and two person, who, in her concert seat, beat time for Pachmann, counted aloud when he took French leave, audibly shuddered); Miss Gordon, the best of the bunch, had a secretaryship somewhere; Miss Bath, with the pince-nez and focused glitter, was studying chemistry. Another, Catherine Hope—a girl a little younger than Mabel—called but once, on Mabel's pressing invitation, but never again. On that solitary visit she soon turned to talk with Ted, selecting him, to his sister's annoyance; and at the door, on leaving, said:

"I like your brother. He's a jolly kid. I didn't know you had a brother."

"Isn't he a dear boy!" answered Mabel, melting-eyed.

This resuscitated friend looked at her keenly at that, yet with a hint of pity. It was as if she said, "There but for the grace of joy in the colour of the world go I——" and departed, terribly depressed by the "queer freaks . . . can't believe I ever chummed with or knew any of them!" And they, when Mabel returned from speeding that guest, amused themselves by discussing her loose and flowing garb, and laughing over her hat, one with a scarf bound round it which really was (as they knew all the while) most becoming to her.

Ted, passing fresh tea, kept his own counsel, for the guest who had made such a brief and formal call was a revelation to him, as an angelic visitant.

"Well, Ted," said Mabel a little later, "what's taken you? You look like a dying duck in a thunderstorm."

He blushed, and all laughed, save the one with the

glittering pince-nez, who looked at him with steely annoyance. They passed on to discuss the blindness of men, and how any woman, if she care to efface her real self and act a part, can marry whom she will. They hated the unwarped and happy Catherine Hope. Mrs. Murray sat aside, pleasantly smiling when there was laughter, looking meditative when there was none, occasionally asking a guest if she were comfortable—wouldn't rather sit here?—or have a cushion?—no?—quite comfortable?—then subsiding again.

At these social gatherings her usage was to follow a policy of aloofness, to protect herself by being melancholy. To Ted's mind it seemed that she was cavalierly treated, was (so he conceived it) indecently ousted by his sister. When he could escape he did, to stroll in the park and watch the swans till the women would be gone. To-day he remained, interested, and with a rising indignation. The girl who had come in from another world seemed to have left him with some belief in himself. He did not beat a retreat, remained till all had departed, and while Mabel was ushering out the last he turned to his mother.

"Why don't you pour out the tea, mother," he said, "when people come? Why do you always take a back seat?"

"That's all right, dear," she replied with a pensive, sidewise cast of her head, accepting his pity for her slighted state—which further roused him and made him, on his sister's return from speeding the parting guest, exclaim:

"Look here, Mabel, you might let mother be a bit more the hostess. After all, she is the head of the house, and you absolutely shut her up."

Mabel looked from brother to mother, her firm hands closed.

"Oh, Teddy, that's all right!" cried Mrs. Murray. Her manner changed now that her daughter had returned. "They are Mabel's friends. You should not interfere."

Mabel flounced away to write some letters, an occupation that held her till supper-time. Over supper she seemed to have her mind full of private thoughts; when she spoke her voice was her natural hard voice, not the rippling one for exterior use, and for use at home only on "At Home" days, or when visitors called. Ted, the meal over, felt no inclination to go out. With a book in hand he meditated upon the guest who was so different from the rest. He recalled the hang of her gown, staring at the page but not reading. He could see her eyes still, eyes that in their friendliness did not suggest a stratagem—like a hay-cock hiding a machine-gun. He bit his lip suddenly, and wilted over a thought that bobbed up, remembering her voice—"Perhaps it is affected, like Mabel's, and now at home it may be quite different." He wished such a suggestion would not pop up; it was none of his making!

Mrs. Murray entered with some sewing and sat down. Mabel followed, strident now in her movements, in an angular mood, and ruffled about the room; opened the doors of the chiffonier as if looking for something, closed them with a jar, ruffled away, returned and wrenched the doors open again, smote them shut, then turned her head as she marched forth to glare at Ted and deliver the thin end of the glare upon her mother. She was aware that Ted's detachment was fairly strong, and not occasioned only by determination not to rouse what might be trouble by asking her what all the din was for. Psychic sense, or character study, she guessed that her brother was thinking of that friend who, on leaving, had so sweetly, but clearly, shown that the house and the set were impossible for her. She was half minded to say more in the "dying duck" vein, almost brought out: "Is Ted sammy over the pretty Cathy?" but did not do so.

Ted glanced at his mother. She stitched on, silent, lips close, expression of martyrdom upon her. But he said nothing. It was as if Mabel would fain exorcise

the pleasant tarrying spirit of that charming acquaintance of hers.

Later, still flouncing, she was in evidence, her reading or writing in the dining-room over, now employed upon the duty known as "locking up"—a duty which in Dundee had been Mrs. Murray's, but which the daughter had taken over here. It was maybe a mere nothing, but to Ted (under the belief, or delusion, as the case might be, that his mother was scurvily treated by his sister) the sound of the front-door key being noisily turned, and the ramping tread of the locker-up, were challenges. He lowered his book, that had only been part read, part used as a bulwark, and—

"Listen to her!" he said. "She's the boss. It's not right for her to boss you the way she does."

Mrs. Murray shook her head and sighed. Mabel rustled and thumped again across the hall. She could be heard in her other voice (or one of her voices) giving some order to the maid. Ted looked again at his mother, and her whole pose, and crestfallen aspect, demanded the paladin in him to arise. His sister came into the room, and as if neither were there swept to the window and drew the blind aside to see to the closing.

"Have we to go to bed now?" asked Ted.

For this had she waited. For this had she banged the chiffonier doors, rasped the key in the lock—to get her brother to say something that would give her opening for action, as Shakespeare pictured the ruffler longing for anybody to bite a thumb at him.

"I notice you don't offer to do it for me," she said. "The man sits at ease; the woman is the menial."

"Oh, I'll do it with pleasure," he answered, leaping to his feet. "I was under the impression that locking up was one of the duties of the boss—one of the signs of chiefdom."

"Ted, Ted," murmured Mrs. Murray, "don't look for trouble."

That was not quite definite enough for Mabel. "Don't *make* trouble," it should have been, for here there was inference that the mother still sat upon the fence.

"Well," she said, turning scathingly on Ted, "you are a petty character. Your imagination runs away with you. I wonder what my friend that you looked on with such sentimental eyes would think of you if she heard you now!"

That was meant to sting, but it didn't. Ted's mind was taken up with the consideration that he knew not where he was. His mother's changes—one moment accepting his sympathy, next gently declining it—nonplussed him. Well, perhaps he was petty; perhaps he imagined that Mabel domineered over their mother.

"I expect you want to be head of the house!" said Mabel.

"Lord, no!" He laughed at the notion. "That is a responsibility beyond me. I don't want to be head of anything. All I said some hours ago, and you've been grinding your teeth over, was that you seem to shove mother to the side, and I don't think you should."

"No, no, my dear boy. I'm not shoved to the side!"

"Oh! Oh, well— Oh, well, if you don't feel it——"

"There you are," cried Mabel. "Imagination. Simply imagination."

And as one word of his mother's cancelled another Ted conjectured that maybe his sister was right. After all, these two seemed to understand each other. But the flaunting tones in Mabel's voice did not make him succumb easily from his *rôle* of protector of the meek.

"One thing I did notice when your friends were here to-day," he said, "was that Miss Gordon had to turn to me twice, once to say, 'Poor you!' and another time, 'The mere man is having a hard time.'"

"Oh, I see! It's not mother! It's yourself! You imagine *you* are not properly treated!" She gave her

rippling laugh. "Nelly Gordon said that, did she? That boresome thing!"

Ted stared in amazement at a fresh inexplicability; for if ever his sister had admirer of her cleverness, Nelly Gordon was admirer. That was all he saw.

But Mabel had other views. She thought that Nelly made use of her when bored, came so regularly to visit on the "afternoons" because she had not many friends in Glasgow; suspected the lurking snob in Nelly (for all her evident admiration), and believed that if more sumptuous doors opened to her, her visits here would be secondary. Again—she suspected that Nelly had no distaste for Ted, was glad to see him too; and she disliked such divided interest in visitors. She knew that Nelly had admiration for her; but it was part of her, if admired, to be distant. Not that admiration was a snap of the fingers to her. That would have been a different story altogether. She inveigled it by her charm. But when anyone was drawn to her the story was not then over—in a happy ending. The poet has sung, "I cannot be content with love upon a mortal lease." Mabel could not be contented with simple friendship and affection; she had to put worshippers to the test, be distant, demanding pursuit. Hers was a tangled personality—irritating to herself even. She had a temperament, as it were, on edge. The more unsophisticated brother, glad in the sunlight and in pleasant airs, and in easy converse, knew nothing of all this prickliness of nature—nurtured by her instead of clipped.

"I simply don't understand you," said he.

"We know that," she responded.

"I thought she was a friend of yours," he persisted.

No, he could not understand. He had thought his mother called for defence, if not vocally, as clearly and more poignantly than with speech, it seemed, in her whole bearing. He did not understand. He did not understand his mother; he did not understand his sister; and anon

He was to discover that he did not understand Nelly Gordon, whom he thought of as the best of the bad bunch, the only one who, that afternoon, had not been at all keen on the vindictive merriment over Catherine Hope, the almost stranger. Nelly was more appreciable to him now, because of her quiet, bored expression while that rending was in progress. Certainly he was puzzled with the average feminine view (as the feminine view was presented to him) of the amenities of life.

The truth was that clear-sighted Mabel had well realised the facing-both-ways attitude of Mrs. Murray, was annoyed with her for accepting Ted's sympathy, for being in both camps. The truth was that Mabel had much of the mother's skill in indicating when a turn of events was unpleasing. She would not say, but she would hint until the hinting was maddening. It would appear, during the following days, that all the result of Ted's attempt to bring about a better treatment of the mother was to increase Mabel's determination to be unpleasant—till the lesson she had to teach would be learnt. So the position looked to him; but then he had been informed that he imagined the strained relations.

He retired into himself. He forced himself to think that his sister's fault-finding of the next days, and his mother's subdued acceptance of it, was, to them, "quite all right." He opined that thus women were with each other, their way, but to him it seemed an inexplicable blend of purr and scratch. He recalled a street-scene in Dundee—it was as if it had some connection. Up a back street, passing by, he had seen a man and woman at fisticuffs—the woman of the shawl over head instead of hat order, the man of the hands under belt and scowling type—the one flailing, the other scratching. Ted going west, and a young man coming east, upon the main road to which this wynd was tributary, stopped on the cobbles between pavement and pavement crossing, and looked in horror at the bout. Ted was on the point of running to

aid the woman when the young man who had also been brought to a standstill by the glimpsed shindy, said: "Don't you do it, old man. Don't interfere. Leave them." "But we can't," said Ted.—"Take my tip," said the other. "I once ran in to stop one of these rows, and I got both on to me. I know a little of the art of self-defence, too, but the woman clawed hold of me behind while the man lammed me in front." A policeman suddenly appearing put the two to flight, together, in a kind of bloody harmony. Ted was sorry that the scene jumped up in his mind now; he told himself that it was absurd of it to pop up so.

But at any rate he stayed in his corner of the triangle which was home, or which was the algebraic symbol for this united family. He was a kind of Brer Rabbit, lying low after his lesson; and if there was no great sign of affection in the next days, there was no uproar about anything. Things were, indeed, running so comparatively easily again that when, on the following Saturday (not an "at home" one) Ted saw his sister dressed for departure as to make a call, he ventured to voice—or less ventured (the wheels running fairly well) than simply voiced a reminder to her.

"Going out?"

"Yes."

"Didn't I hear Miss Gordon say that she was coming here this Saturday?"

He remembered it quite clearly, for Nelly Gordon appeared to him, as has been noted, as the best of the lot. Her last words to Mabel had been: "Are you working next Saturday?" and on Mabel saying she was not: "I shall be out this way next Saturday," Nelly Gordon had said, "May I come up and see you?" Ted seemed still to hear Mabel's "Delighted, dear." It was that "dear" which made the more queer to him the pronouncement that Nelly Gordon was a "boresome thing."

"Nelly Gordon runs after me," declared Mabel,

straightening her hat. "When she comes you can tell her to follow me to the Allinsons'. I don't think she particularly cares for them, but if she is so frightfully sweet on me she can come there to see me. You can tell her I quite forgot I'd promised to go there."

With that she departed, and an hour later Nelly Gordon arrived. When she was ushered in Ted delivered his version of the message.

"Mabel said I was to tell you she was sorry she'd forgotten about an appointment she had at the Allinsons', and I was to ask you if you would go on there."

Nelly's sensitive nostrils dilated. She looked for a moment as if she had been slapped. Ted remained standing.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. His brows lifted, and she laughed. "I may as well have a rest before going to the Allinsons'—I can't say they attract me very much. Vinegar and honey I can understand, but sheer vinegar—pooh!" and she made a wry face. "I can't think what your sister sees in Sally Allinson."

He had a smile at this confirmation of his private opinion, although it was unexpected, coming from one whom he had merely looked upon as one of the bevy, one of the bunch, albeit perhaps the best of the bad lot.

"They can wait," she said. "Is your mother not in? You will be having tea, won't you?" then she added: "Even if you have orders to wait till they come home," and she looked at him to see how he took that extreme remark.

"Mother has gone out to see someone or other herself," he replied.

"Oh! Well, you'll be having tea?" she pressed the matter. "I think you might be courteous enough to ask me if I don't want some refreshment, for it's the hour of tea. Oh, don't look like that! Please understand that I'm not vinegar—at least I hope not. You are too courteous."

He rang the bell, and having rung passed into the hall to meet the maid half-way and ask for tea.

"There you are," Nelly said, laughing, when he returned. "One more sign of what I say. I do get so angry when I see you passing the tea, and the sandwiches, *and* the cake"—she seemed to have a contempt for sandwiches, an increasing contempt for cake—"and all unruffled listening to our illogicalities. I suppose you think to yourself that we jump about like fleas; at one moment 'a woman should work,' at the next 'it is a crying shame that she has to work.' I gather," she continued, with a little nod of her head and a smile, looking at him under her brows, "that poor Teddy is not the chief money-maker."

"No," he answered, lugubrious. "As a matter of fact, I'm not."

"As a matter of fact!" she brought out. "As a matter of inference! How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty."

"Oh. Well, that's all right—you can't eat your cake and have it too," said Nelly gaily. "There, I don't think that proverb exactly fits. What I mean is, that if your sister is going to pose as the self-sacrificing saint, and going to get all the pity for being so, and all the admiration for being so, well then—don't you see?—it is only right that she should be what she gets all the pity and admiration for being. I hope you follow me?"

"I do!" said Ted, but frowning and a trifle worried, looking here and there on the carpet as if its pattern would decide for him whether this sort of arraignment of a member of his family should not, somehow, be stopped. He was doubtful if it was altogether as it should be to let an outsider thus into the family sanctuary—or non-sanctuary for that matter.

The daylight was waning. The maid, having carried in the tea, did not come back later to light up, having

her own coy or sympathetic views regarding the gloaming.

"I must get a light," he exclaimed.

"Don't worry. This will do. I suppose I shall have to go down to the Allinsons' some time. Do you know what I think? I don't know if you will understand—I don't think you're involved enough for that sort of thing." In the shadows of the room the highest light was the oval of her face, and he was just aware of her eyes. "I think your sister is very much a woman. She likes to be admired. I've admired her—and she knows it. The funny thing is that I keep running after her, even though she does not always treat me nicely. Oh, I do—I run after her, she seems to do me good. I told her so a week or two ago," she added, with a sad note in her voice. "I shouldn't have."

She sighed. It did not seem to her that Teddy was following with perfect understanding. She thought it was a fumbled following, and she could not quite express the end of what she wished to express, seeing that he lacked that perfect understanding. It was now dark in the room and, in the midst of the long subsequent pause, host Teddy rose, clapped his pockets, feeling for matches.

"Don't trouble now," she said. "We'll go. I suppose you'll walk down with me? I think if we don't meet her I will just take the tram home—you can see me as far as that; it is half-way to the Allinsons'." She rose. "Yes, we'll go," she repeated, "when I find my gloves. I took them off when the maid brought in tea, and I must have dropped them."

She bent to something and touched, but it was just a shadow.

"There they are," he said, and stooped to lift them. She stooping also, their hands touched and their heads were close, her hair brushing his cheek. "I beg your pardon!" he cried out, for their heads had all but bumped together; and he handed her the gloves.

She drew a deep breath and expelled it in a series of jerks.

"I began by talking about you, or I meant to," she declared, "and I've been talking about myself! Come along, and remember when your sister talks about men being discourteous that what is wrong with you is that you are too courteous." And at the door, when he was opening it for her, "Oh, I do hope you don't think I've been silly!" she exclaimed.

"Silly! Why, no! I understand all you mean."

She gave a little smile, an odd smile to herself, as she tripped downstairs before him.

"I don't think you do," she murmured.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I didn't speak."

"Oh!"

It was almost half-way to the Allinsons', and near the corner of the main road where the trams run, that they saw Mabel marching toward them smartly, with a faint hint as of indignation, or annoyance, in her walk. And behold, apparently engrossed, she frou-froued past them while they stopped and turned in astonishment, thus arresting her in her stride.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh! I did not recognise you. I'm glad I did not wait for you, after all, seeing you arrived so late."

"I arrived about my usual time when I call on Saturday—a little earlier if anything," replied Nelly, "but your brother and I have been chatting."

The strained atmosphere caused complacent Teddy to ask: "Will you come back with us now? Have you time?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Nelly. "I've really stayed much longer than I intended."

"Then we had better see you to the car," he suggested, and turned to include Mabel in the remark.

"Very well," she snapped, and walked with high fuss

as though her petticoat had been overstarched, Nelly Gordon looked statuesquely calm, an enigmatical smile about her lips.

When the car arrived Ted's bow was his most gracious—though he did not introspectively inquire why. But Mabel only touched, and dropped, her friend's finger-tips, and showing all her perfect teeth said: "So sorry I had to go out and miss you. Good-night." Then she abruptly wheeled away so that Ted, turning from a farewell salute, had to jump three lithe steps after her to reach her side, remembering as he did so Nelly's words, "You're too courteous"; and he swung along nonchalant, she ruffling in silence save for her frock, which made a sound, it occurred to him, like that made by water on a choppy day against the bows of a skiff.

"When did Nelly arrive?" she snapped at him.

"A little before tea-time."

"What did you talk about?"

"Heaps of things," he answered.

"Didn't you tell her where I was?"

"Yes—as soon as she came."

She looked up at the sitting-room windows as they approached the flat; so did he—for the flicker of a match and the lighting up attracted their eyes simultaneously. Her lips compressed. What she called her psychic sense was at work, and as soon as the front door closed behind them she said to the maid, "Mother home yet?"

"Not yet, miss."

She had to put her head inside the sitting-room door and look at the two sets of tea-things that the maid was only now, having lit up, about to take away.

"Oh! You had tea in there, had you?" she said. "Must have been rather dark to see to eat before you left," as though she had to drive the point home to one with an unformed psychic sense.

And not till then did even a hint of the meaning of it

all pierce his dense skull. Yet, understanding half of it, if not all, he spoke.

"But not too dark to chatter," he answered buoyantly, and gave her the West smile.

#### CHAPTER IV

It was a day or two later that Caird, the cashier at Ebenezer Moir's, informed Ted that there was something rotten in the state of Denmark. The old manufacturers were seeing their businesses slipping away from them, and that morning the cashier was closeted some time with the Chief. Anon he opened the door and called, "Murray, please!" Ted, wondering what was afoot, entered the private room, where Caird remained at a sign from Moir.

"Morning, Murray. I've just been talking to Mr. Caird. I daresay, though you have not been here very long, you have gathered that—well, er—time for retrenchments. Want to do the fair thing; don't want just to tell you your services are not required—want to tell you perfectly satisfied, perfectly satisfied." He scratched the back of his head. "Er—we've quite appreciated your services while you've been here, and talking to Mr. Caird think it more—well, the straight griffin, eh?—to be quite frank with you. You are a young man with enough sense of honour, what-you-may-call-it, realisation that all clerks are confidential clerks, not to mention it to anybody in the trade. O Lord! Not but what they know—but talk, talk; you know what talk is! Er—you know there are people who would go about saying, 'I had it from one of his staff,' and so on."

"Why, I should never dream, sir——"

"No. Exactly. That's—I just mentioned that. Well,

I hope you will be able to get something else, Murray—during the next month.”

“Thank you,” said Ted. “I’m very sorry, sir, that things are not so bright.”

“Thank you, thank you very much—er—Murray. Tell the boy to tell Mr. Galbraith, please.”

Ted bowed, and departed to inform Galbraith, the chief of the warehouse staff, that he was wanted, Caird still remaining in the private room after Galbraith’s entrance, to aid in the knuckle-biting and puzzled conference regarding reduction of the warehouse staff.

When Ted got home that night he found that his relation to the household was more like that of a fly on the wall than ever. Mabel and his mother, with grave faces, were quietly discussing some evidently momentous matter, and as his arrival brought a halt he withdrew. He would have told them his black news at once had it not been for this air of interrupted Cabinet meeting. As it was, he now put into action a notion he had been considering on the way home without waiting to see how it appealed to the government—and wrote a letter to his former employer in Dundee. “If ever you should come back to Dundee,” that gentleman had said when they parted, “and are in need of a billet, I hope you will let me know.” So Ted wrote now, to his old town, informing the marmalade manufacturer that through unforeseen circumstances his present employer had need to reduce his staff, and had asked him to look out for something else, “and a change in our domestic arrangements,” he wrote, “having made it unnecessary for me to remain with my people, I should like to return to Dundee.”

Maybe, in Dundee, when it was announced to him that his mother and sister were removing to Glasgow, he had felt a fragment of pleasure in the thought that he would soon be free of the household—or, rather, of the raspings of the household. But, even granting that such a flash of pleasure had come to him, it had been but momentary ;

his mother's dread of a visit from the father had decided the course for him—the course of compliance with the joint arrangements. His aim now was to escape. "It was a mistake to come to Glasgow with them," he told himself now. "It's only put me under Mabel's thumb, flattered her bossing instinct. The old man sized up how she would turn out all right. Ruling the roost, all right! But what's the sense in staying on? He doesn't come worrying them. He thinks they are in Dundee, anyhow. Glasgow is a big place compared with Dundee. There's the faintest possibility of a meeting. It was only a chance in a hundred I met him. It was for fear of him arriving, mad again, that I came here—not because Mabel or mother decreed it. Why I came doesn't matter to them. I came—and I'm under Mabel's thumb. Mother's half under her thumb too; but there's no need for me to stay here to keep mother from going altogether under her thumb. The only result of my protests against the shelving of mother is a sigh from mother when we're alone and a siding with Mabel when I kick for her sake before Mabel. I wonder why. I believe she's half afraid of Mabel somehow. It must be that. I believe I could get along with poor mother alone all right. However, that's out of the question." He smiled grimly to himself. "There would be ructions if I turned the tables and told Mabel what she had to do. Oh, no, there's no sense in staying. It's too miserable. We'll all be happier apart." So he wrote and posted the letter.

On his return he walked into the sitting-room, where his mother and sister were still conferring. Mrs. Murray glanced up, but continued to listen to her daughter with merely a frown at his entrance. "You're not wanted yet," was very obvious if unspoken. For Mabel's affairs came more and more to be her own, explained, at crucial moments, to the queen-mother in the manner of a dictator, while Teddy's affairs were less his own than his mother's and sister's. As he stood hesitating in the doorway,

wondering whether he should go to his own room or not. Mabel was saying: "I have no doubt it will be all right, and I think Professor Ingram's advice that I begin on one of the Dundee newspapers, in my own town, is very good."

"Dundee newspaper," he thought. "That's what I wanted to do!" and he spoke: "Are you leaving Professor Ingram?"

She closed her eyes for as long as one could count three slowly, and then continued to Mrs. Murray: "I think it would be best for me to write for an appointment than to go to Dundee and call on them."

"Oh," said Teddy, gathering the drift. "It never rains but it pours. Old Ben Moir has just told me to-day that I shall have to look out for a new job during the month."

They turned and stared at him; the mother's hands dropped in her lap, and Mabel looked as if she had received a blow—then infuriated,

"He can't even be satisfactory in a manufacturer's office!" she exclaimed.

"Moir did not lead me to believe that was the reason," Ted remarked casually. "What he said was that he had to retrench."

"Yes," said Mabel, and she snorted, "we know! Carriage and pair, mother," she sneered. "Can't you even keep a situation?"

"I'm very sorry," he replied, glancing toward his mother.

"Oh, mother never expected that carriage and pair," cried his sister.

"Don't worry," he continued easily. "If you are going back to Dundee of course I would have to go too, anyhow!"

"I suppose you would," she agreed with alacrity. "Your ideal is to be a kind of lodger."

He stared. Things were getting worse.

"Yes, I gave up my job in Dundee and came here at your suggest—command, didn't I?" This to her, though he had, so recently, told himself that if the mother had not expressed timidity at the thought of a visit from his father, with no strong male arm near to protect her, he would never have listened to his sister's decree. "If I hadn't told you about this you would simply have told me—after your Cabinet meeting—that I must tender my resignation and prepare to trundle back with you. Oh, you contrary creature!"

"Ted, you must not speak to Mabel like that," said his mother, recovering from an oddly apathetic look that had come upon her. "We both talked over that in Dundee, and we thought it better for a boy of your age to come with us. Our thoughts are all for you. You must have forgotten."

"My own reason for coming, I may say," he replied, "was that I came to Glasgow to look after you in case of trouble." And it was no sooner out than he thought, "There! I've given Mabel a chance!" He waited for her to comment: "You said a moment ago that you came because I commanded you to." But she did not.

"There speaks the superior man!" she scoffed. "Mother is quite well able to look after herself."

"Is that your view, mother?" Ted asked in cold accents.

She did not reply.

"Is that your view?" he repeated.

"That is not the way to speak to your mother," she said. "I was well able to look after myself before you were grown up. I'm afraid you are going to be rather conceited."

"Oh, well," he said wearily, addressing his sister again, "I can easily look for another job *here*—seeing that you are sorry I have been asked to leave Moir's, instead of considering that I would have to leave, anyhow. Yes—I'll do that. I am so eager to fall in with your plans. I

shall get another situation here and go—seeing you mentioned them—into lodgings. It will be pleasanter in many ways. I shall no longer hear you telling your friends that you are the support and stay of the house and that I am a disappointing and selfish male.”

“Tell my friends!” she almost screamed. “I have never said such a thing. Have I, mother?”

“No—I’m sure you have not, my dear,” replied Mrs. Murray, considering her hands in her lap, then staring at the carpet.

“Why, you’re always sighing to your friends, before me, too, about the hard lot of a working woman.”

“I’m very sorry,” Mabel drily uttered, “if a guilty conscience has made anything that I’ve quite unconsciously said at any time have a sinister sound in your sensitive ears. But if the cap fits—”

“Oh, I’m not the only one to notice it,” he said, nodding his head.

Her grey eyes blazed in that queer, cloudy way, and what she thought was her psychic sense woke in her, and she had a great rush of hatred toward Nelly Gordon. She turned from him, and after this outburst the monosyllabic mood of the last few days changed to a mood of stony silence.

The next day and the day following she filled the place with her strident ruffling and banging and slamming, snapped at her mother, ignored Ted. Only once did he make comment to Mrs. Murray.

“Mabel might try to be decent,” he said.

“Mabel is all right,” she replied, after a pause. “The poor girl has a lot on her shoulders. She has to see about the sub-letting, for one thing. I don’t suppose that occurred to you. She has a lot to think of. You don’t understand. She has also,” she sighed, “much sorrow of heart.”

Phrases like that last one silenced Ted, of themselves, with an internal squirm. The churchy callers that his

mother attracted and his sister patronised and froze away were apt to talk—so—unctuous.

In the event, however, by return post, Ted received a letter from his former employer in Dundee informing him that a position on the staff would be vacant next month: "And I don't think it will make friction in the office for you to come back and take it, seeing you've been gone such a little while—not a year yet. If you had stayed on here you would have had it, at any rate, and Miln, who got your place, is really hardly fit for that, to say nothing of a step up. I know you can fill the bill. I can, however, only offer you £2 a week, with increase at the end of six months, but there it is."

Ted showed this letter to his mother.

"Something for you to read," he said.

"Oh!" she answered in lack-lustre fashion, as though expecting no good news from Ted; but her eyes brightened as she read. "That is not so bad," she said, "and solves the problem. Well, you are very lucky to get it so quickly. I'll just show this to Mabel—it will help her in her arrangements."

"Please not!" he cried.

"Nonsense!"

"Please not!" he reiterated. "You can tell her if you like, but"—he held out his hand for the missive—"I don't want it to be handed to her to read and pass verdict on."

Mrs. Murray put hand behind back, holding the letter, and, drooping her eyelids with finality, called: "Mabel!"

Mabel came from the dining-room where she had been writing.

"Ted has just received this letter," said the mother, extending it to her daughter; and Ted, as his sister took it, hastily departed to write his reply and leave Mabel's approval or disapproval to be expressed to his mother alone. One cannot snatch a letter from one's mother;

one can't wrestle for its possession—a mother is always a mother. A father can be told to go to the devil. So he removed, in a kind of passive resistance.

He was culling paper and a pen at the desk against the wall in the dining-room when Mabel followed him and sat down again at the table.

"Got that letter of mine?" he asked.

She paid no heed.

"I say have you got that letter of mine?"

She rose, and passing to the door, opened it, standing there a handsome termagant.

"Mother," she said, "Ted is raving for his letter. He seems to think he gave it to me." She was evidently "not speaking to" Ted now.

"Oh, I have it," the mother called back, and Mabel swept to her chair again.

Ted stood considering her for a moment, then went to his mother and said: "If you will be so good as to let me have back that letter I will be obliged. I want to write an answer with it by me."

She nodded to the mantelpiece.

"There it is," she said. "I left it there to wait for you till you had got over your tantrum and cared to fetch it." (This was something new. This was the mother alone—and on Mabel's side.) "I think it very petty of you to show this jealousy of your sister. You really are getting very much like your father as you grow older."

He picked up the letter and departed.

"Jealous! So I'm jealous now," he said aloud, as he sat down at the table opposite his sister.

She looked up. "Poor old Ted," she said. "You should not let mother upset you—she's old-fashioned to us. She does not understand that young people grow up and can manage their own affairs. I know how you feel. I have to tell her everything. Try to bear with her, as I do."

He stared, unable to believe his ears.

"I'm so glad about that," she went on, nodding at the letter. "And you've got initiative—though I'm timid about saying it to you, lest you think I patronise. But, oh, Ted, I can't tell you how I've wished you to have initiative." Her face took on an intense look; she clenched a hand and lightly smote the table. "It is needed in this matter-of-fact world. No one can dream; if we dream we are but disappointed."

He certainly didn't understand women. What queer things they were! Even Nelly Gordon was enigmatic to him on that evening when she seemed so friendly. Would that other girl, that charming, haunting girl also be, behind her so open and friendly eyes, if one came to know her better, flabbergasting suddenly? He looked at his sister again, coming out of his stupefaction and wonder.

"Why, you're nearly crying!" he exclaimed.

Her lip trembled. Her eyes puckered like a child's on the verge of tears.

"Oh, you don't know, Ted, you don't know how I feel the responsibility! I can never get away from the fact that I am a woman, and woman is not made for battling in the world. It is the way civilisation has gone that has cast her into spheres alien to her." She half sniffed, half choked. Ted had never seen this kind of thing, and was on the point of running to clap her and console her. He didn't know what to do, for she excited and disturbed him. He was like someone with no knowledge of first aid at sight of a sudden deep cut, in a flurry, wondering what to do. She sniffed again—and did not cry. "I must write my letters," she plaintively remarked, and returned to her employ, leaving Ted again fogged by the incomprehensible feminine.

"Poor girl!" he thought, as he sat down stealthily at the desk to try to collect his mind for the penning of a note accepting the offer before him. "I believe she is rather highly strung. I don't believe the old man's

boozing was conducive to making a restful home—rather nervy for everybody.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Three Sundays later they who dropped in during the afternoon heard that Mabel was going back to Dundee. It was the first that Ted knew of the fruition of her scheme.

“To work there?” asked Miss Allinson.

“Oh, yes,” said Mabel. “I’m going into journalism.”

To be sure there was no reason why strangers should not know before him; but, after that gentler (however incomprehensible) mood of his sister’s, he thought she would have told him.

“And is your brother?” asked Miss Bath.

“Yes, he’s coming with us,” replied Mabel.

Nelly Gordon, he discovered, was looking keenly at him. Mabel also noted the gaze, and glanced a moment at the young lady. “Will you, please,” she besought, “pass this cup, Ted?”

“Ted looks as if this was news to him,” said Nelly.

He almost broke out with “So it is,” but didn’t. In the feminine maze it was easier to pass tea and cakes and be mute.

“Are you going?” Nelly asked him.

“Yes, I’ve got another billet,” he told her, “in my old place—and with a step up,” he added, lest she thought he was again being led with a string through the nose, because she listened to this with a tilting of her head and with a frown, as though personally annoyed.

Observing them thus talking, Mabel turned to Nelly and said: “Oh, yes, we are all going back to Dundee together.”

“That’s so nice for you,” Nelly replied, smiling sweetly, “for you are such an affectionate family.”

There was just the flicker of a frown between Mabel’s brows, there and gone, then she turned to her brother with melting gaze.

"Yes," she sighed. "We all cling together, don't we, Ted?"

"Ra—ther!" he said, his cheeks puckering in an odd hilarity. And when other chatter broke out, relegating this to the condition of an incident by the way, Ted marked his mother's thoughtful scrutiny upon him. The Murray home seemed prone to *arrière pensée*; there was an air of feeling for grips, of double-dealing; they lived amid unspoken, horribly hinted recriminations. Mabel's two voices seemed symbolic of it. One never knew where one was here, if one had a tendency toward the frank. The only way to get along was in being jolly about it—if need be, jestful. He must try that way.

## BOOK IV

### CHAPTER I

ETHEL MURRAY was happier back in her own city. Frequently a-dread in Glasgow lest George's signature to the separation paper might not restrain him, in a moment of alcohol-produced madness, she was here relieved by the sense of distance between them. From Ted's report of the meeting, she had not realised that George thought that his son was alone in Glasgow; it had not occurred to the young man to make a special point of that part of the interview, after so great a stir over the part relating to his father's hazard that Mabel would be ruler of the roost—or roast; Ted could never be sure which was the word, whether suggestive of the hen-yard or of a family table. Though one of Ethel's reasons for being pleased at the prospect of going away from Dundee had been due to a consciousness of having come down before the eyes of others, she found, on return, a change in that respect. They returned, though not to a house as lavish, for her, as that in which, in her early married days, she had been mistress, to a flat less illiberal than the one George had brought her to before his departure.

Her attitude now was of one who deserved respect for her endeavours in face of adverse fortune, one to be pitied, one to be admired. She was here more at ease again in other ways; she had never managed to feel comfortable in the circle of friends that Mabel brought round her in Glasgow. Here, in a flat, thanks to her daughter's

earnings and Teddy's little help, and her saving skill, not sorry, niggardly, she could invite old friends round her again, and retain those who offered tribute (or toll) to Mabel with a raising of palms, wagging of heads, and comments of, "And such a clever girl, too. Such a comfort to you." Respectable, upright, simple souls these were, tolerated by Mabel only because of such tributes; for adulation, even from the despised, is—to some natures—not an adulation utterly to spurn. So genuine, however, was the admiration of one or two for the fortitude and sorrow of Mrs. Murray that they desired to help. "If only something could be done for your husband," they would say to her; and she would shake her head sadly, give them back their phrase: "Ah, yes! If only something could be done for him!"

From the gratifying account that Ted had given of his attire and groomed state, it might be surmised that he was not underpaid for his services as linguist to the advertising department of the Elixir of Life Company. That he had sent no money to his wife, the Wests and their kindred (and indeed all who had surmised Ethel's story or discovered it through gentle inquiry) thought was not very hopeful sign of him; or, as the kirky people murmured, that remissness suggested that there was no "spiritual betterment." For if he had really been ashamed of the way he had treated her he would surely have done so, tried to atone at least in that way.

Information that he was still in Glasgow came to them within a few days of the return here, through a relative of Alice's husband; but it was a drab kind of news—for the report told that he had been seen down at heel and dissipated in the neighbourhood of the Trongate. These kindly souls who used such phrases as "spiritual betterment" and (with sympathy the simple genuineness of which none may doubt) expressed regret that "nothing could be done for him," gaining this information in response to their pitying inquiries, put their heads together

for means to trace him and reclaim him. Anon there called on Ethel a dark man with curiously coiffed hair—hair dressed in whirls and quiffs. He introduced himself, explaining that he was in Dundee to see about a situation there; he was a religious hairdresser with, in his lapel buttonhole, a blue ribbon—not significant of his fealty to a political party, but of teetotalism. His hobby was telling, in public places, at street corners, in revivalist halls, even in drawing-rooms, of the change that had come over him when he found (we say it with all reverence for the High Original) Jesus. He it was who had been the informer in the actual field on behalf of those kind persons who were fain to do something as well as to feel pity.

It transpired, after he had been sitting opposite Mrs. Murray in her sitting-room for a few minutes, talking to her with oddly sibilant utterance, and fixing her with a curious piercing stare, that he was one of the active agents of a reclamation society. She had nothing to thank him for, he assured her; he was always doing such things—"for our Father's sake. You must thank Him, not me." Teddy, coming home during the visit of this angelic sleuth, was introduced.

"Ah, this is your son," said the hairdresser, and rising pinioned Ted's hand in a super-grasp. "Well, I do not believe in heredity," he said, the clutch over, and sat down. "I believe that the blood of Jesus can wipe out even heredity. Young man, are you saved?"

Ted, who had found the Bible occasionally interesting because of its sonority of phrase here and there, although finding the stories—especially those in the Old Testament—often maddening to his sense of justice and decency (and often wondering, it may be said in parenthesis, why two books that so desperately clashed as the Old and New Testaments were bound together as if—to judge by the general view—not by a book-binder but by a Deity), Ted, thus importuned, aptly remembered a verse from the New Testament, and said to the barber (his

indignation at the egregious conceit of the person balancing his feeling of amusement): "I, sir? I am working out my salvation with fear and trembling."

If the visitor had forgotten that text at any rate he recognised the sound as scriptural, and drew in his horns.

"Ah!" he said. "That is good. That is well. And I believe our dear Jesus appreciates—" he paused—"even"—he paused—"endeavours. Praise the Lord for that, praise the Lord for that," he added hurriedly. He was a little skeery of Ted's cold scrutiny. "Before I go," he broke out again, "perhaps you would like a word of prayer," this to Mrs. Murray.

He leapt from his chair and whirled abruptly with a funny bobbing motion like the blue-ended baboon. It took Ted a moment to realise what was afoot. He was still standing there whimsically staring at the barber's hinterland as his mother, a little nervously, rose and turning about knelt upon one knee beside her chair. The barber, kneeling, looked over his shoulder at Ted.

"We are going into the presence of our Heavenly Father, young man," he said in the voice of a martinet, "to ask Him to help the erring member of the family, and to bring him to a consciousness of his guilt."

Ted mastered an impulse to kick the inviting and offered portion of the barber—in no mood to say: "He means well."

"Go ahead," he said, and walked from the room.

It would appear that he was not on terms with his mother to be told, after the barber had gone, just what that astounding creature had asked of his God. The barber had, indeed, been doubtful of Teddy; and Mrs. Murray, before his emotional questionings regarding the youth, the prayer over, was emotional in her replies. The barber was very sure that the young man was not on proper terms with God; he was not astonished to hear that the young man lacked, truth to tell, push and desire to get on, absented himself from church, did not save

his pence. The mother did make excuses, sighed over the pity of her boy having to get along without a father, but regretted that he did not seem to realise the responsibilities of life. In a kind of intense flutter she went on her knees again while the barber prayed for her son—that he might understand the seriousness of life; and when the stranger at last departed he left Mrs. Murray in a state of fervour, feeling a great pity for herself.

Teddy's attitude to the hairdresser had been rude to the last degree, rude in a dual way—rude to the man who had been trying to help his father, rude (obliquely) to his mother whose guest this man was. She found that her son had retreated to his bedroom, and she looked in upon him there—to see him standing before his chest of drawers reading, or at least turning over the pages of a volume seeking for salve to ease the effect produced on him by that well-meaning crony of the Almighty. There was no book-case in his little room; but his books, slowly accumulating, stood in a row atop the chest of drawers—signs of the truth of what the barber had suggested, that the boy did not only not know God, in the barber's phrase, but did not have a sense of *getting on*, of saving, of taking care of the pence. It seemed a fit moment, gently and lovingly, again in the barber's phrase, to admonish.

"If you must spend so much money on books," she said, shaking her head, the fervour of the visitor still upon her, "you might at least, Teddy, think of other things too. I noticed to-day, when I was dusting here, that you have scratched all the top of the chest of drawers."

"Oh, have I?" he asked. "I must put brown paper along the top."

"And you are buying more books; that row is growing. You have bought two more since coming back here again. Should you, Ted? Think of that. Is it your duty considering all you earn?" Her voice was intense. It had something of that disturbing quality of the voices of

revivalist preachers. "You never tell your mother when you buy them; you just bring them home and put them up there."

"Well, you can read them all if you want to," he responded naïvely, as one at a loss to discover the point of the talk.

She sighed.

"You have taken to smoking a lot," she said. "At your table there where you sit and read there is always tobacco spilt. You are getting very much like your poor father, I can see. It is a wasteful habit at any rate, but if you must smoke just because most men smoke you might not strew the tobacco on the floor as well as smoking it. It is so wasteful, Ted. I wish I could get you to see things."

Ted looked at her thoughtfully, and not without pity; for of late he had developed in a subtle fashion. The change seemed to date from that night's chat with Nelly Gordon—or did it? Was it not that girl so unlike the others, Miss Hope, Catherine Hope, that had made him feel he might be right in some ways? All that his mother said was true. Books and tobacco could be done without. In prisons men can live on skilly and naught else—or at least exist on it. But if she spoke truth, that did not mean that a better truth did not exist. He felt, too, a touch of anxiety for her; it seemed as if that prying barber had put his thumb-mark on her. It astonished Ted, for his mother could be impervious to so much. She seemed somewhat distraught.

"I say," he said, "who was that person?"

She passed at once from hectic depression to hauteur.

"He has been trying to find out about your father—to help your father," she answered coldly. The intonation seemed almost to hint an absurdity, to hint that Teddy was responsible for his father—as if her son had given the father birth, and then thought no more about him! Ethel was again at her hinting instead of speaking.

"To find out about dad? Who for? For you?" he asked, with a voice as of demand.

Suddenly she began to sob, and he called himself a brute.

"Oh, Ted," she wept, "if you only knew how I worry. And he is a very well-meaning man, I think. There—that's Mabel, I expect."

It was Mabel who now arrived; and she, coming into this evident scene, had to be told what was the question at issue. Though Ted had for a long time refused to render acknowledgment to her title of chief justice by explaining when she inquired, by responding when she sought to catechise, he did now, as his mother dried her eyes again and his indignation reasserted itself, pour out to Mabel a fluent picture of the proceedings into which he had blundered on coming home. His description convinced her. She made no attempt to turn his obvious plea for her sympathy into a mere explanation to a governor. For once brother and sister were at one in outlook, or at least for once they shared an objection—though (for diverse indeed were they in the main, in nature) their reasons for objecting to the barber were dissimilar.

"Well, mother, really," said Mabel, the narration over, "we can't have fanatical, vulgar people like that calling. These evangelical people have too much effrontery."

"They have," cried Ted hotly, and gave his aspect of it. "My father may have gone down, but conceive of that—*that*," they had never seen him so angry, "tackling a man like my father! I don't object," he added, "so much to his vulgarity as to his ignorant blasphemy; but even that is minor detail. He tackle my father—and with that blasphemous slush! No! It's monstrous!"

In his mind was memory of many a walk with the father of old, and many a talk with the father of old when he was not "queer." He hoped that he might never see the barber again.

But what was his amazement to be confronted by him a week later in the hairdresser's that he patronised.

Ted, on entering, sat down in a chair indicated by the head of the establishment, a quiet-voiced man with a shabby-genteel, philosophical appearance—a man he rather liked. The proprietor touched a bell, and Teddy, sitting in the chair, looked round to discover who was coming to attend to him. So there they were, face to face, for it was the angelic sleuth; he bowed, showed his teeth—rather reminiscent (thought Ted) of Mabel when she smiled to people she hated.

"Hair cut," said Ted tersely.

The new assistant executed another bow, this time of a mock fawning kind that seemed to Ted to imply something almost like: "I wish I might cut your throat!" He tucked the young man up in the regulation tucker, and began clipping, breathing heavily.

"Have you had any better word of your poor father?" he breathed presently, in a low voice. Teddy sat grim. The barber, tapping comb on scissors, glanced quickly round to make sure that the next chair was vacant. "Will you give my respects to your mother," he whispered, "and tell her I am hoping for an opportunity to call to assure her that I have left the sad case in good hands, although our Father has not granted us to receive any further news yet?"

Ted expelled a couple of gusts through his nostrils, but made no response; he had nothing to do with this man, though his mother might harbour him. He had to keep silent; if he opened his mouth at all he might say too much. The man finished clipping, and with his comb made a parting in Teddy's hair half-way down the left side of his head.

"You might brush it straight back," said Ted. "I don't divide it that way."

"There is the mark of an old parting here," answered the barber.

"Doubtless," said Ted. "But I should think that as a hairdresser you would see that recently I have been brushing it back.

"Ah!" replied the barber, and completed his making of the partition with new vigour, the teeth of the comb rasping along the scalp. It was like a buffet given un-awares, a stab in the back. Teddy's instinct was to rise abruptly and smite him on the nose, but then one must not be imaginative; one must not be quick to take offence. Maybe the angelic one was merely naturally rough, uncouth—was what is called a Strenuous Christian. The parting made, he bowed low and murmured in accents oily and stern, a disgusting combination: "It is not for the likes of you to do your hair in that new fashion. That is only for young men with money—what we call toffs."

Ted leant forward, stretched beyond the basin to the shelf, lifted a pair of brushes, and vigorously brushed his own hair in the way he desired.

"Oh, let me, sir, let me, sir," begged the barber. The fawning bow with which he delivered his well-meaning (or not) insolence, if observed by the proprietor two chairs away, doubtless seemed merely an overdoing of the ingratiating; yet the snatching of the brushes by the client was advertisement that the young man was riled about something.

But Teddy, now standing, completed his brushing, then tossed aside the tucker from his neck and held forth his hand. The new assistant tendered him, in haste, the tag of paper for presentation at the outer counter, but left it to the boy to brush Ted down, taking eager advantage of another waiting client for escape.

The little girl who usually sat at the counter in the outer room, to gather in the shekels, was evidently at lunch. The proprietor, with a "pardon me a moment," to the customer on whose head he was at work, slipped from the barbering saloon into the front shop by a private

slit of a doorway in the rickety partition. His manner was of a man worried.

"I hope the hair cut was quite satisfactory," he said as Ted tendered a coin and waited for change.

After all, his trouble with the menial inside was private.

"Oh, quite, thank you," he answered cheerily.

Yes, his trouble was private; and perhaps he should not have snatched the brushes that way; the employer of the evangelical person must have noticed; Ted hoped he had not prepared the way for a lecture—or worse—for the creature.

"I'm glad," said the proprietor, mollified; but he lowered his voice, shook his head and, his manner confidential, he said: "That is a new man just come to me, and—" he paused, "he's working his notice already," and he wagged his head once and raised his eye-brows and puckered his mouth in "What do you think of that?" fashion.

This put a different aspect on the subdued and subtle fracas. "I'm not surprised," Ted admitted.

"Ah!" said the proprietor. "I suspected as much. I see! Everybody isn't as lenient as you, trying to shield him. I suspected as much. I've had one or two complaints, all the same; not everybody leaves it to me to see or not to see. But there are two sides to that sort of thing, you know." He wagged his head again. "Some people might come in here who—well, though they wouldn't make a complaint about him, they would never come back again. They'd shield him—and lose me a customer. Hard on me, eh, their kindness to him? Funny world, isn't it? But I've seen. He's working his notice already. I'd have given him cash in lieu of notice if there was only a trifle more lucre in the business."

"H'm," said Ted. "Good-day."

"Good day to you, sir."

At home his mother scrutinised him.

"You've had your hair cut," she remarked.

"And I don't like the way it's done," said Mabel.

"You'd have liked it less if you'd been there," he assured them both. "It was done by that evangelical barber who has been chivvying the old man."

"Ted! Do speak respectfully of your father!" expostulated the mother.

"Sorry," said Ted. "Thought it was affectionately."

Mrs. Murray gave her son a long, cold look.

"Did he say anything?" she asked, suspicious of something held in abeyance.

"He did indeed," said Ted; and he recapitulated for them, with no heat, coldly, dispassionately (so dispassionately that it was clear how enraged he had been!) the whole encounter. When he came to, "It's not for the likes of you to do your hair that way," his mother sat erect. Till then she had been prepared to tell her son, when he would be through with his story (she would let him say all he had to say first), that he must not be conceited, that he should remember the barber meant well. The retailing of that phrase changed her attitude. Her eyes flashed with indignation. Mabel exploded: "Well!" Ted continued to the end.

"And that was all you did!" Mabel ejaculated. "Well, I think you shouldn't have taken it so lightly. You don't seem to have sufficient proper pride. I would have frozen him."

Ted looked at her. "That's all right," he declared. "There are ways and ways."

When the hairdresser called again—for call again he did—Mrs. Murray was so haughty that he felt disgust with her case. She lacked, he greatly feared, the grace of humility. Mabel, entering to be introduced to him, made him feel suddenly, by her high-handed and rustling deportment, instead of annoyance at the mother for her undue pride (he had been thinking of quoting texts to her on the advisability of not forgetting the beam in one's own eye when desirous to remove the mote from a

neighbour's) an anxiety to rub his hands and bow. Very soon, as the daughter remained standing (responding to the introduction with an "Oh, indeed!" and eyelid-drooping survey), he scuttled from the house.

To Ted, on his arrival, Mabel told the episode privately. He listened and smiled. But not content with telling of how she had utterly crushed the hairdresser, before Ted's approval she must pass on to an exegesis on her skill in freezing generally—more than crass barbers foisted on a family by the accidents of life; and, as she talked freely, her expression changed, her phrases came halting. She stopped. "What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "What are you looking that way for?"

"I wasn't aware," said Ted, "of looking——"

"Oh, yes, you did. Oh—that's all!"

She had been carried away. She had passed into a panegyric on a gift that, though on occasion—such as this of the barber—was useful, Ted too well knew she possessed. He had seen her freeze the undeserving—was thinking so; hence the change on his face, listening to her. That was all. But though she saw a change in his reception of her pæan on her freezing power, she did not read its cause rightly. Despite her success in such chilling repulses when occasion demanded, she could not ever freeze him—he simply retired to his own fireside, as it were—and it is embittering to have one's talents fall flat and one's gifts lightlied in one's own home. That occurred to her now—and she felt annoyed at herself for having extolled this gift to him.

## CHAPTER II

BUT it was at that self-same hairdresser's (Eckie Balgray's, as he was called—Doric for Alexander) that Teddy met John Melville—who was to influence him more than

Ambrose ever influenced the father—with an influence more like that which might have been Constable's gift to the elder Murray had the elder Murray been a stronger man. The introduction was a mere smile of understanding when the dark, well-groomed young man (some years Ted's senior) blurted out: "Mr. Balgray, why *these* newspapers?"

Mr. Balgray, shaving a customer, answered: "I really don't know. If I don't take them I'm asked for them"—he gave his half-pensive twinkle—"and when I leave them on the settle they're objected to."

"You are very near my ideal Figaro, Mr. Balgray," said Melville pleasantly. "But I don't like your literature, and you don't like it yourself!"

"No, sir," admitted the proprietor, "I do not. But the children have a way of wanting to look at pictures, and they like to be agitated."

"I suppose that's it," said Melville, and mumbled as if to himself: "I would like, when I am waiting for a shave, to pick up a volume of the classics. Why not? A volume of Pater lying on the seat," he went on, "or the *Religio Medici* to dip into."

Murray eyed him. "People would read bits out to laugh at," he remarked, and Melville realised that his mumble had been heard; nay, he realised more—realised that if his ideal barber's shop was a Utopian dream at least things could happen here, in this jolly little establishment in Dundee.

"I'm ready for you," said Balgray. Melville stepped up to the newly-vacated chair. "Shave?" asked the proprietor, and put a fresh piece of toilet paper over the head-rest, while Melville leant comfortably back.

"So you've got quit of your blue-ribbonite," he said.

"Thank goodness," answered Balgray. He sighed to himself, and then inquired: "What might your definition of a Christian be, Mr. Melville?"

Ted wondered if this Mr. Melville was the kind of person that one "drew out."

Melville closed one eye and considered.

"I don't know. Person who is always right, perhaps," he said. "Or perhaps a Christian is a person who is so forgiving that he will forgive you even for objecting to being persecuted by him. Only," he added, "I've never lived among Mohammedans or Buddhists, so I don't get particularly hot about it. I fancy that any religion is simply a handy compendium for the self-righteous, endowing them with texts to prove that they are the salt of the earth, and that everybody who does not agree with them is going to hell. But what are you getting at?"

Balgray did not explain that he was only getting at a definition of the kind of fanatic he had recently harboured as an assistant—he who had begun to "work his notice" immediately on arrival, and would have been sent packing without any working of notice, with cash in lieu of it, had the tonsorial profession only been more remunerative.

"You are in fierce mood this morning," he remarked, lathering in person, for, unless customers were numerous, he liked to have this young man to himself from beginning to end, to lather as well as shave.

"Not without reason," answered Melville. "I wanted to move my digs. I found out last night that I could get into new digs, the look of which I liked, in a fortnight; so I told my present landlady this morning, told her she might as well know a fortnight ahead instead of a week; more chance of letting her rooms as soon as I leave, don't you see?"

Balgray inclined his head, lathering.

"But," went on Melville, "she said, 'Oh, it's a week's notice on either hand, Mr. Melville. If onybody comes wantin' rooms before a fortnicht I'll ha'e to gie ye a week's notice.'"

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Balgray sympathetically, wiping the lather from his hands.

"I said to her: 'But I'm giving you the whole fortnight in case of anyone coming, so that you can arrange. Can't you see that I could easily enough wait for a week and then give you a week's notice?'"

"And she could not see?" asked Balgray.

"Oh, well, she looked as if something faintly dawned, but that was all. 'Fat far do you give me a fortnicht's notice?' she asked. 'Ah, ha! I can see through't. Ye canna get into yer new ludgins till a fortnicht is by.' 'Exactly,' I agreed. 'Ah, weel,' she said, 'if onybody comes this week seekin' ludgins for next week I'll need to gie ye a week's notice.' So I said, 'At that rate you'd better take a week's notice now.' And she said to me, 'There's nae need for that. If it's the Lord's will ye'll leave in a week, and if it's the Lord's will ye'll leave in a fortnicht.' So I said, 'My dear lady, the Lord is very evidently not in this—it's settled already. A week's notice.'"

"And you can't get into your digs for a fortnight?" said Balgray, stropping the razor.

"No. But I packed everything this morning—immediately—gave her a week's money in advance, and now I've got a room in a hotel for a fortnight. Heigh-ho! I'm a petty-minded man, I'm afraid, Mr. Balgray. These kind of things get on my nerves."

"Why not have stayed the week where you were?" suggested Balgray.

"No. Atmosphere spoiled."

The man to whom the new assistant had been attending rose. "This chair, please," came the invitation to Ted—and he lost the rest.

It was about a fortnight later that in the Nethergate he espied Melville; there was a salutation, they halted, and Ted, to show he understood (though he had never known anyone like Melville before), said: "Have you found a barber's with a volume of Sir Thomas Browne waiting on the settle for the customers?" That led to a demand

from Melville that Ted should come up to his digs there and then "and have a squint at my books, and a barge about things." It was an invitation that he responded to eagerly. Melville, he found, had but one room, a "bed sitting-room" in the jargon of the landladies, and his books were stacked against the walls in columns. They gave him pause, a thrill, on entering.

"Promised my landlady to get these books off the wall to-day," said Melville, taking Ted's hat and hanging it on the bedpost. "She is afraid they may mark the paper. Ever hear the like of that? They don't like books—books promulgate ideas, and besides, they collect dust. You in digs, or native?"

"Native."

"Oh, you know nothing about that kind of thing, then. I asked her if she happened to have a bookcase, and she was very severe—oh, very severe. She's what is called house-proud, and it annoyed her that I found her house lacking in furnishings. Scratch her wall-paper, indeed! Now that I'm here I find the roses on it look like faces. If I was ever ill and light-headed here they'd all wink and gibber at me. Paper-hangers should hang paper with the faces to the wall. I scented the beginning of trouble. She's religious—sort of presence of a jealous God about her starched movements. She's never had a lodger with books before, and seeing that there is a chance of her wall-paper being marked, she is sure God objects to reading. Spendthrift habit, too! I assure you I'm not exaggerating. You needn't look like that at me! You may think it piffle, living in a home of your own, but they are like that. She has a feeling, or an instinct, that if it had only occurred to God He would have tipped Moses a commandment against having books to read, with an addition against having books to mark the wall-paper. I sort of suspected the atmosphere of the place when I was looking at it, but the brightness of the room appealed to me; didn't notice the old women's faces in

the roses. However, I think I can keep her and her objections out in the passage for a few months, anyhow."

Various fragments of the rambling talk of that Saturday afternoon Teddy called to mind many times afterwards. It must not be imagined that Melville tried either to be epigrammatic or to appear a philosopher. If he did he failed! Teddy merely remembered the "barge," that first "barge," in this fragmentary manner.

"I say, what was that other name you mentioned in Eekie Balgray's?" he asked. "*The Religio Medici* was one, what was the other?"

"Um—Oh, I remember—the chat I mean—but I don't remember what the other book was."

"I don't think it was a title. I think it was a name of an author you mentioned."

"I remember—Pater."

"I don't know him at all," said Ted.

"Oh," said Melville, and his disappointment that Ted did not know gave way to his pleasure in introducing. "Sometimes I can't read him at all, other times he seems tremendous. Let me see! There's one thing I can always read. I've read it ill, I've read it well. I've read it when happy, read it when all seemed lost—pretty good proof that—and it always answers—or I answer, I should say—the Conclusion to——" he looked among the stacks of books: "Yes, the Conclusion to this, *The Renaissance*," and he produced it and opened it near the end and read aloud here and there.

"Go on," said Ted.

Melville, leaning against his wall (rubbing the paper with his shoulder belike) looked up from the page, interested, at Ted's face.

"You take it with you," he said.

"Oh, no. Borrowing books!" said Ted.

"Go ahead. One needn't make a habit of borrowing. It's a cad's game as a rule, but there are exceptional moments." He held forth the book and then: "What

do you do when people give you the hump?" he abruptly inquired.

Ted was staring at him, almost strained.

"I don't know," he said, "what to do. Cycle up the Carse sometimes on Sundays, and then go down one of the country lanes to the side of the Tay."

"Oh!" cried Melville. "Church-goers don't like that cure for the hump they give you, and the calculators resent it. Sometimes I don't exert myself even that much—sometimes I just remember things; recently it has been an orchard that I saw, one of the trees especially, all covered with the globules of the apples among the leaves. You know what I mean. The funny thing is that your calculator who never got the hump about anything in his foot-rule of a world—if I told him that—would say I was too ethereal. Nothing ethereal about an apple-orchard, is there? Mundane enough. But they hate anyone who sees anything in an apple-orchard beyond apple-sauce. And the religious people think it is a pity you can't come into the smell of varnish and hassocks instead."

"I'm not going to tell Mabel or mother a word about this chap," Ted ruminated. "They'd spoil it if they knew."

But memory of them forced him to announce, anon, much against his will, that he must be gone.

"What! Can't you stay and have a cup of tea even? I was going to ask my landlady if she could find another chop for supper——"

"No, I couldn't," answered Ted. "I did not expect to meet you, and my people will wonder what's delaying me."

"Oh, all right. Pop up again if you can put up with me. I hope you'll care to."

He assuredly would care to. With a new appearance of something like self-reliance in his manner he strode home, feeling the air refreshing, striding buoyant. Even the colours of the paint on the sign-boards over the shops

seemed brighter than usual, the plate-glass windows new-washed; high overhead, above the town, gulls circled. He swung along looking up at them from time to time as they veered off over the Tay and oscillated in tangling and untangling drifting flight back again. He seldom felt so much alive. Life seemed good. He recalled, faintly, Nelly Gordon, and recalled, very clearly, Catherine Hope talked to for a mere quarter of an hour, in another city. It seemed he could see her lips, as she talked, so clearly that he could have drawn their contours. Had it been lonely country-road instead of peopled street he might have danced and sung, book under arm. Even as it was, when passing cars or carts made a din he did, if not sing, chant aloud—not inquiring why he chanted thus what he did chant. It was in his head; that was all; he couldn't recall it all, but the fragment he chanted, when the drowning din allowed him to do so privately: "Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening." He did not understand the meaning of it all; "dividing of forces" baffled him, nor did he really recall the whole sentence; but he chanted, swinging along, over and over again, as men march to drums: ". . . is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening."

At his home corner the surface glamour ebbed. Entering the flat he found his mother big-eyed and wanting to know what had kept him. He lied to her without hesitation, told her he had felt inclined for a walk, and came home by way of the Esplanade, right to the end, he explained, and back by Perth Road.

"You've got a book," she said.

"Yes."

It looked new.

"Bought it?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh! Borrowed it. Who from?"

He tarnished his joy with another lie.

"From the library."

"I thought you said you came home by the Esplanade."

"Yes, but I went to the library first."

A diversion, however, was imposed upon her doubt and intention to discover, subtly, if he lied, and if he lied why he lied (she somehow suspected a girl in the case), by the arrival of an old school-friend of Mabel's (they had met at the door) who called vivaciously to say good-bye to them, her marriage, she announced, impending. After marriage she was to go immediately abroad with her husband to be, and so was visiting all old friends, making adieux—looking very young, and happy, and aglow. All chattered buoyantly—the three women talking at once, high and rippling.

Indeed, it struck Ted that his sister was beyond being buoyant—was strangely moved for once with pleasure in another's pleasure; and the prospective bride, by the time of her departure, was (Ted could not fail to note, it was so obvious and curious) the calmest of the three. She looked, he thought, with something like disapproval upon Mabel when that young lady, unwontedly demonstrative, embraced her before her departure. Ted could not make his sister out after the girl had gone.

"Oh, *doesn't* she look happy, mother?" Mabel broke out, tears in her eyes, her cheeks aflame.

"I hope she'll be as happy after the marriage," replied Mrs. Murray, looking dubiously at her daughter. "She is going a long way from her mother. I'm sure she deserves to be happy, and I appreciate her calling on us, not forgetting us."

"Oh, how happy!" sighed Mabel. She seemed distraught.

"I'm sure I hope she will be happy," repeated the mother. "Marriage is such a lottery." She had fallen into a condition of melancholy after the vivacity of the

visit, as one cheered by a drug lapses inert when the false cheer has evaporated.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mabel. "I sometimes feel so disgusted with men. Gracie is not the sort of girl to throw herself at any man, but I think men are such fools. They don't look for merit in a woman—only for a pretty face."

She happened to glance at Ted—and noticed that he blushed.

"What are you blushing for?" she asked.

"I'm not blushing."

But his sister had thoughts of her own. Though Mrs. Murray looked at Ted suspiciously Mabel let the theme of his reddening at her speech about pretty faces drop, to go over to the window and look after the departing Gracie. She was such a picture of weariness suddenly, after her excitement, all "hump," as Melville would say, that Ted felt sorry for her.

"What's the matter with you, old girl?" he asked.

The mother shook her head at him. "Don't worry her," she said gently. "She has a lot to think of."

Perhaps there was some psychic sense in Ted. He felt guilty. He should be getting on. He was still doing little more than supporting himself. There was something wrong, but what he did not know. He wondered romantically if some man had proposed to marry Mabel. There might well be such a man, though he knew nought of him, for Mabel's affairs were very much her own. And perhaps she had turned him down so as to remain here, the support of the home. Her own much talked of freedom he did not take into account in this fancy. The joy of the visit to Melville was evaporated from him now.

"I wish I could help more," he said, "if that's what is troubling you." What could be troubling her? "Is it the sub-letting of the Glasgow house?"

Mabel turned. "No, no," she replied. "The landlord has just written to-day to say he has managed that."

"What is it?"

"Nothing. Nothing."

Ted could not rid himself of the feeling that much was wrong—and he mainly responsible. That was the feeling in the air. He walked into his own den, that little wedged-in chamber across the square hall, put Melville's loaned book in the table-drawer. Hands in pockets, feet straddled apart, he stood looking at his row of books, wondering if perhaps they were so many signs of selfishness, all unnecessary. Melville's influence was gone. He was in another environment now. No, they were not unnecessary; he could not admit that; but perhaps they were, as his mother said, signs of selfishness.

Would he be doing his duty if, instead of the names on the backs of these volumes reading Crashaw, Marvell, Marlowe, Herrick, Keats (neat enough little shilling copies in the Muses' Library) they read *Grammaire des Grammaires; English-French, French-English; English-Spanish, Spanish-English; Continental Tutor?* He wished he had his father's gift for languages—for he still believed that languages were learnt by gift instead of application. A language would get him on. He was disturbed in his rather lugubrious musings by the passage of his sister in the hall; and seeing that his door was open she languidly entered. Glancing up, he found her aspect unusually friendly, although a little more to the melting side than he wholly liked. It was dubious to him always, this languid and melting mood of hers, especially in contrast with the wontedly "practical" and the so frequent domineering moods.

"I've to go to the theatre to-night, dear," she said, "to see if I can get copy for an article on stage costumes in the play."

This cheered him with the thought that after all she had not too arduous a life, and it occurred to him also, as a make-weight, aiding in his re-assurance, that it had always been her very definitely voiced desire to be inde-

pendent, to be a self-supporting woman. Well, she was even more than that. She had more than realised her ambition. He envied her gifts, he who was so little more than self-supporting.

"Have you a book that I can take—something to look at in the intervals?" she asked. She glanced along the top of the chest of drawers. "I have so little time for reading," she sighed. "I see you've put brown paper under them. What's that for?"

"Mother told me they scratched the veneer," he replied.

"Oh, poor Ted. You must bear with your mother. She's old-fashioned."

She tapped the top of the Marlowe, the tops of the two volumes of Keats, extracted the first volume of Herrick, and, leaning against the wall to one side of the chest of drawers, ran the book open, paused at a page, scanned it.

"I always think," she said, "that this is such a beautiful poem—

'Bid me to live, and I will live  
Thy Protestant to be. . . .'

She read on to herself, all but the last stanza, which she spoke aloud:

"'Thou art my life, my love, my heart,  
The very eyes of me:  
And hast command of every part  
To live and die for thee.'

I do think it is beautiful. 'And hast command of every part, To live and die for thee,'" she repeated. "Some men would do anything for a woman. I *do* think it is beautiful. I often wish I had more time for Poetry. May I take this?" and head on side her eyes melted.

"Certainly."

As she turned away he looked at her keenly, with something like a medical man's scrutiny, her expression of love of poetry to him suspicious as to the doctor is a fevered eye. It was love—with a difference.

She had the desire to be worshipped rather than the desire to be worthy of worship—as there are those who desire fame rather than to do good work, their dream a bay-wreath instead of their hope that someone has thanked God for them. It makes the work rather superficial; scratch it, and the bricks show beneath—the column is not marble. So with Mabel—her “charm” could flee between the departing smile to a friend and the closing of the door, simply go out in a twinkling like ignited gauze. But all that does not make any less intense her pining, hunger, agony at times, to be a person worshipped. Only it prepares one to hear that those who accepted her charm had in store for them a moment of startled, unbelieving amazement or, if their devotion grew deep, days of being bruised by the admired one; a time ahead when still to adore would call for a certain amount of self-abasement.

So she made friends, and they drifted away, left her bitter, as if against the world for its capriciousness. Her constant friends had to contain in their natures something heartless, or a drop of mockery, or of cynicism, or of what the word “feline” has come to mean with perhaps lack of justice to the best of the feline species. Swallow all that, accept it, and one could have great pity for her. She was of those who almost make one believe that we are the slaves of our temperaments. In her intensity of nature she had her agonies, very real agonies; but their result, the full spate of them over, was a hardening instead of a softening, and the great trouble was that she was proud of her less humane side, nurtured where she might have curbed.

## CHAPTER III

It might have been better for Ted had he not lied about the book Melville had lent him, not only for his own pleasure in its perusal; for Mrs. Murray felt there was something suspicious about it. Having lied, to save more talk and cross-questioning, books being such a sore point, he kept it to read in his own room after he had gone to bed, and left it on Monday in the drawer of his table. There his mother found it, for the fact that he had not brought it to the sitting-room again, nor left it on the chest of drawers, made her continue the search when alone during the day. No; it was not a library-book, she thought, had not any library stamp, no sufficient sign of use, unaware that even library copies of Pater often keep their pristine beauty unsullied by any contact. Opening it, she read a name—John Melville. She would not ask who John Melville was. If her son was going to hide things from her, be deceptive, she would merely keep her knowledge, for the time being. He was holding secrets from her blunderingly; very good, she would hold what she discovered. But this secretiveness regarding the unknown Melville (mixed up in the mother's mind with a lie to her) made her give heed when, some evenings later, on Ted's arrival after a nominal walk—a walk which was too evidently a flight from some of his mother's church friends, Mabel said:

"Well! Back again! Been spending your evening with your friend the tobacconist?"

"What's this?" asked Mrs. Murray. "I haven't heard about this."

"Oh, didn't you know?" replied Mabel. "When he is bored with our friends he goes and leans up against a counter in a tobacconist's and talks."

"Indeed! A tobacconist! You prefer a tobacconist's society to your mother's and her friends?"

Mabel sat back blank, contented. She bore a thin-lipped malice to that tobacconist, for not once, but often, had she seen Ted sitting in the shop or leaning against the counter's end in long conference; and the occasions on which she had seen him there gave her pause—on these occasions she had come out from home with her friends, friends from whose converse her brother had run away. On the second occasion, having convoyed her visitors some distance, she glanced into the shop on her return, and Ted was still there. Popping her head in round the corner of the door, she said: "Hullo, Ted! Coming home?"

"My sister," said Ted to the tobacconist, who bowed. "Yes, just coming. Well, good-night," and the young man hastened after her.

As they walked home—"Were you speaking about me to that man?" she asked.

"I was, as a matter of fact," answered Ted, "when I saw you go past with that Miss What's-her-name."

"You did!" blazed Mabel, indignant.

"Yes," he said, swinging along beside her. "He said he thought you looked clever, too."

"What did you say about me?"

"Oh, I just said, 'There's my sister gone by. She's a tremendously clever girl.'"

She thought this out. She was silent the rest of the way home, wondering whether her brother was here deep or simple. Now, at any rate, she had sprung the trouble of the tobacconist when her mother, annoyed at Ted's flight from her friends, would tackle it.

"And what do you talk to your tobacconist friend about?" Mrs. Murray wanted to know.

"About the latest kirk feud," said Ted pleasantly, "about the chief deacon being a bit of a fraud and how

his wife is jealous of the minister's wife—of all sorts of things like that."

He looked from one to the other. His mother's lips were invisible, so close did she draw them.

"That's a dig at you, mother," said Mabel.

"Oh!" thought Ted, and continued: "Sometimes also we talk about how cleverly we snuffed out somebody or other, 'Yes, that's what I said—I just said it like that. Of course, she couldn't say anything, but she knew what I meant'; or we discuss the cruelty of having to work for a living and——"

"That's a dig at me!" said Mabel.

"How can you think such a thing!" cried Ted, getting his sister's accent fairly well. I ne—ver dig at anybody. It must be guilty conscience." He paused, listening to his own voice. "My goodness! I don't know how you do it," he said. "I couldn't do it twice. Awful!"

"I wish you had stayed in to-night," said Mrs. Murray, looking deeply injured. "A young man called who might do you a great deal more good than a tobacconist." She wore by now her lofty and aggrieved manner, but Ted made no inquiry regarding the young man, and she did not pursue the theme. However, he saw him anon, a very serious youth who was spending vacation from his college of St. Andrews in Dundee, because he wanted to get on quickly, was studying there in cheap diggings, cramming in the "vac," being much invited to supper by the people of the church, he affording them opportunity to be kind to the stranger within their gates. It was in the movement to ask the lonely and upright youth to supper; and the mothers of the church took turns in being hospitable to him. The phrase was: "Now you mustn't study all the time. You must come and have supper with us one night."

He was the kind of young man who told of how ladies had been just like mothers to him. Teddy was not destined to miss him, was incontestably at home when he

called again. The visiting youth had already scented the pensive, self-pitying air of the house, and on this call he perceived that the son was a secondary matter. From rumour he had gathered that Mrs. Murray was not a widow; he had heard sad comments of, "Ah, poor woman! There is a skeleton in her cupboard." He had to invent for himself, now, the opinion that the son was a source of apprehension to the fond mother and sister. Farther, he was what is called a Practical Christian, or Athletic Christian, and he must needs broach (the path to hell, they say, is paved with good intentions) his panacea to the cornered Ted.

"And what do you do?" he asked in a high, piping voice, turning from the ladies.

"You mean my business?" asked Ted, gently.

"Well, I did not, as a matter of fact, but—er——"

"I'm a poor clerk," Ted told him.

"I meant your recreations," piped the young man.

"Oh, I don't know," said Ted.

"Do you golf?"

"No."

"Do you row?"

"Not often." He almost added: "I can't afford it"; but that would be a too painfully intimate footnote. He began to have, on his face, something of that calm, inscrutable air that his mother wore upon occasion. And Mrs. Murray sombrely eyed him, making him (for he was aware of her sitting there not at all indignant at the attitude of the good young, inquisitorial guest) more aloof, more prepared to become baffling.

"Do you cycle?"

"Not much; occasionally—with friends," said Ted, slightly stressing the last word.

"Do you box?"

"No," replied Ted, leniently, "but on two occasions when I have been attacked I have given a great deal more than I received."

"Oh!" piped the strenuous youth, glancing at Mrs. Murray to include her. "I believe in boxing. It is not brutal—it is so good for the health, the general physique, so steadying for young men."

"Do you read the sporting papers?" asked Ted in a tone of mild inquiry. He had not lived up to his intention to be jolly with his kindred, but he felt he could be jolly with this.

"Oh, certainly not! I don't mean that kind of thing. I mean a healthful way of having recreation with a few nice fellows in the evening."

Ted stared. He had never met such a young man before; he seemed unreal. It dawned on him that there were a vast number of different kinds of folks in the funny world.

"Do you swim?" the piping voice went on.

"I don't think I can call myself a swimmer exactly," said Ted. "I can float."

Mabel, mute, knew that this was her brother in his most provocative mood—when his own temper could be by no means lost. That twinkle in his eye was the one great sign to her that a scrap would not be successful.

"I must take you in hand and teach you swimming!" piped the strenuous Christian. "Shall I call for you to-morrow night?"

"That would be nice," said Mrs. Murray, smiling; benign, matronly. Mabel had (truth to tell) a contempt for the youth, but she held her peace.

"I have an engagement to-morrow night, thank you," replied Ted, quite pleasantly.

"Oh, have you?" said his mother.

"Yes." And then he looked at the visitor who was to be an example to him, and couldn't help it. "I'm going for a cycle spin up the Carse," he said.

"I thought you said you didn't cycle much!" exclaimed the youth.

"A little, a little."

"I'll be happy to come with you."

"That would be very nice," remarked Mrs. Murray.

Ted had a slight puckering smile at his lips, and raising his head in the manner of the young man, he said: "Do you read?"

"Well, of course, I'm studying," answered the youth.

"I mean apart from your studies. I mean," Ted continued to smile, "for relaxation."

"Oh, I don't believe in light reading," declared the visitor. "Apart from my studies I read Ruskin, Carlyle, Macaulay. Do you know Macaulay? Do you know Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*? Have you read Gibbon?"

"No," said Ted. "I'm reading Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey* just now."

"Oh, indeed. Is that the same Stevenson who wrote *Treasure Island*?"

"Yes. And *Men and Books*, and *Virginibus Puerisque*."

"Indeed! I didn't know. Let me see—*Virginibus*—um—ah—'of boys and girls.' Yes, 'of boys and girls.'"

"*Travels with a Donkey*," said Ted, "is very fine. Hamerton," he added, with that little puckering smile, "the author of *The Intellectual Life*, which I expect you know, thought a great deal of it." For himself, when reading that fact in the course of his unaided wanderings in print (if in one book he found reference to another he got that book next if the library possessed it, or if it was published at a possible price), he had taken it upon himself to wonder what could be wrong with *Travels with a Donkey*. But he was, with the years, realising the difference between human beings; and now, with highly deliberate intent, he was trying to be baffling to the catechist. "He says," he went on very drily, "in his preface, that we are all travellers with a donkey," and he smiled upon the example of manly perfection and rectitude before him.

This was in a vein that Mabel could thoroughly understand, and, indeed, appreciate. She felt a sneaking regard for Ted—although that would not prevent her from pointing out to her mother later that Teddy had been rude to the stranger.

Mrs. Murray, again out of her depth, said: "Well, it will be nice for you, Ted, to have Mr. Session go for a cycle-spin with you to-morrow evening. You could introduce him to the country."

"Very kind of you," declared Session.

"Thank you very much," said Ted, "but I am afraid I have already made arrangements."

Ethel had once told her son that she hoped he would show himself of a stronger will-power than his father, and, though mixing with young men in business, not fall into any treating or dramming ways. "Though your father is weak," she had said, "there is no need for you to be. Remember that you have West blood as well as Murray blood in you." And now students of heredity may, perhaps, perceive in him indications of both West and Murray—though that is by the way; and maybe he was just himself. At any rate, signs were not lacking that he had what his mother had hoped he would possess—a certain will-power. If once she had cautioned the father that he was easily "put upon," her objection to the son was now otherwise.

"As a matter of fact," said Ted, giving back to the smug Session an air of self-esteem, self-assurance, "something in the way, sir, that you are studying in your vacation, I—though I have never before given it that word—am studying in my summer evening, and Saturday afternoon, and Sunday"—he stressed the Sunday diabolically—"cycle runs. I cycle out into the country," he paused, "with a book of poems in my pocket," and he twinkled at the guest, if he had only known it, much as his outcast, gone-under father twinkled (you may remember) upon the Reverend Mr. Tannadice.

Session opened his mouth and grinned. It seemed a foolish face to Ted then, hardly worth all this trouble; but he continued:

"I know a nook," he spoke slow and dangerous, as Mabel, listening (and making no attempt to interrupt, as was usual, showing no desire to be the centre of the chat), realised, "where I squat down and read as long as the light serves."

"Oh, po'try!" cried the youth, pleasantly smiling to his hostess and back to her son. "I was not aware that I was talking to a poet; all the while I did not know it!" and his little laugh broke out, high and piping like his voice.

"This," thought Ted, "would start Melville a-going!"

The mother laughed at the sally, but Mabel did not; and Session now flickered a glance a little doubtfully at her, observing her utter lack of sociable appreciation of his wit. He had a faint suspicion that he had made an error in taste.

Teddy, however, was whetted up to his task, and somewhat as he had mentioned Hamerton, so now, smilingly, did he make a bid for opening fresh depths in the good young man.

"I am reading Omar Khayyám just now," he said, very definitely, with a touch of glee at the end; for he was speaking slowly, and he had got no farther than the word "Omar" when he realised that he had been right in the assumption that prompted him.

"A most pernicious book!" cried Session. "To my mind the most pernicious book of the century."

Ted was on the point of commenting: "Then you have read all the books of the century?" But that would be too bludgeony and small at one and the same time. The mother was startled. Clearly it was high time that some such young man as Session came into her son's life to pilot the fatherless boy, she being a simple woman who knew nothing of literature. But Ted, having checked

the reply that suggested itself, suddenly felt that he had had enough. He took out his watch.

"I'm sorry," he said, rising abruptly. "I have an appointment. I shall have to go if you will excuse me. Good-bye—very nice to have met you," and he was gone.

He was so full of it that he wanted to rush off and tell the only person in Dundee that, as far as he knew, would appreciate it.

"Which way are you going, Ted?" Mabel called after him, rising just as he was closing the door. "I have to go down to the office for a proof."

For the first time the Strenuous Christian looked really disturbed. "Oh—proof? I was not aware—you—er——"

"Yes," said Ted, airily, again in the doorway, returning at his sister's call, "my sister is a literary woman—also has prizes, a degree, medals, all that sort of thing. Good-bye Mr.—er——"

"I will say good-bye also," added Mabel, "in case you are gone before I come back."

Outside the door she said, "You should not have said Mr.—er—— like that at the end!" She laughed as she spoke. "It was so definitely rude, and the way you looked at him, too, was so definitely showing what you thought of him——"

"And I jolly well want to be definite," said Ted. "I jolly well want him to know what I think of him, that's why."

Mabel drew on her coat. "You are really going out, are you?" she asked in the hall.

"Oh, yes."

She went off to affix her hat before the mirror, Ted waiting for her, moving to and fro in the hall with a half-skipping walk of pleasure.

"Which way are you going?" she said, when she rejoined him.

"Townwards. I'll come a bit with you," he answered. "I'm going to pop down and see a friend of mine."

"Who? Someone I know?"

"No," he said. "No. Horrible swine, that," he remarked, reverting to their mother's guest.

"A little excessive—that!" she said drily. "But he is rather a plebeian person, I think."

They left the flat and swung off townwards.

"Who is this friend you are going to see?" said she.

"Certainly not a plebeian person, anyhow," Ted replied.

"Who is he?" she persisted.

"He's a journalist—not in your office."

"Have you known him long?"

"A little while—a little while." He couldn't tell her. Even at her "decentest" he couldn't tell her, for her "decency" was unreliable. "Well, so long. I turn down this way," he said chirpily, trying to pretend to himself that they were still on excellent terms, but a trifle dashed again; and he was utterly dashed, the mercurial youth, on being told by the landlady at Melville's digs that her lodger was gone from town for a long weekend.

Bang down he went into a slough of despond—and crawled slowly home again. It was at such times, when some little hitch of the day, or miscarriage of a plan, depressed, that he thought of his father—the tragedy of his fall; of his mother—the tragedy of her grief; of himself—with dissatisfaction. Doubtless Session would be gone by now; he would go home again instead of having a walk. His mother must feel lonely at times, though she but seldom spoke of the father who was dead yet alive; that was how it seemed to Ted.

Home again, however, Session gone, and his mother lack-lustre, monosyllabic, brooding over his rudeness to her guest, but at present saying nothing of it, he was highly restless. He walked from one room to another, unaware that by doing so he depressed Mrs. Murray with

considerations of how her life that was to have been so proud had turned so sorry. It was a reminding pad.

"Was your friend at home?" she asked.

"No."

"You did go to see a friend? You had an appointment?"

"Oh, yes—I did go to see a friend."

"John Melville?" she asked quietly.

Ted stared.

"What do—er—how do—"

She shook her head.

"You may choose to keep secrets from me—but I know some things. I was tidying your room the other day, in my motherly duty and thought for you, and came across that book you told me you had got from the library. It was not a library book. Why did you lie about it?"

Again he stared at her. It seemed impossible to explain. She saved him the baffling attempt by saying:

"If this friend that you don't feel you can mention to your mother is responsible for teaching you how to be rude, I don't think much of him. You were really rude to Mr. Session. I asked him to call for your sake—I thought he would be a good companion for you."

And he had heard her say to one of the church visitors that she had invited Session to call as it must be lonely for him with no friends in Dundee! Of course, she might do both. But even that was neither here nor there, a mere minor part of the whole cross-purpose business. The word, indeed, was in his mind: "Cross-purposes! Absolutely at cross-purposes!"

She renounced the subject now. There was an air of dismissing it, or of laying it aside for the nonce, at any rate, in the way she reset her spectacles (to which she now had recourse when sewing) and took up a piece of stitching.

Ted again roamed through the house, to his bedroom,

looked at the books, back again. Life seemed harassing instead of glorious. He came to the sitting-room and looked at his mother. She appeared so dejected that he felt pity for her. It came to him that she meant well, but was maddening in the process. How terribly stationary she was!

"I'm just going out again, mother—I shan't be long," he said.

"All right," she answered, ever so sadly, and the lamentation in her voice haunted him, almost made him turn back to bid her cheer up.

It was evidently one of the "off" nights for the promenaders. The bleached streets in town were remarkably empty; there was no hum of talk and laughter in various keys, no tripping and clatter of innumerable feet. One could pick out the tobacconists' shops, public-houses, sweetstuff shops, ice-cream shops by the lozenges of light from their windows; but in between these the shutters, drawn blinds, or tailors' dummies standing stiffly in unlit cavities added to the depopulated air of the town over which the old town clock chimed the quarters with melancholy.

Haunted by a sense of the pity of the life of his begetters, Ted went librarywards for the succour of a book, and coming forth with one, blowing out what seems the inevitable odour of public libraries, and drawing a deep breath, he turned to the right, and on the vacant pavement before him there was a figure that arrested him.

It was a man striding ahead and gesticulating all to himself in a manner at first startling, if not, indeed, terrifying, beheld thus without warning. Ted followed at an even pace, his eyes doubtfully upon the man's back. Suddenly the maniac (for so he seemed) paused and, looking up at the Burns statue, declaimed something to that unwieldy image, in a thick utterance, as though he had marbles in his mouth.

"It's dad!" thought Ted to himself, a new clutch at his heart.

"I will, by God!" ended his father's harangue to the statue.

He turned away, heard the footsteps of his son behind, swung round, pivoting on his heels, and peered. Under the street lamps his face was a thing to flee from, the eyes dreadful, the brows fantastically twitching, not level, the moustache gleaming dank, the original contour of his jaws blotted out now in worse than dewlaps. There he stood staring and frowning at his son.

"You!" he exclaimed.

Teddy felt that the only procedure at the moment was for him to stand fast and await further developments. The father thrust his face forward, somewhat as a bull thrusts, and there they stood, confronting each other, George Murray as though trying to read something in his son's eyes.

"I've found it out!" he said. "I thought *you* would have been honourable. They were in Glasgow when I saw you last!"

This was coherent, and Ted understood the reference.

"I didn't tell you they weren't," he replied, meeting the gaze of his father.

"Oh, all right. Tangle it up! Tangle it up more! Tangle it up!" Murray chanted. "I don't care. I haven't the gift to unravel it. I only came back here to see the old place; and now, when I've come back, I find they were in Glasgow with you. You were all there."

"That's right." Ted nodded.

His father gave a horrible "Ha!" at him. "You can't prevaricate this time, can't tangle it up. They are back here again, I know. Are you afraid of me?" and he stared and peered again.

"Not I," said Ted, not flinching. "But when you're like this, you must see for yourself, where a woman is concerned——"

"Ha!" the father breathed once more. "That's it, is it? Woman concerned! If you ever have a son, Teddy, just you antidote what his mother teaches him. His mother is sure to tell him to be courteous to women, never to contradict them, always to give them their way. You take him on one side, Teddy, now and again—like this," and he caught Ted's elbow. "You take him on one side and say to him, 'My boy, that's all very well in its way, but just you keep this little thought in the back of your mind—you watch your eye with women. Very dangerous,' you say to him. Mother teaches him to be courteous to women for the sake of other women. You teach him, my boy, to be very courteous to women for the sake of himself. It's an awful tangle, Ted, and, by God, I'm going to kill her!"

His voice went up in a sudden shriek that echoed from the street walls.

"Can't she leave me alone?" he cried. "Never left me alone. Now she pursues me with a dirty little barber, a dirty little ignorant barber, by God. I said to him, 'You menial rat—you want to demean me too, do you?' Of course, I'm down, but what did she want to spit him on me for? I tell you what it is, your mother's a——"

"Now, now," cried Ted. "Now, now."

"Your mother's a——"

"Now, now."

The father peered at his son again, this time drawing his head back instead of thrusting it forward.

"Chivalrous, chivalrous," he said, his voice thickening, a wave of something like silliness following what had been a wave of something like madness. "Oh, all right. On second thoughts, what does it matter?" He pronounced the last word "mar," and his ears heard, and his fuddled mind used it so. "Mar!" he said. "Can't mar me any more."

Then suddenly he took to his heels and ran, not in the direction he had been going, but eastwards. He had

turned about, facing Ted, and now he shot past his son in this terrible run. Ted, looking after him, was robbed of the power of action, then thought that he should follow, and walking smartly after his father—who had swept round the corner into Panmure Street—expected to see him in the next stretch of road. But Murray had vanished. Panmure Street was vacant, save for a girl advancing on the hither side. Ted stood there at a loss. The girl, swinging level, accosted him with, "Hullo, ducky!"

He turned to her. "Did you see a man running?" he asked.

The ruttish smile vanished, for his tone and manner impressed of something wrong, with anxiety.

"I saw a manie run across and down the wynd there," she answered.

He had forgotten the wynd. He hastened to the other side; but the wynd was empty. He wandered round as far as Murraygate corner, but there was no sign of his father, no commotion of any kind among the few people abroad there. A policeman at the corner twirled a whistle on his finger unperturbed; out of the shadow cast over the upper half of his face by his helmet he glanced at Ted passing and returning.

It suddenly occurred to Ted that perhaps his father in this mad mood was cunning. That running toward Panmure Street may have been a ruse; perhaps he had doubled back and was now hastening in the other direction; he had hinted that he knew where the family was living. Precipitately Ted crossed Murraygate and leapt on a passing tramcar.

He estimated the time lost in scouting for his father round Panmure Street and Murraygate, and decided that the old man was hardly likely to be ahead of him. He climbed the stairs to the flat, looking up watchful. He put his key in the lock and entered. No sound.

"Hullo, mother," he called.

"That you, Ted?"

"Yes, mother. In the sitting-room? Ah, there you are. I haven't been long, eh?" He spoke cheerily, hoping she was now in easier tune, though after his encounter with his father the recent frictions of the home seemed side-issues. But she had been thinking over them in his absence.

"You did not answer me definitely when you came in before," she said, "a question that I asked you. You went out to see this mysterious friend; but had you an appointment?"

"No, I had no appointment." Then he gave ear, for there was a step on the stairs. No, it was not his father's—and it passed to the flat above.

"Then why did you say you had?" she asked, going on unruffled with some stitching.

"I didn't say so to you. But I said so to Session, because I think it more polite to invent an appointment than to tell a guest that one can't stand him."

"Can't—stand—him?" inquired Ethel, and carefully she sewed, thrusting the needle through the material and raising her hand in the air. "But you ought to stand him. You should not be so self-opinionated. He is a sterling, fine young man. I think you could learn a lot from him. Where have you been, now?"

"To the library—for a book." He passed to the hall and took it from his coat pocket, returning with it, after a pause there, to give ear for any step on the outer stairs.

"He is a sterling young man," she repeated when he came back, after a glance at the book in his hand, "and steady."

"My dear mother," he said, "Mabel agrees with me that he is an absolute mugwump."

There was another step now audible on the stairs to the listening Ted. His heart responded to it. He must be ready for anything. Then there came his sister's rat-tat-tat, and he hurried to open to her.

"You back!" she said. "You did not stay long with your friend."

"Oh, I've been back and out again. He wasn't in," replied Ted. This over his shoulder, walking into the sitting-room, while Mabel uncloaked. "And where are your proofs?" he asked, laughing, as his sister, now divested of her hat and coat, entered the room.

"I read them at the office before coming home," she replied.

He wagged a finger at her. "Sure, now?" he asked.

"Oh, quite. Thought I would read them there and give that terrible young man time to go."

"You don't like him?" said Mrs. Murray.

"Like him!" cried Mabel. "Why, he is an awful prig."

"Oh, well," said the mother, dropping her stitching. "I hadn't thought of him in that way. Yes, perhaps you are right." The queen-mother evidently did stand a little in awe of the dictator.

\* \* \* \* \*

Teddy, sitting in his bedroom after the front door was locked and chained, did not read to-night before going to bed. He sat there, the door ajar, the others in bed, so that he might hear any sound upon the stairs. He seemed still to be confronted by those terrible eyes; the terrible face, from which the trigness of the jaw was quite gone, lost in dewlaps like hanging pouches, was still before him.

It could hardly be said that he thought. He merely sat there, leaning back in his chair, heels on table, an open but unread book in lap, head in hand—still looking into the old man's fearsome face. It was almost as if he looked at his father out of that glamour in which he really lived, hardly aware, made up of the lyrics and the ballads of the old dead singers whose books stood there behind him on the top of the chest of drawers, a sheet of brown paper under them now lest they should

scratch its veneer. Only once, in an hour's motionless reclining there, he spoke to himself.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. Queer world. It's terrible—all round."

#### CHAPTER IV

TED did his best to hide the fact that there was something on his mind during the succeeding days, for the proximity of his father—in such demented state—gave him ceaseless anxiety for the home's sake. He left in the morning worried; he made the excuse of a longer lunch interval—"We are a little slack at the office just now"—to delay with his mother at mid-day; he hurried back to the flat at night with interior forebodings hidden beneath an easy exterior. Once, from a car-top, as he was homeward-bound, he saw the cause of his uneasiness walking down Tay Street, and marvelled at the old man's marvellous recuperative powers, remarking the alert, erect carriage. The figure thus glimpsed as the car passed Tay Street end haunted him; it seemed an arresting figure, a figure of battered possibility. He was still in Dundee, then; anything might happen. Ted took the policeman on the beat into his confidence, stopping to speak to him in an impulse born out of his continual worry for his mother's peace and safety.

"Would you mind," he said, "just keeping an eye on number nine?"

"What's the trouble?" asked the constable.

"Domestic trouble," said Ted. "My father—" he raised his elbow in an explanatory gesture, not eager to tell just how bad the matter was—to enter into detail.

"Crooks his elbow, eh? And isn't the kind of man that should?"

Ted nodded.

"What are you feared of?" asked the policeman.

"My mother is alone all day," answered Ted. "It is very distressing."

"What way? Is he violent?"

"He has been. There was a separation some time ago. He has been away from Dundee, but he is back now, and I saw him the other night on the verge of D.T.'s. He threatened to come and do away with her."

"Aye, man," said the policeman. "But he didna—cheer yersel' wi' that! Of coorse, the trouble is that a lady in your mither's social poseetion," he looked at Ted's clothes, "wouldna like to give him in chairge, perhaps? That would settle it, of coorse, if he came round creatin' a disturbance."

"No," agreed Ted, "she wouldn't do that."

"Of coorse, if he created a disturbance——" continued the policeman wagging his head; he left the rest in air. "What's he like?" he inquired.

A look of distress came on Ted's face. He was on the point of saying, "A man who looks as if he was once handsome and well-to-do, about my height, marked with debauchery." How to describe? He thought to say, "A man of medium height, with a wild look in his eyes." But instead he said, "About five foot ten, past his prime, rather vigorous appearance, his eyes generally more red than brown—a tendency to a kind of hanging look here," and he touched his jaw.

"Of coorse, if he was in liquor," said the policeman slowly, "that would be quite apart from your mither giving him in chairge for an assault, or the neighbours calling me in for a disturbance of the peace—and that would keep your good mither out of it. And then, of coorse, there's suspeecious loitering, ye ken. I'll keep my eyes open, anyhow, and I'll tell the man that relieves me—though, of coorse, you could go down to the office and see them there. There's such a thing as plain

clothes men, ye ken. Your mither could be protected and saved her peace of mind, and her feelings too. Do you really expect him to come brawling?"

"I'm a bit nervous about it since I saw him like that the other day."

"You leave it to me," said the policeman. "I'll keep my eyes open anyhow."

Ted was thus made easier for his mother's sake, and he did not so much as glimpse his father anywhere in his comings and goings during the next days. It must have been close on a fortnight after that encounter beside the Library that Mabel came home a little later than usual, and with a frown at Ted, who was sitting to the side of the hearth reading, his feet tucked up, not against the mantelpiece, but against the side of the mantel support, said:

"I saw Mr. Taylor to-day." This was the Taylor of the old shipping office in which her father had once worked and shown promise, now in business for himself, his wife a member of the church attended by Mrs. Murray. Her manner was the manner of one making grave disclosures, and the mother waited for more. "He told me father had visited them the other evening."

Ted, listening over the top of his book, glanced at his mother and saw how she started, how her hands gave a slight involuntary clutch. He wished Mabel had kept as mute regarding this news of his father as he had of the recent meeting.

"He seemed rather cold," said Mabel.

She eyed her mother, and the mother eyed her. Apparently they had a good understanding.

"Yes," she repeated, "he was very," a pause, "dry."

"He *was*," said Mrs. Murray, meditative, and her face had a drawn look. "What did he say?"

"Oh, nothing much; just mentioned it, and—was very dry."

"Did you ask how father was?"

"No, I just said, 'Oh, indeed?' Och," she exclaimed—as if suddenly smitten with disgust at what Life offered her, a dismissing expletive. "I've to go back to the office to-night to see about an article;" and she looked very sorry for herself, as though a cruel Fate decreed that she must work, not at all as though it were her Glory to work. "I must have a glass of milk, or something, first."

As she dismissed the theme her mother left it so; but after Mabel (supper over) was gone Mrs. Murray, who had left Ted again reading by the fire, suddenly put her head round the door and stood there until he looked up. He noticed that she was dressed for going out.

"Get your hat on, Ted, like a good boy, and come along with me. I'm going to make a call, and I don't like to be out alone after dark."

Ted jumped up. "Where?"

"I'm going to see the Taylors. I haven't called on them for a long time."

The expression upon her face, while she spoke, did not change—the expression she had seen in the glass as she tittivated there—an expression of long suffering, of deep grief.

Ted considered to himself the pathos of this intended visit—how she still loved his father, how, without any word to him (all being too deeply sacred to her, he supposed) she merely got ready to go out, to call on the Taylors, seeing her husband had been there, so as to have news of him. He pondered on how wonderful a matter was love, which thus moved her.

"After all," he thought, "in the early days, before he went wrong, they must have been happy together—and behind his debauchery and his fall she still sees the man she loved."

He would go tenderly with her; to ease her sensitiveness. "Right-o, mother!" he said. Drawing on his

shoes in the hall he said to himself, "I hope we don't meet dad on the way. Jolly glad she did not think of going alone."

Arrived at the Taylors' house they found there an attitude of diffidence. The Taylors were really not visiting friends, were more what may be called church-door acquaintances, and recently even the church-door smiles and bows had been formal, for Mabel felt superior to them, as indeed she felt to most of those folks who had composed the former church connection. Mr. Taylor's manner, this evening, was neither here nor there. Mrs. Taylor, however, was a little fussy. Such a once-in-a-blue-moon sort of a call must have something behind it, and what that was she guessed.

But they talked of the weather. They shook their heads over a comment on a feud afoot in the church instigated against the minister by the wife of one of the deacons who did not like the minister's wife.

"Of course, there are two sides to every story," Taylor interjected, for this gossip was between the women, and really little (it may be noted) to Mrs. Taylor's taste, who, though in the church, was not of it.

For a moment, at that remark, the hard look in the core of Ethel Murray's eyes dominated other expression; but a second later it was wiped away, and her air was merely of one wounded by the world. There was, nevertheless, a pause in conversation—which she ended by saying:

"My daughter told me that——" head on side she looked away and sadly concentrated her gaze upon the coal-scuttle, "that you had seen—George," she murmured after a second pause.

Mr. and Mrs. Taylor exchanged a fragment of a glance, and Mrs. Taylor was again fluttery.

"Oh, yes, he called on us," answered Mrs. Taylor.

"I suppose—I suppose it is only natural that I want word of him," Ted's mother almost whispered. "I do

so often wonder. Many prayers have been offered for his redemption."

Ted had to admit to himself that this sort of speech gave him an interior squirm; and of late phrases of the genus of that last one had been coming more and more into her vocabulary.

Mrs. Taylor sighed; Mr. Taylor stroked his face, appeared slightly perturbed.

"I do not think I should condemn myself," Ethel went on. "I had to think of the children—Ted growing up—it was too terrible."

"Terrible for you, mother," said Ted—and the Taylors glanced at him.

"How was he?" asked Mrs. Murray.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Murray, you mustn't trouble. He looked wonderful," answered Mrs. Taylor reassuringly; she was a woman of the kind called "sonsy," a well-covered though not stout, a rounded, buoyant, well-wishing sort of woman.

Taylor, sitting back in his chair, right elbow in left hand, plucked his chin, and his eyelids drooped. There was another halt in the conversation.

"Yes—wonderfully well," he said at last.

"He is working too," broke in Mrs. Taylor in cheering accents.

"In town?" inquired Ethel.

"No," replied Taylor, "at Carnoustie——"

"Well—er—at one of my husband's branches, as a matter of fact," said Mrs. Taylor.

"That's all right, that's all right," said Taylor hastily.

"We're stocktaking there, and—well, at least it is temporary work for him."

"I don't know how to thank you," declared Mrs. Murray.

Taylor made no reply.

Ted's mother glanced from one to the other and played with her fingers a little nervously.

"I worry so about him. Was he looking——" she had difficulty in saying it—"dissipated?"

Again Mrs. Taylor had her air of flutter, looked to her husband for him to give reply.

"Really you have nothing to worry about, Mrs. Murray," said Taylor.

"Thank you so much," and her head turned pensively from host to hostess. "Did he—did he, by any chance, mention us—me?"

Mrs. Taylor left this also to her husband.

"No. No," he said, raising his head and closing his eyes. "Very reticent."

"I'm so glad he called on you," said Ethel, "and that he was—er—all right." She nodded. "You might be able to do something towards his reformation—to speak to him."

"Well, I don't think," began Mr. Taylor, rubbing his hands together slowly and tilting his head until it rested against the chair back, "I don't think that I would——" his gaze came down and roved his own sitting-room, "that I would—er—tackle him in that way. We had really a very pleasant evening."

"Just a homely evening," interjected his wife. "It is nice for him to have——" she hesitated. "My husband says he can come to us as often as he likes; glad to see him."

"Give a dog a bad name, you know," continued Taylor. He suddenly looked directly at his visitor. "I think—er—giving a man a chance instead of lectures is better."

Mrs. Murray sighed.

"I do hope," she said, "that he will pull up. I would have gone on had it not been——" her voice broke—"for the children."

Ted stared before him. This was not the first time he had heard her view of that matter, and he still thought his memory played no trick on him in serving him with the belief that it was for her sake—that separation; yet

she clearly thought it was for Mabel and him—"the children." Perhaps that was why she was at times so dry toward him—was still fond of the father; because of the children they had to live apart, and to the younger she maybe bore a grudge at times. Perhaps it was something like that—but women were unfathomable.

"Quite," said Taylor, as with perfect understanding. "Quite so. Oh, well," he seemed to dismiss it, "you can feel fairly happy about him. I would not say that to anybody of penetration he did not—er—give a hint—" Mrs. Murray peered eagerly at him as he paused for expression of what he had to say—"of the fact that—well, one could see signs of former dissipation, perhaps." Mrs. Murray seemed relieved "But he is a very able man—wonderful brain," added Taylor, "wonderfully good brain."

"Ah," she sighed, "he had once. Of course, that can be weakened and lost by disuse, and I hope that after all he will be the victor, not the vanquished, over his besetting sin," she shook her head, "and receive the prize that for the conqueror waits."

Teddy was numbed, ashamed; why, he could not have immediately explained. Mr. Taylor glanced at the carpet; Mrs. Taylor (more in the way of hearing such speeches, though never making them) merely nodded her head slowly, repeatedly.

"I should think he has strong recuperative power," she stated to the somewhat strained silence.

"Yes, he has, I know," Ethel murmured sadly. "I've often seen it."

"I think his will power quite probably may aid him," Mrs. Taylor said hopefully.

"Doesn't he speak a language or two?" asked her husband. "Does he know Spanish?"

"Yes," answered Ted, promptly.

"I asked," explained Taylor, returning to Mrs. Murray after a glance at Ted, "because I thought so, but did not

wish to speak to him personally about it yet, for fear of raising false hopes. He struck me—indeed, he always struck me so—as a sensitive man, who might be depressed if things didn't come off as he hoped; but I—er—had a tentative notion that perhaps after that temporary work was over I might be able to put him in the way of a situation in Spain—get him away from his old cronies, seeing he's back here again," he ended abruptly.

"I'm afraid it's not cronies," Mrs. Murray contradicted, in melancholy tones.

"Oh!" said Taylor. "Solitary. H'm!" He stroked his face and stared into distance. She looked sadly downward, and his gaze came back, and he searched her with a long glance.

"Perhaps he will show his appreciation of your probation at your Carnoustie branch," added Ethel, "though I'm afraid——"

Ted knew his father was down, and a waster; but he thought it unfortunate that his mother should talk of him "showing appreciation" of "probation." Perhaps this was false pride of clan, but so he felt. Oddly enough, and illogically, he was annoyed with Mr. Taylor. He raised his eyes and looked at their host, and Taylor's gaze, coming from the mother's face, met Teddy's, stayed for a moment. At that glance Ted rather liked him again!

"And how are you keeping?" Taylor suddenly asked Mrs. Murray.

"Oh, I'm nicely, thank you, nicely—considering."

"That's good. We've not seen you for such a long time—beyond just the little greetings at church."

"Didn't it rain after service last Sunday?" said Mrs. Taylor.

"This is quite our rainy season," remarked Taylor.

They extricated themselves by aid of the weather as they had shaken themselves down with it. Then Ethel,

with "Well, Teddy boy, I think our visit has been long enough," rose to depart.

The visit came to an end with bows and hand-shakes and pleasant smiles, and on the way home the sensitive son of the sensitive father again cast back in his mind to former days. The frou-frou of his mother's skirts somehow set the tune for his thoughts. As he paced by her side the sound recalled to him the evening when he walked home with his sister after the electric parting from Nelly Gordon. This, too, was a silent convoy. Only when they were quite near the flat did Ted break the silence.

"I think it rather a good idea of Mr. Taylor's," he said, "to say nothing to dad—I mean in the lecturing way—but just to treat him as a friend, not to touch on his life. And I'm quite sure if dad was all right, or even if he'd had a glass, so long as he wasn't—well—you know what I mean, mother, he'd be the last man to wash dirty linen in public."

His mother not responding, he turned his head and glanced at her, but she was still lost in private considerations. He did not repeat his opinion, and not until after they had entered the little hall did she speak.

"Well, I'm not sorry I called!" she exclaimed, it might have been to herself—seemed as much to herself as to Ted.

The sitting-room door opened, and Mabel looked out.

"Oh, it's you!" she said. "I thought I heard somebody. Well?"

Ted felt himself very much of a third party, a dependant, an outsider, because of something in that "Well?" and the way his mother and sister stood there confronting each other.

"I've been to see——" began Mrs. Murray.

"The Taylors," interrupted her daughter. "I guessed that was where you had gone. And?"

"I suspected he had been trying to turn opinion against me," Mrs. Murray said.

"Who? Father?" Ted cried. "I don't suppose he did, Mr. Taylor said he was all right. But even if he did it wouldn't matter. You've always hoped that he might have decent friends still, and people to help him, and even supposing that he did say anything disparaging about us, that doesn't make any difference to you, mother. When one is really in the right, it doesn't matter what rumours go afloat."

Her eyes went very hard. Mabel paid no heed to her brother's long comment, neither did the mother. To the daughter, as mother and daughter walked into the sitting-room together, Mrs. Murray began: "Yes. I went along. I thought it advisable."

"Yes?"

"Oh, just from the general feeling I gathered——"

Mabel swung the door shut, and Ted did not follow. He passed into his bedroom, and lighting the gas sat down there, kicked off his shoes, and, heels on table, chair tilted, sat in a kind of stupor with a feeling of resentment at things in general. It was to him as if he had been dropped into, and stirred up in, a jumble-dish of a world. He had no opinion on anything to offer himself.

"Och!" he broke out at last, and looked up at his little row of books—so many doors opening to real worlds, different from this mixed, and disordered, unreal one.

## CHAPTER V

It was one of those days with a base of blue overhead, when white clouds, tinged with ruddy gold, drift up and over. From the gap in the houses where Perth Road runs into Nethergate the view of strip of sky-reflecting river

(over engine sheds and many lines of railway) arrested the sensitive passer-by like the smile of an unexpected friend encountered on the way.

At that part of the road Ted always had a joy of somewhat the same order as he knew on opening a new book. He would walk past there with head turned, relishing the scene, the space, the colour. He had observed, too, that a mob of gulls had a fancy for lingering in the air there overhead, adding their beauty of movement, poising and drifting aloft, round a common centre, like leaves in a slow whirlpool. He derived great happiness from such things. They seemed more real than the world of a drunken father, a pathetic mother to whom these things which lit life for him were less than toys, who—for some reason denied him to understand—apparently considered him as somewhat of a suspicious character; more real than the world of his sister, that queer world of complaint against the very things she desired, a perverse sort of world. To remember these gulls, poising like great snow-flakes, when Mabel was "shirty," and trying to make him "shirty" in response, was to become so catholic that he could even think to himself: "Poor girl! She is bound to be embittered against life, to be cynical regarding men, having had such a father—seen him so often in such horrible condition."

But his attitude was changing as he grew older. Solicitous still regarding his mother, thought for her safety was now more inspired by duty, and disattached pity, than by affection. He found the home, with all its nagging pettiness, irksome. He could not pretend to endorse the "united family" phrase. Melville—who might bore some and clash them—was a God-send to him, belonged (in Ted's private cataloguing of things) to the same world as the sunlight on the Fife fields across the river, the sweeping movements of the gulls overhead. He found that Melville helped in somewhat the way that the unexpected visitor in Glasgow—Miss Hope—had helped,

and did still help, for he often recalled her, recalled her voice, or listened as it were to a lingering echo of it.

He was thinking, walking into business, some such filmy thoughts made up of the best bright moments that he knew, when a voice hailed him, "Hi, Murray! Murray!" and a cab drew up at the kerb, the horse slithering to a standstill. Ted turned his head abruptly from enjoying the view, and saw Melville sitting up on the dicky beside the driver.

"So glad I've seen you," shouted Melville. "I was so sorry I was away last week-end when I heard you had called. Come and see me in my new place. What's the address? Do you remember the address, cabby? Yes, that's right. Couldn't stop at that place," he went on. "The landlady was a church-going Christian. It began last week—I mean the crisis, a kind of long crisis. The man in the flat below died. I saw the hearse and the cabs drawing up—my first announcement of it—so I jumped up and pulled down my blind; all the blinds were down on the other side of the street already. A decent thing to do; token of sympathy. Hanged if the old lady didn't come into my room and say, 'I want to look at the funeral out of your window—my gentleman in the next room is that austere. What have you pulled down your blind for?' Now, I hadn't pulled it down because it was *usual*; I object to doing things because they are usual, unless the action in question has something deeper than just being usual."

He was highly excited. The cabby looked at him with bland interest.

"I told her it was out of decency, sympathy for the bereaved. 'Oh,' said she, 'we'll ha'e the blinds doon at oor ain funeral. They are my blinds anyhow,' and up went the blind over her head while she commented, 'It's a fine funeral. I didn't think that all his relatives would have silk hats.'" (The cabby, head turned to Melville,

sitting close, grinned in his face.) "Now, Murray, I can't make a home in a house like that! End of prolonged crisis came this morning."

He went on pouring it all out, sitting up there on the dicky beside the driver.

"There is a young engineer in the 'digs,' and I've always listened for him in the mornings, so as to let him go into the bathroom first. You see, he goes out at six in the morning, comes back for breakfast, and off again—apprentice. Seemed to take a long time to-day, so I went and tried the door, and just when I was coming away again, the door still being locked, out pops a big bald chap in a dressing-gown—and went into a further room; and out of the kitchen door popped the landlady. 'I don't like the way you try that door-handle,' said she. I said, 'Well, hang it all——' Whoa, cabby, stop your horse!" for the lean horse went restive. "I said, 'Well, hang it all, I thought the engineer was in here. I always give him first show because I know all about these engineering works. The gates are shut after the whistle blows, and they don't open again for a quarter of an hour or so, to let the late ones in; the men get docked the cash for that lost time, and the apprentices have to work off all their lost quarters of an hour at the end of their term of apprenticeship. It is like being kept in at school, rotten for them.' And she jeered at me, 'You pretending to think about other people!'—'I don't *pretend*,' I said. 'I'm not a professing Christian!'—'You don't need to tell me that,' she said. 'Two months have you been here, and never once gone to the kirk. Go out in your old Norfolk jacket, too, on the Sabbath—and with a silk hat under your bed, never worn!' Oh, no, sir, it's not funny," he flung off in an aside to the cabby, who was chuckling; and to the smiling Teddy he affirmed: "It's *not* funny!" although, to be sure, he was grinning slightly himself now as well as looking enraged. "I said: 'And why did you tell me I could not have a hot bath in the

morning? I heard that old fat buck slung and plunging as I came along!"

The cabby's paunch heaved with laughter.

"Oh, I wasna going to put maself oot to gie' you a hot bath," she said. "You can go to the public baths."—"You give *him* a bath, don't you?" I said.—"That was a stipulation when he took the rooms," she answered, and curtseyed to me—a dam nasty curtsey, too, more like a curse than a curtsey. "He's not just a journalist—he's gentry," she said. "He's a company promoter. He's in Dundee interviewing moneyed people."—"Well," I said, "I'm glad you've told me that, for seeing that's what he is he's too much of a hell of a swell for me to be in the same house with." She's one of those people with whom one must be overbearing to gain hateful respect and establish right and title to a daily wash. She gave me only hateful despite. She is a lowly Christian—and I was far too Christ-like toward her. I rushed into my room, and packed my things; and I rushed out and ran round the town till I saw *Lodgings to Let* in a window, and I've taken the lodgings. I think they'll be better; that last woman was too superior to put a notice in the window, she put it in the newspapers; and she told me she'd never heard such profanity from anybody! The old murderess!"

The cabby turned round and touched Melville's elbow with the butt of his whip.

"The old what, sir, did you say?" he asked.

"Murderess!" hissed Melville. "She's a widow—suffocated the old man with a Bible, I bet you. Come down to-morrow night, Murray, and have a barge at the new place."

A policeman stepped up. "A little less language, sir," he warned, trying to look stern, and failing. "You're shouting your language."

Melville gave him a naval salute.

"All right," he said; then to Ted: "Try and come up

to-morrow night, and we'll shut the door and the windows so that nobody can hear, and we'll plan confusion that will come some day, soon or late, to the rotters of the world. So long! All right, cabby!"

The cab, banked inside with sugar boxes, doubtless containing the books, and with a diminutive trunk, two suitcases, and a hat-box on top, rattled away; and very jolly and smiling Ted went on to business. He could not resist the temptation to look over his shoulder at it again, and above the top of hat-box and trunk he saw Melville giving what is called a "touch-light" with his cigarette to one in the cabby's mouth. And that picture stayed with him, making him smile to himself ever and again throughout the day. In the evening at home, over supper, what with the day's blue sky, the clear air with tang in it, and the Melville episode, he looked a very cheery young man. His mother did not fail to remark his twinkling mood, and suspected that it, and recent reserves in his manner, perhaps meant that he had now some girl in his life.

Mabel also had an eye on him, part dictatorially-minded, part proud of what she called her "psychic sense"; and she or the mother—they had an understanding—would in their talk work in some reference to pretty girls, and then both would have a squint at him. To-night, if Mabel did not know what he was thinking, she knew at any rate that he had a private and whimsical thought, and she felt very clever and superior to him for having found this out. But he had still an open countenance; and the proverbial man with a cork eye would have known that he was considering something jolly, and later would have seen a shadow come on the jollity. That was when, thinking of going down to see Melville, he was brought up with a consideration that he had better still be a good deal of a home-bird, lest his father hunted them out. He wondered where the old man might be now. For the time being, inspired by what his mother wished would inspire

him, and what his sister affirmed men lacked—sense of duty—he stayed indoors, the day's work over.

But about a week later, the deferred visit to Melville still in his mind—"Going out to-night?" he asked Mabel.

"No. Why?"

"Oh, I wanted to go out—but didn't want to leave mother alone."

Mabel trilled her laugh.

"There's filial piety!" she carolled. Her psychic sense did not suggest to her Ted's reason for not wishing to leave the mother alone.

"That's right," he agreed, "that's the phrase for it," and departed, depressed, or what Melville called "pippy."

Melville was the man for him to-night more than ever. Melville was his light philosophical comic relief from the acidities at home—Melville, with his diatribes against pettiness. His own few friends he never felt he could invite to the house. The talk was hopeless, about (when Mrs. Murray was in her element) the price of coal, vendettas at the church, last Sunday's sermon; and when Mabel had its guidance (she being now engaged upon writing novelettes of the lover-in-the-lane order) was chiefly complaints regarding how, in real life, men did not know what love was, how men were jealous of women, how they demanded purity from women but were impure themselves—and how it was a crying shame that women couldn't be impure too, though to be sure she did not put it that way. The word "impure" seemed to be masculine; "freedom" was apparently the feminine.

The "atmosphere" of the house, as Melville (dangerous young man) would say, was all wrong for Ted as he grew older. His mother thought he should not invent excuses to get away when her friends called, told him so—not in any heat, for she was seldom heated; she possessed, indeed, a calm that almost suggested a halo of sanctity. He affirmed when reprimanded, not hotly but as one balked,

that they bored him—"you've no idea how much." To listen to talk of church-meetings, and what the parson's wife had said to the leading deacon's wife, and what the leading deacon's wife had said, with a pleasant smile, to the parson's wife, so that the parson's wife could take it or leave it, bored him to the point of physical pain, made him ache. So he plaintively pled, in extenuation, for his flights from visitors.

"But you must remember that there are other interests in the world besides your own," she replied. "I'm afraid that you are selfish—like your father."

On that occasion Ted had expected Mabel to defend him. When they were alone she could be quite cruelly amusing in disparaging talk of the church circle. He looked to her, but the hope failed; her sympathy was private; he did not understand.

"All men are selfish, mother," she tossed at them. "It is really in vain for you to tell Ted not to be selfish."

To-night, coming out into the street, he had the feeling as of having escaped, and gaily he set off to find Melville's new "digs"—only to be informed, by a cheery little woman at the door of the discovered "digs," that: "Mr. Melville was here, but he left. He only stayed a week. A friend of his came unexpectedly to Dundee, and this friend wished him to share rooms. I can give you the new address."

Wondering what manner of man Melville was thus chumming with, Ted (provided with the new address) sought him out—up a corkscrew staircase in a cobbled court off the Nethergate now. He was prepared for another disappointment. He felt it coming. Melville would be out! But no, Melville was not out—was very much at home. Ted apologised for his omission to call at the last "digs," and received Melville's apology for the omission to drop a note announcing the further change which had sent him on a vain errand thither. "You

gave me your address but I lost it. I always can't find things that I put aside carefully!" he said in disgust at himself.

Presently it transpired, on the non-appearance of a partner here, that there was no such person. He was a pleasant fiction, designed, as Melville explained, "to let that little woman down gently." The truth of the case was that her husband had, on the first evening in the "new digs," put his head round the door ("Can't stand people putting their heads round the door!") saying that he hoped Melville would be comfortable. On the following evening he had advanced as far as the table to say: "Well, you've got plenty of books, sir. You look studious." On the third evening he was sitting on the table, swinging a leg, knowingly informing the lodger that he had picked up a copy of Aristotle at what he pronounced an "unction," and then pointing with his foot at a copy of *Don Quixote*, he said: "I believe that is pretty near the bone. Can I have a loan of it?" He had the loan, and Melville thought that here was an example of Mr. Dooley's advice about using a book as a "weapon of defence." He hoped he was now quit of his landlord. But next evening the wily one entered with the volume in hand to say that he could not get through it, that his eyes were bad, and: "I see you don't mark your books, Mr. Melville. A man like myself, who is no great reader, has to have the plums pointed out." Hence the invention "for the little woman's sake" of a friend demanding that Melville immediately come to share rooms with him; hence the removal to this old house complacent to that invented request of the non-existent person. It would seem, however, that Melville had found a haven in this old house in the heart of the old town, though even it supplied him with cumulative evidence for his diatribes.

"When I tell people where I'm living now," he said, "their remark is an excellent indication of character.

Some say, 'That is very nice and central! So convenient!'—others say, 'Before I was married, and went to live across the water, I had rooms out west.' Out west be damned!"

Ted found very exhilarating these comments on the paltry. He knew so well the world against which Melville raved. They helped him to expel, as unfair, the imputation at home that he was very selfish—all wrong, all round.

"I like the place," said Ted.

"You must come upstairs and see the room in the tower itself, with the deep window-sills, set away into the walls." He led the way up. "Like an old stronghold or keep, isn't it? At this window, looking out, I feel I could be a child again with a telescope made out of a roll of paper. Look. You can see the roofs below and the people like puppets, and away beyond," he nodded, bending to look over Ted's shoulder out of the low, deep-set window, "the river. There's a lighthouse away down there blinking all night when everybody's asleep."

After the ancient place had been duly enjoyed, Melville led down again on the narrow stair.

"The human element is all right," he said quietly. "Live and let live. No objection whatever to my having my own pictures on the walls, no nastiness about it like most; realises that I'm going to live here, and may as well have my pictures up instead of sitting among hers. It sounds not worth mentioning, but it's amazing what friction can follow the putting up of one's own pictures in place of the ones in occupation. They won't say anything as a rule, but they'll wait the opportunity to tell you that they don't see anything in the pictures you've hung up. You can have the room, but you must learn to be happy with their pictures and keep your own under the bed. Fact."

Ted nodded, highly serious, and looked round the walls. On the mantelpiece were a few photographs, and a figure in one group arrested him.

"May I look?" he said. "These are yours, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Why—this is Miss Hope!"

"Eh? Do you know her?"

"Oh, I just met her once. She's a friend of my sister's," Ted hastened to explain.

"Very decent sort," said Melville. "I don't know what relation she is of mine. Let me see—my father's brother's—no; my father's sister's—no; I always get mixed. Some kind of cousin—or niece—or aunt—I don't know, one of those relationships that are settled by saying 'cousin' and explaining afterwards if anyone asks that it's not exactly cousin—not *full* cousin."

Ted laughed.

"Oh, she knows. Women all remember these things. They have the knack for relationships. So your sister is a friend of hers? Small world."

Ted, feeling he had gazed long enough, peered at another snap-shot that didn't interest much at all, and kept gazing at it as if it was natural for him to look long at photographs. Then he had another look at Catherine Hope, saying: "I like the way this group is taken. The trees in the background are fine, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Melville. "They're not so bad."

"I like the combination of black and white in it," Ted went on.

"Um!" said Melville, whom it had not appealed to as quite such a perfect thing. "Very pleasing."

It seemed to him that this young man he had picked up at Eckie Balgray's was a trifle gushy, very eager to admire things that were just "so-so."

"I like it chiefly for that," he pointed to Miss Hope, "for Cathy. We don't often see each other, but she's refreshing. Of course you've met her?"

"Just once," said Ted again.

"Oh, fine!" said Melville. "I don't know if you've

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noticed it with girls—but so many of them get stiff if they're not centre of the stage. There's nothing of that about her. Jolly decent kid," he added, as if he were a hundred years her senior. "I like her because she knows a lot of things but doesn't seem to have read just for the sake of knowing more than others—for prizes, the way some college girls seem to do. You know what I mean—difficult to describe."

"Yes, I know," replied Ted casually.

The subject was dropped. Melville turned to his bookcase—he had a bookcase here.

"Look at this," he said. "I've packed so often in a hurry that I'm damned if I haven't driven some nails through half-a-dozen books! Well, I'm at peace now, anyhow—I'm at rest, and my instinct is to be at peace and at rest. My landlady is a gem and a friend. She forgets to sweep under the bed, but that's a detail. I say nothing. She never beseeches me to shut the window to keep the dust out. I've got it at last—perfect understanding. There is no question of bossing either way. I think that's the secret."

Ted's eyes opened wide. "I believe it is," he said.

"It's the whole thing," said Melville, oracular. "Scrapping to see who is to rule, and who's to be ruled, is simply damnable. We only live a few years anyhow. There's no sense in ruling and being ruled."

"The trouble is," said Ted, "that if you don't rule some people they'll rule you."

"Oh, people like that you've just got to leave," answered Melville, "before they turn you into a——"

"Slave," interrupted Ted.

"I was going to say tyrant," said Melville. "Slave is out of the question."

## CHAPTER VI

"WHERE were you last night?" asked Mrs. Murray over the breakfast-table.

Mabel held knife and fork in abeyance and eyed her brother. As he looked from one to the other he understood how in certain foreign courts, where a system of suggestive catechism is practised upon suspected criminals, men have been known to plead guilty of crimes which they could not possibly have committed. But he considered that with such a father as he had his mother must be anxious regarding him now that he was a young man, no longer boy. It was doubtless to be expected that she should wonder if he sought escape from the home in libidinous, or at least Rabelaisian, distractions.

"I was visiting a friend," he replied.

"Where did you meet him?" she continued.

"In a barber's shop—the barber's shop where——"

"Oh! In a barber's—not a tobacconist's shop," the mother remarked dryly, adroitly interrupting him.

"Melville, his name is," said Ted. "You'll remember the name. You discovered it by accident in a book I had."

This was unforgivable. He had no right to understand her so well.

"You refer to that book you told me you borrowed from the library?" she inquired with her thinnest voice.

"The friend who is not plebeian," his sister broke in.

Ted heaved a sigh. Doubtless they were the people, and uprightness and respectability would die with them, he thought; doubtless his mother was to be pitied; she, so respectable, had had her life wrecked by his father. Doubtless Mabel was all that was exemplary and upright.

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But humour and jollity died before them; and he felt, like Aucassin, that "if these be they that go into Paradise, with them have I naught to make." He would willingly admit that he was no great matter, had taken no prizes, had won no scholarship to carry him from school to college as an upright young man should when the finances of his home can't carry him thither. Willingly would he admit that he spilt tobacco on the floor when filling his pipe, that he did not show interest in the talk of either his mother's or his sister's friends, that he sometimes turned off the new-polished bath-room tap with a wet hand—in the same careless way his father used to do—a great crime that, prolific of a dissertation on selfishness from his mother and an oration on men by Mabel—and if all these were signs of selfishness then was he selfish. But—while they could eat, a-bickering, a hearty breakfast, his stomach turned. It was like as if into Aucassin's Hell he would fare, with the goodly clerks and sweet ladies.

"Plebeian? I don't understand the reference," said Mrs. Murray.

"Oh, he said Mr. Session was plebeian," Mabel explained, "but that he had a friend who—"

"You said Session was plebeian!" contradicted Ted, maybe what Mabel wished—contradiction, which is rude. There are those who, not winning love, will not be content till they are granted hate, desiring some kind of stir and quickening pulse always.

The mother's eyes were keen and hard.

"Now, now—this does not answer my question," she said. "You are always being nasty to Mabel. And if you are referring to the friend you went to call on so as to get away from Mr. Session—and prevaricated to your mother about—" She spoke with no tones of anger, but as with divine regret, and her look was of grief that her son should so prevaricate with her, "are you ashamed to introduce him to us?"

"Ashamed of us, perhaps," suggested Mabel. "You don't know, mother, how very egotistical Ted is under his humble exterior," and she laughed her mocking laugh.

"Can I invite him here?" he asked, addressing his mother and paying no attention to Mabel.

"Why, certainly," she answered. "We never object to you inviting your friends to the house if we think they are the kind of friends you should have."

He noticed the "we." "All right. When shall I ask him to come?"

The mother looked to the daughter, but Mabel said nothing.

"When would you say, Mabel?" she asked.

"Oh, it's not my friend," Mabel said. "Ted might think his manly freedom disparaged if I offered a suggestion—might even say I ruled the roost." She, too, like the mother, could file for reference.

Ted rose from the table.

"You can settle it between you, then," he said, "and let me know. Whatever you decide upon I shall be happy to comply with. Please pardon me for leaving the table—I really can't eat any more. It is not natural for me to live in an atmosphere of erect fur. I lose my appetite."

As he reached the door his mother, the plaintive note in her voice now not so marked, a hardness coming, said: "I wonder what your friend would think of you if he heard you speaking like this——"

"The friend who is not plebeian," put in Mabel. "And Nelly Gordon, too, who half lost her heart to you."

This (the half loss of a maiden's heart to him) had not dawned on Ted. He laughed at the suggestion, amused now.

"And Catherine Hope, whom you doted over for days and looked at as if you would die for her. She wouldn't think you such a dear boy if she could hear you at home, alone with us," continued Mabel, smiling, radiant.

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He was on the point of saying: "I noticed she did not call again. I don't think your development impressed her." But he didn't want to drag in that girl somehow. He bowed and turned away—and her failure irritated Mabel.

"Perhaps it had better be arranged now that he come on Saturday," Mrs. Murray called to him as he departed. "I hope you will be in a better frame of mind by then."

"Saturday!" he said. "Very good."

But Mrs. Murray marked his expression.

"And what's wrong with Saturday?" she asked.

"I didn't say anything was wrong—but since you ask—Mabel's friends drop in on Saturday!" he said, as if that was sufficient explanation.

"But I thought you said Mr. Melville was not plebeian," she remarked, gently smiling. "He will probably be able to be interested in other people's interests if he has breeding. And there's the expense, too, for you to think of. We can't afford the maid every day. She comes on Saturday, as you know, to help, and if you had him to supper on another night she'd have to come specially to wait table."

"How much do you pay her to come in?" asked Ted.

"Oh, ho! Now he's going to offer to pay for the girl to come in and wait on his friend who is not plebeian," and Mabel laughed a crackling laugh such as only a relative might hear. "Unless it's too much," she finished.

Ted closed his lips and drew and expelled a long breath through his nostrils. It was all unbelievable. And this was "poor, dear Mrs. Murray"—and that was "such a treasure of a daughter." On the one side these—on the other his debauched father with fearsome eyes and revolting dewlaps!

"All right—Saturday," he said, and fled; but before

his departure he plunged into his bedroom to snatch a volume from his chest of drawers and slip it into his pocket, so that he might have it with him during the day and by its feel be aware that Keats, who sang of the "unheard melodies," had lived as well as the house of West.

But out in the street the puzzle of that house was with him. He sought reasons for it all. Merely emotionalism and a condition of "gone sour" did not occur to him. "By Gad," he said to himself, "I believe Mabel wants to rile me into going off—to be rid of me—to leave them to themselves. I can't see what's the game otherwise. The man-hatred business is due to dad; I can understand that; but this everlasting, unbelievable rag is certainly puzzling. I think that must be it. Probably she despises me for standing it so long. Queer! They snarl at each other too; but yet they seem to have a strong alliance. Beats me! Damned if I can understand it."

He was so greatly upset that he felt he must see Melville. His inclination was to take to Melville somewhat as his father, in the final years, took to drink. Pipped—Melville. Something wrong—a dram!

Yet it was not an inclination, he felt, to give in to; he recalled from Scripture: "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he weary of thee"; as a tippler might recall: "Look not upon the wine when it is red."

Happy thought! He had an excuse for calling on Melville soon again—this very morning indeed—to give him the invitation. But should he give him the invitation? What a house to invite him to! And yet he couldn't go on calling on Melville and never invite Melville to his own home. The long and the short of it was that, seeing he had lots of time—for he had left home early because of that unutterably petty appetite-blasting breakfast scene—he went up to see Melville on the way to

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business. He passed into the cobbled court, thence into the doorway at the foot of the tower, still saying: "Perhaps I shouldn't go; I was there last night," but going nevertheless—drawn like iron-filings to a magnet. As he went cork-screwing upwards an itinerant banjoist was making a beginning in his morning's serenading of back windows, tuning up; he smote the strings, and broke forth with: "Climbing up the Golden Stairs." The refrain brought Ted smiling to the corridor at the top, and sent him jauntily to the door. Even a very so-so ballad can atone for much, and put jollity into the step of an underdog. The handsome landlady gave him entrance.

He found Melville groomed and brushed beyond his ordinary.

"Hullo, old man! I'm awfully glad to see you," he broke out. "How are you?"

"All right. Just thought I'd look you up and get you to knock off my hump—and ask you when you're coming to see *me*."

"Good," said Melville. "Been trying to knock off my own hump. Clean underwear, clean shirt, best suit, creased pants, trying to look what I don't feel. I'm not the first since Adam to try that trick. When Suckling used to lose at cards he always dressed his best, and swung his jewelled sword to his side. I'm much ashamed of myself. Went to call on a parson last night—old Tannadice, perhaps you know him? I interviewed him about a week ago for my rag on *Is Christ in the Churches?* Stupid to go to a priest or parson with such an inquiry. Remember what Emerson says, though, of course, Emerson has no voice in a popular rag: 'If I know your sect I anticipate your argument. Do I not know that he is pledged not to look but at one side, the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are humbug—' something like that, I forget the exact words. I interviewed him anyhow—and he asked me to

come to supper some night." He suddenly laughed. "Beginning to see the fun of it now," he said. "'Delighted to see you,' was his greeting, 'delighted to see you.' Took me into his study, and I'd hardly been squatted before he told me I didn't look well, thought a drop of spirits would help me. 'Let me see,' he said, 'this is my maid's evening out—I expect she went off after admitting you. I wonder if I could find the spirits.' I could see the bottle myself, from where I was sitting, under his table.—'I wonder where it is?' he said, and I felt inclined to tell him, so that we could have a drink without turning drinking into a crime, or a secret sin. I always think it was a great mistake the way God Almighty warned Adam off apples. Sorry I didn't tell him. I let him go his own way about it, and when he drew a red herring across the track by suddenly asking me what I thought of his garden, although I knew it was a red herring I went over and kept looking out hard until he'd whisked the bottle from under the table and shoved it into the cupboard—where he *found* it! 'Why, bless my heart!' he said. 'Here it is! *And* glasses.' I saw what I was in for when he poured the noggin, and at that stage of the proceedings I hadn't got the journalist-versus-parson notion into my head, which came later, so I said, 'I can't take that. You've filled it to the brim.'—He replied, 'Never mind! I know. My wife would say this was vulgar, filling right up to the brim. Say when,' and he began to trickle into another glass. I gave him 'when,' and he handed it to me. Then he held up his original bumper very carefully. 'Do you know,' he said, talking as if he was in the pulpit, mouthing it over, 'in a way one can learn admiration and appreciation for humanity from everybody? I often think when I'm in a chemist's shop how adroitly the assistants decant their potions in the measuring-glass—just exact. I must try to pour some of this back.' Gh, Murray! I wish you could have seen it—good as a play.

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Talk about Tartuffe! He took up the bottle in his free hand; of course, he couldn't do it, so he went on with his harangue to me the way a sleight-of-hand man prattles you away from the weak spot in his trick.—'I don't think I can,' he said. 'Yes, Mr. Melville, even in little things one learns to admire the chemist's assistant. My respects to you,' and he knocked that noggin over his throat as swift as conjuring; then went on right away: 'I'm glad you called to see me, but I could never forgive myself if you caught a chill from a draught in my house.' Two minutes later he had to try to see if he could pour out what he called 'a decent, refined little touch.' Oh, a great card! I *took it on* then. I was determined to see that parson under the table. When the maid came in to announce supper he looked startled. 'Why, Agatha,' he said, 'I thought this was your night out.' She stared at him, so he added, 'Oh, of course, of course. You stayed in for Mr. Melville.' I felt inclined to clap him on the back and say, 'You damned old fraud!' He did it well—I mean the supper; but there wasn't a budge to the man. He did not slide forward an inch. I stayed with it. He had a great fund of stories, and he kept them up until he had two heads. My eyes went that way, but I had a perfect grip on myself. I could see that the old buffer had spotted my squint and was smiling at it. I didn't sleep all night after I came home, and the way that the morning came up the Tay—well, by God, it was sad, although splendid; and the way the sparrows chirped was one of the saddest things I've ever struck. Funny business this drinking in Scotland. They do the forbidden fruit racket about it; and it is a mistake. And you know, Murray," he nodded, "it is a dangerous town for a fairly well-built young man like me to come toddling home through in the early hours. There are too many girls roving around looking for a man in a condition when he might care to take advantage of them.

Seven to one, I think, is the proportion here of females to males; and a sober man is monogamous, but a man who has been trying to drink a parson under the table is looked upon as a chance. Very glad when I heard the sparrows this morning that I got safely home to the old Morgan Tower—so far as that sort of thing went. Funny business, life. Funny business, ethics, Murray. Funny business, booze!" He shook his head. "I sometimes understand a sensitive fool wanting to put a little glamorous barrier of booze between himself and the world, but—especially if he's a Scotsman—there's a great chance of the barrier toppling over on top of him. You look very serious, my friend Murray, over these trivial remarks."

"Oh, I was only just thinking," answered Ted. "I must go. I'll be late if I don't bolt now. Can you come to supper at my place on Saturday?"

"Yes, I'll have got over by then this feeling of 'pardon me, I am ashamed of myself; I saw the world in duplicate last night.' I'd like to meet your people. When you mentioned your sister was a friend of Cathy Hope I very nearly invited myself!"

Ted's mouth opened as if to say something. He looked a trifle embarrassed. Well—it might be all right on Saturday. Mabel could be charming to strangers.

"All right, Saturday."

There is much to be said for having a friend who is apt even to overdo denunciation of the orthodox, if you are a young man with a tendency to being sat upon. It is as good as Emerson's *Self-Reliance*—which the wrong people too often read! And there is much to be said also for having in your heart, even though she be leagues away (and deriders might call your communings with her image "mawkish sentiment," and you know not if she ever recalls you), the image of an adorable lady. At least there is much to be said for all that when you are young and callow and still fumbling in the vestibule of

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life. Ted had taken the opportunity, standing on Melville's hearth-rug, to gaze on the presentment of Catherine Hope again, trying to look as if his eyes rested upon it by accident the while he listened to Melville's latest outpourings.

## CHAPTER VII

ETHEL MURRAY used to worry at times over her daughter's matrimonial future. To be sure, Mabel did not take her mother much into her confidence in matters of sentiment, or rather, it should be said, Mabel did not respond to the mother's probings or gentle reconnoitings, distant prying, to discover if there were ingredients of a certain sentiment in her friendship with this or the other male. Once and again the mother was of opinion that it was not only in her imagination of the friendship that such a sentiment existed. But for all Mrs. Murray's preparing of opportunities for confidence from her daughter, the daughter remained mute on the topic. Ethel was slightly hurt thereat. Not thus had she treated her mother; perhaps it was a streak of the Murray clandestine tendency, thought she, in Mabel, that made her thus ignore the opportunities for disclosure; for she suspected, on certainly these two occasions, that the stir of nesting was in the house. She did not fail to note a new pliancy of movement, bend of neck, light of eye, hint of engaging wriggle. It is doubtless a sign that the mother felt under the thumb of her devoted daughter, that not for worlds would she have told Mabel—no, not even if Mabel had made any daughterly confidence—that she knew, in the first case, granted the sentiment, that it would come to naught. The possible male of that story was a year or two younger than Mabel, and Mabel was

half-playful with him, not nearly so stately as with most acquaintances, and once when he called it was discovered, at the hour of his departure, that torrential rain was on the city, the hill-side gutters running like small rivers. Mabel said: "You'd better have an umbrella—here is one. My brother never uses an umbrella. You'll have to take mine," and with kitting movements, "look," she said, and opened it in the hall. Oh, yes, Mrs. Murray knew then, adding these playful ways to earlier signs, that there was a something here, but—and the but settled all—to open an umbrella indoors is a most certain sign. To put up an umbrella indoors is as good as saying: "Good-bye for ever. Fate parts us." Nothing would come of it—and nothing did; though whether the opening of the umbrella indoors was what made the piqued gods squash the episode, or whether they made Mabel open the umbrella as a sign that they had decided to veto the possible match, is to inquire too far. Mrs. Murray would have been peevish if you had asked her, and merely reiterated the statement that everybody knows the significance of opening an umbrella indoors; you would have got no farther forward in your questioning.

The other possible he Ethel never saw. She merely suspected him because of a certain languid lustre in her daughter when she returned from visits to a house where he too was a guest. She had to be careful, for Mabel knew the arts of inquiry and of drawing conclusions from appearances—had practised upon Ted many an evening when he returned from the outer world—and she would not tolerate much of: "And did you have a good time?" "And who were there?" "Oh, very nice. And who did you sit next to at table?" Mabel could pay back for such rummagings without ever a statement of objection to the rummaging.

Session was the nearest approach, in Ethel's sphere, to a promise of a house with fair guarantee of stability, with cook and housemaid, but it was obvious that Mabel

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did not like him—which was odd, seeing that Teddy did not as well, and in the matter of their likes and dislikes for human beings they were usually so totally different.

Mrs. Murray, it may be said, never trusted in the depth of Mabel's frequent pæans on woman in the world, self-supporting, despising the male. She had fixed ideas on this subject of the sexes—as on all. Some day Mabel would be bored with all that sort of talk. And Mrs. Murray thought that respectability was as important as a banking account. A clever wife, she knew (and Mabel was a clever girl), could take a man in hand, mould him, expunge from his character those idiosyncrasies that she did not care for. When Teddy mentioned that Melville was a journalist his mother had a flash of wonder. How droll it would be if, after all, Ted were to introduce to the house Mabel's husband-to-be, a sterling young man with a position ahead of him, who would, robbing the mother of a daughter, largely remember her and in the way of a fine and praiseworthy, although, to be sure, merely dutiful, son-in-law contribute to her support.

She supposed he had money. The book bearing his signature that she had seen, by accident (for by now, had that little incident been dragged forth again, she would probably be quite sure that she had come on it by accident and had not been suspiciously hunting for it), was not a cheap-looking book. She would not fall into his arms—but she would see! After all, it would be just in the funny way of things in general for Ted to introduce the good son-in-law.

On the next Saturday afternoon ("Come early," Ted had said) Melville arrived; and Ethel Murray did not like him. It was a case of dislike at first sight. He reminded her (not facially, but in a way beyond explaining) of that Constable fellow of whom George had thought so highly. She preferred men who looked as if they might have a tendency to be obedient. Plump at the outset, as

Ted introduced them, confronting this young man who wore a courtesy different from the courtesy she desired, she intended to be haughty. He might be a friend of her son's, but that did not imply at all that he could be a friend of hers.

The intention of her manner was hauteur; the result was otherwise. She meant the "sir" that she tacked on to the "How do you do?" to hint to Melville that he was an outsider, an acquaintance of her son's of whom she had not heard until recently, visiting for the first time now very much on approval. He had the faintest flicker in his eye at the "sir." It clashed. He was uncertain whether it implied barrier of servility or barrier of hauteur. Newly entering this house, unprepared beforehand for aught but ordinary hospitality, he had the merest start at the greeting. And the "atmosphere," too, that this young man (to whom "atmosphere" meant so much) was aware of seemed almost incredible as the atmosphere that had lapped the Ted Murray he knew. He bowed, and was at once on guard. He made bold to conjecture (as, to be sure, had Session) that there was something wrong in this house.

While the introduction to the mother was in progress, Mabel entered, and to Ted's joy was her most charming self. Ted opined that when the mother had shaken down the visit would prove successful after all.

"Teddy boy has often spoken of you," she said, and if Ted thought he had not, the speech was gracious and the "Teddy boy" charmingly in the elder sister vein. He trusted that she would not, having begun thus, drop hints that "Teddy boy" was a trouble to the household, nor air her view, as if from sad experience, that men nowadays lack sense of responsibility and women have—just have—to buckle to. It was, at any rate (if in Ted's ears, by comparison, meretricious), her best vein for strangers. She was going to be "decent." In this united family his trouble was that he never knew what

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to expect, and he took a few moments to adapt his mind to the state thus indicated by Mabel. But she saved him by leading the conversation with, "My brother tells me that you are a journalist."

Melville bowed.

"So is my sister," explained Ted.

Melville acknowledged the link with inclination of his head and a slight elevation of his brows. He was not resigned to the atmosphere, still felt on guard.

"It is a queer life, isn't it?" he managed to say, and turning to include Mrs. Murray, as head of the house, he added: "I have just finished sub-editing a fearful and wonderful serial story."

He gave them, by way of amusing chatter, the brief and entertaining outline of two instalments, and the delightfully unbelievable "curtains." Ethel failed to see the humour of the story as he told it. It was the only kind of story which she knew, or cared to know, and the way the mill was blown up and how the thumb-marks were discovered did not seem droll to her. In earlier years she had read many such simple human narratives with a slightly patronising enjoyment; of later years she objected to fiction.

Like many who do not ever read, she had learnt to use the names of Dickens and Scott as bug-bears. If she found Ted reading novels, she assaulted with Dickens, told him that he should read good fiction—Dickens, for example. With Mabel's friends, if they touched on the topic, she protected herself with Dickens. "No, I don't read much; when I was a girl I liked Dickens." And if that did not cause them respectfully to leave her alone: "Some of Scott's, too, I like," she would admit.

Her laugh, when apparently the point of Melville's recapitulation of the fiction in question had come, was too rippingly formal. She made a mental note that, by the way, he was not even serious about his work.

Mabel saw the point with zest, laughed, and exclaimed: "Oh, it's too funny!" Yes, she was going to be "decent." And then the door opened, and Ted's heart sank as the girl announced one of his sister's friends. Mabel introduced Melville as "a friend of my brother's." The newcomer (she reminded Melville, as he rose, of "a rag, and a bone, and a hank of hair") gave a lean, offhand nod, and an "Oh, indeed"; and immediately Mabel and she fell excitedly into a high-pitched talk about some personal matter, naming names of people of whom Melville the stranger had never heard. The uninitiated could only gather that they were members of some society, and that there was a split in that society—great fun!—and that someone would have to be crushed for interference. Presently Melville (the conversation, despite the vocal pitch of the newcomer, being so evidently private) pushed his chair closer to Ted's, and nodding toward a framed print that hung unobtrusive in a corner, quietly remarked, "I like that."

"I'm afraid you must think us very rude," said Mabel, breaking off the talk with Miss Baxter. They had, indeed, as he moved nearer to Ted, despite their engrossing chatter, given him a sidelong glance, their eyes upon him on the instant.

He turned his head and looked suave interest at her.

"How is that, Miss Murray?" he asked, as though astonished that such a thought should cross Mabel's mind.

"We do chatter so about our own affairs."

Ted was mollified. Mabel could not apologise then and there with "My friend is rather uncouth," but she was doing her best.

"Oh, but quite natural," Melville said pleasantly.

Pointing to the great gold-framed photographs of views, Mrs. Murray said: "Don't you like these too?" For the print of which he had, in a decorous aside to Ted, expressed appreciation, was Ted's one and only contribution

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to the pictorial display upon the walls, and there had been much trouble upon the day he brought it home. Item: Ethel would like to know if he considered that he was in a position to buy prints. Item: She would like to know if he thought his taste better than that of the home. Thus rebuffed, he had taken it down and hung it up in his bedroom; but that was not the end. The attack was pressed. He had said, in defence for the needless purchase, that he thought it would be a "nice addition" to the house. He was reminded, on removing it to his bedroom, of that, and told that evidently he had been thinking only of self—for now he had carried it to his own room! So it had come back to an obscure corner in the sitting-room.

Mrs. Murray now, with a glance from her son to the son's guest, wondered if Ted had "put him up" to commenting upon the print, was curious to discover if he had told all his domestic woes to Melville as she told her woes to her friends. Perhaps Melville was a missionary come to proselytise her, even as Session had been invited to proselytise Ted!

"Very interesting," said Melville, looking at the gold-framed photograph indicated by Mrs. Murray. "I see it is a scene in India. That over there is of Calcutta, is it not? Have you travelled, Mrs. Murray?"

"No," she said. "No—I haven't travelled."

Ted suspected that already Melville was not enjoying himself, marked his friend's gaze drift on to "His Majesty the Baby." Probably he preferred the Indian photographs for theme of chat.

"Some people are tremendously attracted by the East," said he, returning to an urbane survey of these photographs. "They 'hear the East a-calling.'"

"They what? I did not catch."

"'Hear the East a-calling,'" he repeated. "I thought when I saw them that perhaps you had—or your family . . ." his voice drawled off in a way he had, with-

out knowing it, when bored, "Dundee being connected with the East, the jute business." It had just struck him that he did not know if Ted had a father or not; perhaps the father was dead, and perhaps Mrs. Murray had long put off black. He could conceive of people feeling a loss so deeply that they would wear mourning all their lives; he could also conceive of people feeling so deeply that they would never wear mourning.

When the door opened again he wondered if perhaps here was the father arriving; but it was another friend of Mabel's, a certain Netty Munro. And the maid murmured, after ushering her in, that supper was ready.

It was a different supper from those in the Tower room. Netty Munro, finding that Melville was a journalist, had to ask—shyly and blushing—if he was a reader. It was a blushing shyness that Ted knew from much experience. A shapeless person this Netty, who seemed to have come by all the wobbly flesh that Miss Baxter had lost, with bulging full lower lip, slightly moist. She would come into conversation with reddening cheeks and timid voice, as though after summoning all her courage, awakening the pity of her auditor for her gauche manner; then suddenly and unexpectedly (save to her intimates) she would perk up, and what had been apparently blush of timidity would be transmuted to glow of combat. Argument would wax hot, and end with, "Yes, well!" from Miss Munro. "Yes, well!" was always her phrase when she imagined she had routed her subject. She was a handy ally, as her familiars knew, highly disconcerting to anybody they might, in concert, be badgering.

To the difficult question of whether he was a reader Melville murmured a response that he supposed he did read a little, and observing how the inquirer was all a-blush and a-fidget he, having thus responded, removed his glance from her to set her at ease. And then she

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brought out, in a new voice, that she had only asked because so many journalists don't seem to read. He seemed not to perceive the lack of taste in the explanation.

"One has to read, if only for an antidote," he told her, and she was puzzled. It was, to her, as when one player says "check!" and the other, protecting his king, in the very act checks his opponent. "Don't you find it so?" he added, turning to Mabel.

Miss Munro was dismissed, or so she felt. Mabel looked very wise, as though he had said something cryptic.

"Yes—I think I see what you mean," she replied.

"I find Milton a splendid antidote to the life and adventures of Charles Peace," said Melville.

"Oh, it's *that* kind of journalism," stammered Netty Munro. "I didn't understand."

"Alas, yes," he said, "though, to be sure, it makes the antidotes all the finer."

"Do you," interrupted Miss Baxter, craning up out of her blouse, "do you like Ella Wheeler Wilcox?"

Ted, over his plate, expelled a sudden gust of breath that made his mother look quickly at him with annoyance. It was a queer way he had. He had never seen Melville before in (if we may say so) society, always in his digs, where he could contort in a saddle-bag. Melville was now strategic.

"Don't you prefer Alfred Noyes?" he asked, non-committal.

It is exasperating not to get a direct answer to such questions as: "Is it lawful to render tribute unto Cæsar?" Miss Baxter's brows had a little pucker.

"Oh, yes. I like the tum-te-tum of that thing of his, 'Kew in Lilac-time.' Do you know it?"

Melville gravely inclined his head.

"What is poetry, Mr. Melville?" asked Miss Munro, in a gentle, nay timid, voice.

The poor young man did not understand. He was overfrank to understand the society he found himself in. He asked if she had ever heard what a certain American poet said when that question was put to him. "N—o!" she said, on guard—and "fix bayonets" was in her eye. Miss Baxter cocked an ear, listened, in reserve.

"Oh, something to the effect that the question stumped him—but that there were some specimens of it in his last volume."

Miss Munro only gave sufficient of a laugh at that pleasantry to prove that she had a sense of humour—for she knew one should have a sense of humour; and Miss Baxter murmured something about "Just like man's conceit"; but Melville evidently did not hear asides.

"Oh, but I'm not joking," said Miss Munro. "I ask for—eh—information."

He believed her, and hid his astonishment. Had she said "Because a definition is so difficult" he would have been more at home, but he did his best.

He had no conception of what he was, as Americans say, up against. He had no conception of the drollery, the pathetic drollery, of the episode. He did not know how this young lady's reading, apart from the text-books that had won her medals (and a belief that everything could be contradicted if one cared), evaded Poetry and Ideas. She thought Ideas were, at their mildest, plans, at their most inspired, disputes. He did not know that on a train journey her reading matter was, instinctively, *John Bull* or *Mrs. Bull*. To know that would have helped him. But no one had warned him. He had no inkling. If his friend Ted had not seemed to have read very widely, that was neither here nor there; Ted's instincts had not suggested to him an environment such as he was being introduced to. He had not thought of them as being negatively nurtured instead of positively. Ted had, so far, been more eager to draw inspiration from

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Melville than to narrate to him his solemn youthful spasms, so he had not told Melville the great paltry story of *The Trial and Death of Socrates*—how this chit Miss Munro had found him one day reading it, and how he had foolishly opened his mouth and talked enthusiastically, full from his heart, of what it meant to him—how she, on her next visit, had casually handed him a copy of one of these aforementioned organs open at an article on Socrates, with "That may interest you." There is much chagrin in the path of the poisoner by instinct. Ted, after having said: "Oh, thank you," read the article. But he was not dashed in his admiration for perhaps the greatest soul that has drifted across this world, despite that article. If hurt at all (the intention was to hurt), he was hurt at the thought that there lived those who could be so appalling—every way round. By the very unspeakable crassness of the assault she had dished herself for worrying this boy, who offered himself so naïvely on first and third Saturdays (or whatever it was); after that incident of the stored and presented critique (?) upon Socrates she found that she had lost power to have gentle relaxation with her friend's brother in that way. Something had happened. He could be amazed at her, but never again upset by any view she might propound. Melville, of course, did not know how very negatively came Ted's devotion to the things that matter. He had had experience of a landlady or two before finding one with a dream instead of a design in her eyes; but even his most crass landlady could not hint at the existence of this kind of female to whom Ted handed tea with deference—or, latterly, with awe, a certain kind of awe. His own women-folk were humane. Though they read, and sang, and knew pictures, they were kindly as are the kindly illiterate. They were the sort of people who read for joy, not for prizes, not to stump other people. But Ted knew that here was discord brewing, having had experi-

ence. Ted knew that this was war with a flag of truce up, this was war under the guise of a pleasant supper-party; but he had no means to enlighten Melville, to hint to him that shells, bombs, rifle-fire, were all only in abeyance—and that this timid-seeming advance, if he only knew it, was of the preliminary gas-cloud. One whose women-folk are humane, who knows of Tartars only from one or two landladies, and conceives of a terror of a woman as something vast and Shakespearean, must be at a loss when plunged among such simple everyday human beings and hearing a timid inquiry of: "What is poetry, Mr. Melville? . . . I ask for—eh—information." He thought (annoying her, thereby) that she was really desiring information. Wherefore to the best of his ability he gave it.

"Now you have asked a question," he said, and began, out of his full mind for that sort of thing, to recall attempted definitions from all the encyclopædia articles he had consulted of yore when himself stumped for definition, and had passed on to Hazlitt's attempt, and was on the point of recalling Coleridge, when Netty said, thrusting up her little red face: "Oh, I see—anybody, then, can say what poetry is." He realised that he had not been joining with an interested young lady in a fascinating search. His own interest may have made him dense to the significance of Netty's question, but that daringly uptilted face was suddenly impressed on his vision as simply of a bad little chit, very ignorant. He, as it were, reverting to the earlier simile, put on his respirator, bowed deeply, said: "Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not understand. Oh, yes, certainly—anybody—anybody. I quite agree."

Ted felt hot and infantile and could think of naught but swear-words, but Mabel charmingly intervened.

"I never get any time for reading," she sighed. Maybe she was perilously near her theme of: "You see, I have so much to think of—a working woman"; but, at

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any rate, she was kindly trying to prevent the continuation of Netty Munro.

Netty looked at her—and giggled. "Poor girl!" she murmured.

Ted used often to be angry, for his sister's sake, at the way her friends of this sort jested at her, but if he told her what he thought of them she was wont to inform him that he was rude to speak so of her friends—and so leave him merely at a loss to know what "friendship" signified to women as they were, so far, displayed to him.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mabel.

"Nothing," Netty replied; then to her plate, blushing and diffident: "I don't know Mr. Melville, or I would say: 'Is it absolutely essential when a woman's work is mentioned to cite a man's?'"

Melville glanced to Mabel, as if requiring her aid with her friends. She offered him merely a worried glance.

"I'm afraid I was not thinking about the sex," he answered. "I was thinking more of the—er—work."

"Then I will forgive you this time," said Netty, and Ted had an interior squirm. Her remark was inartistic. She had not the manner, not the shape, to carry off that order of remark. If she could only have seen herself! Melville, opportunely, observed that Mrs. Murray lacked mint sauce, and he attended to her.

A hush fell about the festive board. Miss Baxter sat frigidly erect; Miss Munro sat humped and pouting, redly eyeing her plate; Mabel seemed terribly angular; Mrs. Murray indignant and bewildered; Melville looked too markedly at ease, but Ted was slightly trembling in a bottled rage at the "impossibility" of this table to which he had brought his friend. To Melville it was all highly novel. The lull seemed to be all that he had been waiting for. To Mrs. Murray he was inimitably gracious.

"I don't know what you will think of me," he said, "but a friend of mine is coming up to my rooms to-night. He telegraphed from London to tell me he would be in Dundee this evening. I hope you will forgive me. It was very kind of you to have me. I've told my landlady to ask him to wait—but I mustn't keep him too long."

Miss Baxter murmured pleasantly to Netty: "A remarkable way to treat a friend!"

"He usually comes up on Sundays," he went on, "but he has been at our London office this week, and has to start work here to-morrow. One of the men on our staff, Murray," he flung off at Ted. "Like you to meet him."

Mrs. Murray fluttered.

"I'm very sorry," she said. "Still, if you must go—. And, you know, I am so old-fashioned that I prefer Saturday calling to Sunday calling." She glanced nervously at Mabel. She did not know very well what she was saying. She had understood next to nothing of the table-talk.

Melville bowed, and as if intensely interested, replied: "You would like my Aunt Elizabeth. It is a matter of epoch; and the new generation need not jest at the old. She absolutely lives up to her views. She has never read a Monday paper since it struck her that the men who get it ready must have been working on Sunday night to prepare it. And—er—," he had, to Mabel's now collected scrutiny, the appearance of a man rapidly inventing, "she never posts a letter on Saturday, her aim being not to entail Sunday work."

Ethel did not know what to say.

"Well, I think that's very silly," said Netty Munro, sitting baggily hunched, markedly corsetless. "The mail-bags are going, at any rate."

"True! But as my Aunt Elizabeth says, if everybody abstained—" he gave a little nod.

"What does she do about foreign letters?" promptly

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asked Miss Baxter, sitting straight up stiffly in her very evident corsets. "They will be travelling more than six days."

Melville looked as though depressed that his final attempts to be congenial before departing should receive so scant reciprocation.

"I never thought of that," he said.

"You will have to suggest it to her," said Miss Baxter.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. "It would be a shame to badger her. I loathe badgering people. And she is such a dear thing." He sat forward, hands together, eyes roving the tablecloth; he dusted a few crumbs gently into a small pyramid, then rising—"If you will excuse me, Mrs. Murray," he said.

Mrs. Murray responded: "I'm sorry, but of course—" and shook hands with him.

"I'm so sorry you have to run away," said Mabel. "I'm afraid there has been too much argument." She gave a flicker of a glance toward her friends.

"Not at all," he said. "It's been tremendously instructive. I'm sorry to have to run away."

He bowed distantly to Miss Baxter, who responded; to Miss Munro, who, seeing how much more cold had been his bow to Miss Baxter than Miss Baxter's bow to him, retrieved the error by not bowing at all, merely raising her head and growling, "Good-bye."

"I'll come half-way with you," said Ted.

"I was going to ask you to come all the way. I would like you to meet Airlie."

Mabel, who had risen very graciously, wondered if even the name was invention. Ted—he also wondered. He was an expressionful youth. Catching his sister's eye as he opened the door for Melville, he remarked her gaze upon him, and knew that she thought he was doubtful if Airlie existed. Out in the hall, the door comfortably closed on the assemblage, in a deep and fevered misery, he helped Melville on with his coat.

"My God," he muttered.

"What's the matter?" Melville inquired pleasantly.

"Rotten—these two coming in. They are two of the rottenest friends my sister has. I don't know what she——" it tailed off so.

Melville was taking stock of him very acutely as he spoke.

"Come along!" he said.

They made exit, tripped down the stairs from the flat, came into the street, and both took deep breaths.

"Fine oxygen to-night," murmured Melville.

Ted felt mean, paltry. He wondered what Melville thought of him now—now that he had seen him at home.

He felt as though Melville had discovered that he was only apparently five feet eight inches, only apparently used the morning razor, only apparently wore long trousers—but was really only new-breeched, to the knees only. It was a horrible, nay, a disgusting feeling. It must never come to him again. This horrible climax of a feeling was what he had been joggling toward for so long. He had thought he managed to get along fairly well, things being as they are, in his home; but to-night, with this friend present, he had discovered that his life there was intolerable.

They passed the little houses that lay behind their little gardens; they passed more flats; they came to the streets of tenements and closed shops. At the first public-house door, to Ted's astonishment, Melville had a momentary pause.

"Teetotal?" he asked, and then added, sharply: "On second thoughts, better not. Never mind. If it wasn't for Airlie being very probably at my 'digs' by now I'd suggest a tramp in the country. Just the night for it." He looked up at the stars. "'Why so hot, little sir?'" he murmured. "You remember that in one of Emerson's essays?"

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"I'm afraid I don't," said Ted.

"Oh, yes. He comments on how the stars say that to men coming out of their political meetings. 'Why so hot, little sir?' You must get Emerson's essays. Read *Self Reliance*. Don't forget. Great night! One can get ripping nights in Dundee."

"Yes," agreed Ted.

"A ripping night for a walk," Melville went on presently. "And apropos of ripping nights—this man Airlie and I had a great night once." Mention of Airlie seemed soothing to the vehement youth. There was less of rage in his stride.

Ted considered: "So he really does exist," and then on top of that he thought: "I shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't. When we come to the 'digs' we shall find Airlie has not arrived. He only wanted to get away, and now he's stuffing me too!"

"Yes," said Melville. "We left Dundee at 10.30 p.m. and walked up the Carse, arriving back at 5 a.m., fresh as paint. Never forget it. The black of the night didn't last more than two or three hours. Goodness knows where we tramped to. It seemed more like an adventure among stars. Never forget it. A walk like that would atone for many differences. We haven't so many. Bobby Burns is about the only subject I need to go carefully on with him. I can't stick Burns—at least not the things I hear raved about most; but I love this chap Airlie, so I never breathe a word about my discreditable but honest opinion when he's extolling the Great Bard. He must be great all right, I suppose, though he doesn't lure me except once in ten, and five in ten he makes me tired."

If Melville was not the greatest bluffer out of America he would have to produce this Airlie. It wouldn't do for him to say, on arrival at his "digs": "Oh, he hasn't come yet, evidently."

"You'll like him," he said. "He's one of those chaps

that can't be killed. They can neither be driven to church nor to drink. Better jump on this tram that's pursuing us. Mustn't put upon him too much—keep him waiting too long. Come on!"

## CHAPTER VIII

THEY dropped off the tram as it slowed down for the bend of Nethergate, drawing near Tay Street corner, one after the other, with a jump and a run that carried them into the court; mounted the corkscrew stairs (Ted often recalled the place afterwards), Melville jingling out his bunch of keys. On their entrance to Melville's sitting-room a dark sturdy youth, who was reclining in one of the easy chairs reading in a book, glanced up, saw only Melville, dropped his eyes to the book again with a: "Hullo! This is great stuff!" and held his hand round the volume to pump-handle his friend. Evidently they understood each other. He read to the end of the arresting page before speaking again, while Melville held a hand for Ted's hat and coat, depositing them upon the arm of the sofa; and casting his own hat and coat down he waited for Airlie—for it was Airlie, and the tale was true—to be aware of Ted—as presently he was, with apology.

"Oh, pardon me!" he ejaculated, and rose. "I thought you were alone."

Melville made formal introduction, and, "I hope you haven't been waiting long," he said. "I had to go out to see Murray; didn't get your message till I was just going off."

"No—not long. Your landlady told me I was to make myself at home. You're back sooner than I expected, or else this book I've got hold of is even better than I thought. It's great to come to your rooms after the run

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from London. I was too much in a rush at the end to procure any reading matter, and after dusk it would have been welcome. The only reading matter visible in my carriage was *The English Review* and *The Pink 'Un*. Have you fixed up to go?" (Ted had been enjoying a long range and unassuming survey of the photograph on the mantelpiece, and now glanced abruptly at Melville. Was he moving his digs again? "Go where?" he wondered.)

Melville just nodded briefly. Airlie eyed him; but neither spoke for a moment.

"What sort of a time did you have?" asked Melville at last.

Airlie took survey of Ted to make more certain of him.

"Great!" he replied.

"See any of the men?"—this presumably meaning ex-Dundonians.

"One or two. Saw Herbert Bell. One of the fellows who used to be on our staff," he explained to Ted.

"A rotter!" Melville broke out vehemently. "Sort of chap who loses the last train to Newport and asks you to let him bunk with you—and entertains you with a lot of dam lies about his pluck on former occasions when he lost the last train—how he climbed to the railway and walked across the three miles of railway bridge—all about his skill in evading the watchmen, and so on. But to-night—well, to-night he didn't feel in the mood! Um! Oh! these suburban sparks! And all about the wages he earns, till you feel inclined to ask him why in hell he doesn't go to a hotel."

Ted had heard Melville in vituperative mood before, but never so fierce of utterance.

"Oh, come now," said Airlie.

"Oh, yes!" declared Melville, and turned to Ted. "Came and asked me to write the application for his situation in London—fawning, wanting something, hand on shoulder, 'I say, old man.' I worded it for him all right, leaving blank the screw he was going to ask. And

when he got the job he tried to sniff at me—no farther service I could render him. I've no use for these mother's darling, boarding-school-miss sort of young men. How's he getting on?"

"He's getting on very well, financially, that is. Told me he had a lot of money coming to him, if it is financially that you mean."

"One couldn't mean any other way with Bell. He can't advance, travel; he's a calculator, not a dreamer. Borrowed some money from you, I expect?"

For a moment Airlie looked a little foolish. "As a matter of fact he did," he admitted.

"Same old Bell!" cried Melville gleefully. "There you are! What did I say? And sort of crowed over you that you are out of it—provincial."

"Oh, I don't know," said Airlie again.

"He's one of the rotters all right!" repeated Melville. "He never reads. He only drinks beer, lager beer at that—and gin and ginger! Good God!—gin and ginger! Found a difficulty in keeping him off dirty stories after the first old compatriot greeting was over?"

Airlie shook his head, smiling at the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, well, perhaps you are right," he said.

"I know him," asseverated Melville. "Put on middle-class edge with you while touching you for a loan and letting you pay for his lunch, and dinner, *and* gins and gingers! And talked about going *up the river* with a la-de-dah air, and all the rest of it. Now, didn't he?"

"You seem to know him very well," said Airlie. "I didn't attach much importance to it all. Ah, well."

"I'm sorry—I'm really dam sorry," said Melville, "to dash you when you are trying to believe that what you saw right before your eyes wasn't what you saw. But it annoys me that a decent sort like you, just because you would like to think that everybody is decent, is to be

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Ted had never heard him so swearish.

"Want to tell you one thing you'll appreciate," said the dark-eyed, almost gipsy-like Airlie, with an air as of whispering something momentous. He had a manner, to Ted, that was very engaging. "The train stopped at Symington for something. Late afternoon—" he waved his hand in a slight gesture, "mist on Tinto—Borders—Spirit of the Borders all there. You see?"

Melville nodded. Ted listened. In a few words Airlie seemed to be sketching something for them.

"Cottage—there," he pointed as if he saw the cottage now. "Somebody had been redding up the little garden, was burning the leaves at the gable's end. Smoke drifting—" he made a gesture again before him, "tardily out, gauze-like, along a wood. And then the train went on. You see?"

He looked from one to the other, seemed to want to be sure that they had got something in the description of the scene that he had given, something deep and moving, some kind of quiet ecstasy, that he had splendidly experienced.

"You should write a border ballad," said Melville in a serious voice.

"Eh? I may some day. I don't know." He was still looking at Tinto with misted top, still seeing the drifting smoke athwart the wood—autumn fires. Then he dismissed that. "Went down to Sussex," he said. "'Sheep bells and the ship bells,'" he spoke in that almost whisper, "heard it—heard them."

Melville turned to Ted.

"Airlie loves his fellows and loves the land," he said. "I love the land and have little inclination toward most of my fellows—despise them."

"No, you don't!" cried Airlie with a definite wag of his head, "only," he paused, "well—perhaps you see a lot

that, perhaps, I let slide," he paused again, meditative. "You are really going, are you?" he asked.

Melville now fell thoughtful, tapping his teeth with the stem of his pipe which he had taken from his pocket and not yet filled. Then he indicated Ted, jerking his head round.

"His father was a librarian."

"Grandfather," corrected Ted.

"Oh, grandfather? I remember you told me once when we were talking about heredity, or something. Anyhow, he's absolutely out of it in a marmalade factory." His gaze encountered the group photograph on his mantelpiece. "Was Cathy Hope a great friend of—eh—saw her often?"

"Oh, no," said Ted. "Just once."

"Oh!"

Airlie did not understand, looked from one to the other puzzled.

"Beats me!" said Melville to Ted. "I wonder you don't pull out and get into a library somewhere. Not Edinburgh," he added definitely. "Edinborgians put on as much edge as a branch-line stationmaster—about nothing; pettifogging and grandiloquent."

"Oh, I don't know," said Airlie.

"There you are!" cried Melville. "You, a Dundonian, rather venerate Edinburgh, but you couldn't find an Edinborgian to venerate Dundee. You would have a long hunt for him. Why, they would laugh at the suggestion—and that's Edinburgh. It does laugh at all such suggestions. *Rab and his Friends!*" he exploded. "*Noctes Ambrosianæ!*" he jeered, with infinite contempt. "Why, it is the most provincially-minded city in Scotland. The men worth a rush in Edinburgh despise all of it except its pictorial side."

"What's that?" asked Airlie, giving ear to a sudden murmur of mankind without.

"'Tis the voice of the people," said Melville. "First

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house coming out of the music-hall over the way." He walked over to the window, and pulling up the blind looked out. "There you are."

His guests rose and stood beside him, looking down. The crowd was seething out from the entrance to a court almost opposite, behind which lay the music-hall. Its hum came up to them. Ted, behind the other two, said suddenly, "Look at the Tay!" for he had looked away over the roof-tops. The dark-eyed, gipsy-like Airlie glanced over his shoulder at him; their eyes met, and Airlie nodded. Tay, beyond the houses, showed up where the broad strip of moonlight rippled and shimmered on it as with a million little floating mirrors, all a-joggling at various angles.

Then—"What's that?" said Melville, looking up. "Angels moulting, or what?" and Airlie, brought thus back to Nethergate, gave a chuckle of amusement at his friend.

Fluttering down on the heads of the crowd, to be trampled into the thin layer of glue upon the streets, made by soot and haze and moisture, fell a hundred leaflets. Melville thrust out his head.

"What is it?" he said.

And they heard a voice outside—the voice of his landlady (she looking from the next window)—answering: "Tracts!" Melville drew his head in, and down went the blind.

"Quick!" he cried, "lest we be misjudged. Some of them are looking up."

"Wasn't that weird?" said Airlie elated. "You put your head out of the window three or four stories up, and ask a question, and a voice answers——"

"As from the void," said Melville. "I noticed. There go more tracts! Excuse me, but I must inquire into this," and he passed out of the room to call his landlady, who at once came tripping into the hall.

"What's the notion?" they heard him say.

"I was just looking to see if he'd do it again to-night," she replied. "He did it last night—I meant to ask you if you saw. I pulled my head in the moment the folks looked up, in case they'd think it was me."

"But where is he?" asked Melville. "Is he in a balloon?"

They heard the landlady's laughter.

"No," she said, "he's in lodgings somewhere up in the building. He's a religious barber, and he drops them out, about a couple of hundred, after each house. 'God is love,' and 'What shall we do to escape so great damnation?' And his landlady tells me that someone wrote 'Tak' a boat' on one, and came up when they saw where he was and put it in the letter-box."

"And did his landlady show it to him—this annotated tract?"

"I should think she did. She thought she would let him see what kind of a performance he was making of himself, but he just quoted to her something about 'him who hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be cut off, and that without mercy.' He's a terrible man. Talk about a hard neck! He treats her as if she was a dog. She says she'd far prefer to have third-rate professionals with her."

"A barber. Let me see. Has he got a nose like a hawk? I mean a hawk's beak?" By the sound the landlady began to giggle. "Eyes like a ferret's? Hair like an ice-cream man's?"

"Indeed, and I don't know. Oh, you make me laugh, Mr. Melville. I've never seen him and I don't want to. I'm feared he would ask me if I was saved, and I'd laugh in his face, I'm feared."

"Hullo, kiddy," said Melville next. (Evidently one of the landlady's little girls had entered.) "What's that you've got?"

"It's what the man let down from the window. I picked one up," came a child's voice.

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for the next those within the room heard was: "Oh, I do call this blasphemous! You can hardly laugh at it. Oh, dear me, isn't it dreadful? It's treating God as if he was a Comic."

Melville returned with a copy of the horrible leaflet. He glanced at it, shook his head, and handed it to Airlie—who humped his shoulders over it before he had gone far, put his teeth together, and had a look as if he were physically hurt. Then he held it tentatively to Ted.

"Want to look?" he asked.

"I don't think so," said Ted. He was happy in the "atmosphere" of this room, and he did not want to be reminded of how certain others (religious barbers and the like, holding different views from his) had such a bastioned and bulwarked air of eternal infallibility. Youngest of the trio here, he wanted these two to go on talking as they had been talking before the shower of tracts interrupted. And he had a guess who the man was. A place of the size of Dundee could surely not harbour two such fanatics. For a brief moment it was as if he heard his father's voice again: ". . . pursues me with a dirty little barber. . . ." It seemed droll to Ted that such a person should be lodging in the same block as Melville.

"Ah, well," said the lenient Airlie, as the tract—which he had handed to Melville, and Melville had thrown on the fire—flamed and was extinguished, "I suppose it takes all sorts to make the world."

With which easy broad-minded comment they returned to their talk on all manner of themes, as the links led. Mention was made of Emerson again. "You get him; I won't offer to lend you mine," said Melville to Ted. He affirmed that the great poet-philosopher had visited Dundee, which brought Airlie up eagerly; he had neither heard nor read of the visit, and was fain for detail, particulars of time and place of stay. He mentioned that Robert Browning had lived a spell in the Seagate—and that brought Melville up astonished; he wanted to know

what in thunder Browning was doing in Dundee, and how he thought it compared with Venice.

As they chatted Ted was aware now and then of a considering look in the eyes of his host, who sat back in one of the big chairs, holding pipe to mouth in right hand and blowing occasional slow smoke. The look of consideration was so marked once that it arrested Ted, and he almost said: "Of what are you thinking?" for it was of something, he was sure, outside the conversation. But Melville's eyelids drooped, effacing, and once more he gently tapped his teeth with the pipe-stem. At length Ted put the question that Airlie had once or twice asked without getting satisfactory response.

"What's this about you leaving?" he said. "You're not leaving Dundee, I hope?"

Frowning, Melville nodded. Airlie, still ruminating over what they had been chatting about, in a lingering way he had (he was a reminiscential young man, wandering about his city and the world always with Mnemosene, tremendously aware of the present, and the past), gave that evidently typical clenching of his teeth, that little humping shrug.

"Well, I suppose I should be glad for you to go, for your own sake, but—" he jerked his head, "it will be rather rotten looking up at the light in the old place. When do you go?"

"Week," snapped Melville. "Never talk much about things in advance. Week. Always just decide—and go. It's all right." He turned his head and stared at the dwindling fire, now dropped to a red glow, with one flickering blue and yellow flame. "It will be rather rotten going for some reasons," he said.

And in the little silence that followed they were all aware that it was late. The "second house" had come out, and they had not heard. In the distance a roystering song of a homing drunkard waxed and waned and died away, making Ted shudder inwardly. There was no

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sound but the slight patting of the yellow blind by the wind, the window being open. Ted, startled, thought he had better be going home, and rose. Airlie also rose.

"You can see lighthouses from here," he said, looking out of Melville's window again—maybe for the last time, maybe storing up a memory. The moon had drifted over; they could see a lighthouse blink-blinking in the moonmist away down river.

"Well—I really must go," said Ted, the great silence telling him that it must be far on in the night. "I hope I'll see you again before——"

"Look up," growled Melville. "But I'm going to write to you anyhow."

Airlie expelled a breath at the window. "I must go too," said he.

"So early? You've been home already, haven't you?" Melville murmured, but there seemed some thought in abeyance in his mind.

"Oh, yes. Went home first. I always do—just——"

"To see the mater—and folks."

Airlie nodded.

"All right—if you must. You'll be tired anyhow after the long journey."

"Not a bit!" cried Airlie. "Feel fresh. Weird, isn't it?" He considered the subject. "In London this morning—here to-night—all up England, Scotland? Yes. I'll go with Mr. Murray."

Their host opened the door quietly, for the household would be asleep by now, stepped across the diminutive hall where a "peep" of gas had been left for them to see the way out, opened the front door. At the end of the unlit corridor a slab of moonlight lay; and the quiet court was drenched, outside the window, in full crazy moonshen.

"Fine night for a walk," remarked Airlie. "Won't you come along with us?"

"I don't think so," replied Melville. "I half-way home

with you and Murray, you half-way home with me, and so forth—

' A mile an' a bittock, a mile or twa,  
Abūne the burn, ayont the law,  
Davie an' Donal' an' Cherie an' a',  
An' the mūne was shinin' clearly !

' Ane went hame wi' the ither, an' then  
The ither went hame wi' the ither twa men,  
And baith wad return him the service again,  
An' the mūne was shinin' clearly !'

He ceased, and Airlie shaking his head, murmured :

" ' O years ayont, o years awa',  
My lads, ye'll mind whate'er befa'—  
My lads, ye'll mind on the bield o' the law,  
When the mūne was shinin' clearly.' "

"No, very enticing, I know," said Melville; "pigmy walking and talking what the *blasé* and withered call futile boyish chatter under the street-lamps, and the city looking as void as Babylon. But I have a letter to write—and I want to post it first thing in the morning."

"Who wrote that that you quoted?" asked Ted.

Melville smiled.

"Burns," he replied.

Airlie glanced at him, his mouth twisting.

"No," said Melville, "Burns never got that note."

Airlie said, aware he was being "joshed": "It's very fine, Stevenson could do it too."

"All right," said Melville, "we'll leave it at that."

"Good old Melville," said Airlie, laughing. "So-long. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Melville.

"Good-night," said Ted.

"Good-night," said Melville, "and good-morning."

They crept down the eerily-lit and eerily-shadowed white-washed stairs.

"Great old place this," was all Airlie said on the way down. "Great old place."

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They emerged into Nethergate that ribboned along all quiet under the clear night with its pale stars (stars that were almost put out by the moon), and saw the plough tilted serene in the sky. Ted felt no desire to hasten home through this peace, after the evening. He walked away, the friendly "Good-night" over with Airlie at the court's end, hushed in the quiet, all quiet save for the sound of Airlie's heels hammering in the other direction. He walked slowly, delaying the homing process; and as he turned into the street where was his nominal home—

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if my father really was such a dam swine after all."

\* \* \* \* \*

Up in the tower, after his guests had gone, the feet of Airlie ringing east, the feet of Ted ringing west—he could hear the sound up there, echoing in his room, the window still open—Melville looked out on the vacant street—the Royal Hotel standing up against the sky like a fantastic wood-cut, the street-lamps shining pallid on moonlit and house-shadowed pavements, and illumining blank walls, and dead windows, and posters on a strip of hoarding, for only the moon and a wandering cat to see. He looked down river, and marked the lighthouse blinking beyond roofs that glistened to the moon; and he murmured, thinking of his promised departure, his fresh move:

"While I, withdrawing down the stream,  
Drift vaporous to the ancient sea,  
A wraith, a film, a memory."

He was a queer chap. He murmured that fragment three times, somewhat as Ted, marching up the street below there, when it was loud with traffic, had chanted the fragment from Pater about "on this short day of frost and sun . . ." (Here, perhaps, was hint of why, though in many ways dissimilar, they "pulled.") Then he turned to his table, saying, in the words of the American office-

motto, "Do it now!" and drawing to him blotting-pad and the necessary materials for correspondence, he wrote his letter, read it over, enveloped it, and tilted the envelope on the mantel for posting in the morning.

## CHAPTER IX

THERE is a colloquialism in Dundee and neighbourhood—there are, indeed, many, but this one has to be told of (instead of being filed off, like others, for the general reader's ease), seeing that it is part of this story of simple human beings and their everyday thoughts: They ask there, "Are you going to do so-and-so?" and reply thereto, "No, I am *not to do it*." Or they inquire, "Are you going on holiday next week?" and respond, "No, I am *not to go*." But this does not imply that any order has been given, that—in the first case—the one questioned has received a command from Deity or mortal against the performance of the deed spoken of; nor, in the second example, that an employer or relative has forbidden the holiday-making. They merely speak thus, in Dundee and neighbourhood, as elsewhere people say, "I am not going to do so-and-so," or "No, I have decided not to go on holiday next week."

Now Ethel, after a spell of careful speech or protective silence, when the necessity for careful enunciation or frigid silence had passed, always lapsed wildly back into colloquialisms. And her daughter did not like colloquialisms. To-night, after Ted and his friend had departed, the mother informed Miss Baxter, in a reply to a question of that person's, that she was not to do something or another; and Mabel, oddly irascible after the withdrawal of the young men, which was so much more of retirement than retreat, took it upon herself to

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correct Mrs. Murray before the two remaining guests. Of this Ted, of course, having no psychic sense, no capacity to precipitate spirit, or what-not, knew nothing. Mother and sister were in bed when he returned; but in the morning it was clearly evident to him that there had been some hitch between them.

It was made further evident at breakfast that the trouble was not with him, or at any rate that the trouble floating a-top of the everlasting slow whirlpool was not with him. Mabel flounced and flurried, and the mother tilted her head higher the louder the flouncing and rustling waxed. Ted ate in silence. Mrs. Murray handled knife and fork as if averse to even a click of steel on crockery, and grew more in love with a hushed plying of her tools as Mabel the more markedly clashed fork on plate, rattled spoon in tea instead of stirring. Suddenly, however, her vindictive-sounding breakfast over, the daughter spoke.

"I do wish," she said, "the laundry-people could send my things. They should be spoken to. It's absurd that they aren't!" and she wound up her tirade by commenting that though some people could pig along, she wanted to blow her nose!

One of the minor grievances against Ted was that he used at least a handkerchief a day, often more, and he sympathised with his sister now, though in silence. She was not in a mood to be sympathised with openly. He doubted if, of her own self, unsolicited, she intended to say to him, as he had expected she would: "I was sorry that these women behaved so stupidly last night." Other trouble had supervened. He sat tight, employed upon the stuffing of himself with the air of one sheltering from storm. He did not even smile at the final high-flown vigour of her plaint, though she favoured him, knowing she might sound ridiculous to his ears, with a brief, blazing glance, as of warning. Mrs. Murray drew gently erect, her lips very prim, her eyebrows arched.

"Well," she said, "you may try to teach me some things, but at any rate I can tell you it is not polite to say 'blow your nose.' You should say 'use my handkerchief.' My mother taught me that."

Ted, head on side, discreetly munched, and was interested.

"Absurd!" Mabel launched at her mother.

"Oh, no—not absurd. A matter of good taste."

"Middle-class!" snapped Mabel.

Ted risked a guarded glance from one to the other.

"It is all in the point of view," he said, adopting, apparently, the *rôle* of peace-maker, but internally a trifle hilarious. "To you, mother, a nose—and the offices of a nose—are to be spoken of in veiled terms. To you, Mabel, any covering of a nose by a veil, or reference to using a handkerchief, which might merely imply wiping off a smut of soot, when blowing the organ is meant, smacks of prudery. It is all a question of whether a nose is part of the anatomy that can be definitely referred to or not." And then he laughed. He couldn't help it.

His slow dissertation was heard out as in astonishment, speechless astonishment, at his effrontery. And then Ted discovered that the tiff between mother and daughter was only the surface and obvious one. Each (although in their angles they were at loggerheads) ratified the old alliance by a careful turning of the head and the eternal humour-lacking expression of: "How dare you?" The little surface tiff could be forgotten at any sign of life and movement from the third member of the united family.

Ted, having now spoken, was informed by his mother that he was expected to apologise for the rudeness of his friend to Miss Munro and Miss Baxter last night; and he replied lightly, too lightly, that for his part he had thought it possible that perhaps there might be an apology awaiting him for the way his friend had been

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treated. He was not at all hot in the matter; his accents were of one slightly amazed at the way the world wagged.

"Your friend is conceited," said Mabel.

"I felt anguished the moment I saw him," interpolated Mrs. Murray. "I don't think he's a good companion for my son."

"Good companion!" fltered Mabel. "I object to him because of his insolent manner toward my guests."

He thought to inquire: "Did you ask them to come yesterday or was their arrival accidental?" But of what use? To know details would not change the result of anything, and to ask for them would only lead to recrimination. So he remained calm.

"Odd," he remarked, as though interested. "I thought he was rather fine. They couldn't make him angry—I fancy he rather despised them."

Mrs. Murray bridled. "For my part I think your friend looks as if he drinks," she said.

Ted laughed, remembering Melville's story of the quaint, humbugging parson, Mr. Tannadice.

"You need not grin like that at your mother," Mabel said.

He rose with a sigh and looked at his watch.

"Then allow me," he said, "so as to make all comfortable, to apologise to you and express my unqualified regret that my friend could not be snuffed out by"—he lost his calm—"the two bitches."

That did it. There is a commandment against swearing, though there is none against snarling; and to use such a word is the same as swearing—therefore it is wrong morally. Further, there are ways to talk to ladies—ways to refer to ladies, and every gentleman should know them.

"It is a great pity your father is not here," said Mrs. Murray. "In a home without a father there is no one to control a young man like you. It is caddish of you

to behave as you do just because there is no man in the house to keep you in order."

Ted looked at her very thoughtfully, sadly even, and his look silenced them both. It was a queer Sunday. Later, as he sat with book on knee, though not reading, he heard his mother and sister rustle off to church. Mabel accompanied Mrs. Murray to-day because an "intellectual" preacher, in the absence of their own parson, was filling the pulpit. They returned to lunch fortified for the feud, any doubt (if such had ever existed) of their rightness, and Ted's wrongness, wiped away by considering of the further evidence of his irreligiosity in contrast with their communion with the Saints of Hassocks and Limp Morocco. They discussed the sermon and the hats of the choir over lunch, and treated Ted as though he were another salt-cellar. He preferred it that way, for in their absence he had been reading a little book of Irish songs, and that one about the little roads of Breffny was moving in his mind while they sought to starve him of intercourse into apology for the rudeness of his friend, and for his own further rudeness regarding Mabel's guests. He did not feel himself at all a smug martyr; but he had a passing surprise at the lack of effect toward *bonhomie* that the service had had upon them. He ate the food—that was pushed a little way toward him instead of being handed—without even seeing the drollery of it all. It didn't amuse. It didn't annoy. It had no effect. It was to him, to-day, not as if his kin behaved so—but as if they were automata. He reached for the plates thrust at him and paid no heed. Lunch over, he departed for an afternoon's ramble, and came back at night to the old story, his Pagan mind stored with pictures—skyscapes and landscapes and vistas of river—and his blood joyously oxygenated.

On Monday, with a parting remark (not responded to) that he wouldn't be home to lunch or supper, he departed to his day's work like one under an Atlantean

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burden. All very well to tell himself they were like automata acting so. By Monday he was worn. Evidently he had to apologise—for going off with Melville, perchance, for something clearly—oh, yes, for his word in referring to these two women, anyhow; that was ordained, and he would not be spoken to until he did. But unfortunately for that scheme of things his own thoughts were of so deep an order that he forgot to apologise even when he came back at night. He still preferred the stony silence of the home, the stony, haughty silence of the next days to a home of nominal peace. It seemed to him now more easy to get along with his relatives when they were waiting for an apology than when they were supposed to be pleasant. For with them pleasant a storm was always imminent. With them stonily ignoring him, awaiting apology, nothing was really imminent, unless, to be sure, the apology! That was the reason why Ted now considered to himself that it was really better to be (as children say) "out with them" than "in with them." At the same time, he had to confess to himself, after well-nigh a week of it, leaving the office one evening, that the picture of home in his mind did not, distinctly did not, appeal. All the week now his one remark on leaving in the morning had been: "I am working late to-night—don't expect me home to supper." Once or twice Mabel had made a point of looking up at the office windows on her way home, or when passing later to concert or theatre, to see if they were lit up, on a mutual understanding with her mother, and had reported each time that he was working late; the windows were lit.

On the Thursday, however, the extra work was over, but he did not on the Friday morning tell his mother that he would be home early. As for the ever-imminent possibility of a visit at the flat from the crazy father, which used to weigh upon Ted, it did not weigh to-night. He had heard Mabel inform his mother that she had met

Mr. Taylor again, and that he had given her news that Murray was helping with some auditing work at the Perth branch.

Coming out of the office, Ted walked slowly to The Pillars, intending to take tram home. It was in the interim of waiting for the car that his mood inveigled him. There was a great din of carts rattling past on the stony thoroughfare, a din that islanded him away, drowning the words spoken by the people who thronged on the pavement, tangling and disentangling. He heard only the merest hum of humanity. The car still delayed. Should he walk home? That might do—postponing the arrival. He moved away; and it was then (not at all enthralled by thoughts of home) that some lit upper windows caught his eye, and it occurred to him that behind them would be ease and a quiet supper. All the week he had enjoyed the little suppers with his fellows of the office, hastily snatched about six o'clock in an adjacent chop-house, before going on with work till ten. Now he was intrigued by the prospect of a leisurely and lonely meal here. All very well to tell himself that the condition of things at home did not worry him; it did—or he felt this evening that it would worry him, that he could not enter into it. He found himself the only occupant of the coffee-room. Glad that he had decided to stay in town, he sat easily back in his chair. The lights of the shops opposite, and the street lamps, cast a glow on the drawn blinds, for only the jet over the end of the table where his supper-cloth was spread had been lit. The exterior glow was evident. In the street was the raucous voice of a hobbledehoy calling the evening edition; then he heard, above the low murmur of the traffic outside, the old town clock la-la-ing the half hour.

Why had that waiter not given him more light? The melancholy mood may upon occasion be pleasant for youth to toy with, but as the bell remotely struck, and its last echo rippled out, it came to him how many must

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have heard it ringing so. A sense of the antiquity of the old town was upon him. He wondered how many men had listened to that bell; Emerson must have noted it if Melville was right in his statement that the great philosopher and poet had visited the place on his European journey. He looked forward to reading more of Emerson. He had had to order a copy, and so far had but dipped. What Melville advised he found good. If he had not so recently visited Melville he would have called on him to-night; but no, even though Melville was going away so soon, he must not bore him. To-morrow he would call—to say good-bye. Yes, dead men innumerable, men who had been round the world and back again; men at the ends of the earth, dead and alive, must have heard that bell and its dying fall. This was the thought (meaningless or meaningful, wise or idiotic—but this was the thought) with which his mind toyed as his hands toyed with the table cutlery, awaiting his repast. That melancholy bell must have been anathema to sick folk; to people with a worry that thinking of did not mend; to people who hoped to fall asleep before the next quarter smote out inexorably in the night. Yet doubtless it had sounded homely and good to others (or even to the same people) on happy days. Yes, it was a short life, gauged even by a peal of bells, to say nothing of the old Law, that humped knob of grass that backed the city, unchanging, or the league-broad Tay, changing always, now placidly smooth and anon rushing treacherous. Thus he mused over the soup, which the waiter brought at last, giving him, at the same time, more light. Chump chop and chip potatoes followed, and by the time Ted had cheered his body to that extent another quarter had gone. The stroke announcing the fact of that flight sent an odd shiver round his loins, as if he had been sitting in a draught. He rose and passed out into the corridor to meet the waiter, who, seeing him, came anxiously running.

"Sweets—coffee—cheese? Nothing to drink? Sorry I forgot you, sir; been detained."

The door of the bar-parlour was open, and the place within was brightly lit. Ted had drunk no ale with his supper; he would have a glass there, and, paying the bill for what he had eaten, he entered. The barmaid served him, and he carried the tumbler in his hand, setting it upon a table that stood before a kind of disintegrated section of the divan which ran round the place, a niche of a seat set apart thus by two pillars, or perhaps roof supports. He paid no great attention to the architecture, merely espied the secluded seat and filled it.

But he had not long been seated when a queer feeling came over him (whence, who knows?), and he mused to himself:

"I have been here before,  
But when or how I cannot tell . . ."

Leaning back, he sipped occasionally, leisurely filled his pipe, fell into a happy mood of hugging himself over no one knowing he was here, over no one knowing where he was, feeling free for a few hours from his mother's haughty silence, his sister's rustling asperities. Footsteps came into the parlour—perhaps those of the waiter, dodging back from supper-room to bar, to ascertain if there was anybody at the tables to be attended to; but no—there was a new voice, and the beer-pull handle clicked. Followed a sound of someone sitting down with vulgar, if comfortable, sigh of satisfaction, and then a: "Well, how are you to-night, miss?" Odd fragments of talk came to Ted, irresponsible talk—on the weather, the weather for the time of year, on feeling off colour—"You're looking well!"—"Oh, you flatterer!"—and so on. Ted sat back smoking, and paid no heed to the piffle.

Suddenly he turned his head; and there was a man who had evidently, like him, carried his noggin from the

bar for himself, in the act of putting it upon a table, sitting down in slow fashion the while he peered at Ted. And Ted was arrested, for the man was his father.

"My God! You!"

It was the elder Murray who spoke. He had not quite settled, and instead of settling he rose, came across, still peering, as though his sight was failing.

"Yes," he said, "it is." He put the palms of his hands on Ted's table. "At first," he went on in a strained voice, "at first I thought I must be going off my head, you looked so much like a man who used to sit in there—but I heard long ago that he was dead. Ambrose—yes—that was his name. A very interesting man—a philosopher, to a certain extent, though he made a mistake when he cut me dead. Didn't understand."

He drew erect again, and glared at his son.

"What are *you* here for?" he asked.

"Oh, I——" began Ted, "I—er——"

"Is it a way of escape?" said the father.

Ted met the old man's red eyes and, in a voice he hardly recognised as his own, replied: "A way of escape."

Murray looked as if he could cry. His lip trembled; the heavy jowls shook; the corners of his mouth went down.

"Don't do it, my boy; don't do it," he said. "I'm an escaper, and I've never escaped. I always liked you, Teddy"—there was a quaver in his voice. "I'm down and out—I almost don't care, but you moved me just now. I was thinking of myself—of myself, not of you—what do you think of that? That's selfish! Thinking of myself instead of you, really. Or perhaps I wasn't. I don't know. The joining up of things inside my head is rather bad. But don't sit here to escape, Ted; don't do that. Go away. Go away from whatever it is." He was on the point of tears again. "For the battle is not to the strong, my boy, the battle is not to the strong."

The man who had been talking to the barmaid gave a laugh, perhaps over some witticism in the "Here and There" column of the evening paper. She was turning over the paper on the bar, the big man watching her. Murray's head jerked round.

"That reminded me of Ambrose," he said, in a whisper as of one awed, but as though speaking to himself. Ted thought he was wandering. "And I thought *you* were Ambrose!" Ted was sure he was wandering. "I get—what's the word?—anachronistic sometimes. What was I going to say? Oh, yes. I remember a discussion in this very room—my God, that was long ago."

He leant back, still staring at Ted, fumbling behind him for a chair, encountered one, and drawing it close, sat down. The windows were open, and the town clock began its everlasting perennial chiming and telling of an hour.

"That has been going on all the time," cried Murray, waving his hand upward.

Teddy, chin on necktie, gazing at the old man, had fallen into a stiffly set position.

"I mean the bell," explained the father. "I mean the hours, and the quarters, and the half-hours, and the three-quarters," he continued, growing excited. "La-la, la-la."

"Yes, yes," said Ted. "I quite understand."

"What was I going to tell you?"

"About a discussion you heard here," replied Ted, his voice hollow.

"That's right. That's right. You've read my thoughts. But why was I going to tell you about that discussion?" He sat humped like a toad, elbows on table. "I know; it's perfectly plain. They were all talking of a marriage that had been disarranged; the fellow didn't turn up. I remember thinking how funny it was that what caught them all was the length of the procession. There would have been no use explaining to Molison that it would

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have been just the same if there had only been one banana-barrow at the door instead of carriages all the way to The Pillars. Huh! All the way to The Pillars. The fellow bolted, Teddy. That was before your time; you never heard of it—it was withheld from babes. Ambrose was the only man——” he lost his way. “Then there was Constable. Constable said it was a damned good job for the girl; but the point of the story, Ted, is that it would have been better for both.”

He stopped to drink from his glass, but Ted did not move.

“You know, my boy,” said Murray, “I’ve taken too much drink, and my brains are getting a little funny. As Americans say, the cogs slip. But I can grasp the main facts, and if you are sitting here drinking on your lonesome at your age, take my tip—no, don’t try to stop drinking on your lonesome—put an end to whatever it is that makes you do so. Ambrose would have understood that. I believe I’d have been a better man if I’d—er—well, if I’d had different people round me, people to understand these things instead of to take me for a fool if I said them, and eventually make me think myself a fool for thinking them. And then,” he wagged his head, “you don’t know how my mother and I used to play hunt-the-slipper.”

To Ted this sounded at the moment like senility again.

“And look here,” said the father, going off at a tangent, “why did you, the last time I met you” (it would appear that the meeting by the Burns statue on the night of his dementia was forgotten), “lead me to believe that you were in Glasgow alone?”

Ted had to clear his throat before he could speak.

“Well,” he replied, “frankly, for my mother’s sake. I didn’t know what you might do.”

“For your mother’s sake,” said Murray, in the tone of one repeating something definitely, to memorise. He pondered that, and seemed bitterly amused. “And

because of whom," he asked, leaning over the table to tap his son's arm, "because of whom, might I ask, are you sitting here now?"

Ted dropped his eyelids, and held them so a moment.

"No!" he said, and shook his head once.

"Then both of them!" cried his father.

Ted's lips closed; his expression was of refusing to discuss the subject.

"My boy," declared Murray, "I'll do the square thing by you."

He took off his hat, set it down on the table, and felt with two fingers on the top of his head.

"It's soft on top," he said. "You put your hand up and feel that. It's soft on top. There's the place."

To humour him Ted stretched forth and felt.

"I believe that's drink!" exclaimed the father. "But I've got a great constitution, and it does not matter what happens, I promise you one thing—I'll never go near your mother. She wants me to go abroad now!" He laughed outright. "I know she wants me to go abroad. Constable—no, not Constable—what's his name?—where I've been working—God damn it!—Taylor—that's it—Taylor hints that I might, and she's called on him. He let that out. But I don't want to go now—I'm too old. Remember—remember, I promise you, as a man of honour, that I'll never"—he accentuated with a finger tapping in the air—"go near her. I'm going away from Dundee to-night, and I'll not come back. I was just having a look round. It doesn't matter how putrid a time a man has had, he likes to have a look round at the old place." He rose abruptly. "Come along, Ted, let's say good-bye in the street."

Ted followed him, Murray walking smartly downstairs and forth. On the pavement he turned sharply.

"I'll not forget that promise," he said. "If you want to go away—away!—don't let that keep you. I swear

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you need not. One thing I am is a man of honour. You ask your mother. A man of honour."

He pressed Ted's hand, wheeled, and went off with a terrible alertness. To the petrified young man came a thought, hard to express, that he should have said something to his father hinting of an immortal soul! He was sure that if he told his mother of the meeting she would say he should have done so. But Murray had come, and talked, and gone; and it was all as a dream. He should have said something hopeful to the old man instead of being like a mute before him. He hurried to the corner, and, even as he pursued, wondered what he could say, what there was to say.

Ted walked this way, that way—but his father was out of sight. He passed through the crowd in a daze, wanting to get out of it. He felt all this had happened to him before, dazed. It was a night of almost full moon, a moon that diminished the town lights to ineffectual tapers, and he turned aside, intending to go home by the Esplanade. But there were promenaders on the Esplanade, too, so he went down river to escape them, down by the docks, past the baths. He wanted to get away by himself to think. The moon was bright enough to read by; it lit up the wharf, it penetrated with wan yet clear shaft of light to a lower jetty beneath.

Leaning against the rail, Ted tried to think—to think what it all meant. Ineffectual! He felt as though his head would burst, and he had to desist—merely looking out on the ribbon of rippling moonlight laid across the estuary, at the joggling wavelets, the tips of which were lit as they rose. The whole thing was simply as inevitable as the river. Yet to him it was unreal, untrue, like a terrible dream from which he would awaken soon.

He turned away suddenly, horrified by the sucking and gurgling of the river under the piers, and found himself

—free of the wharfs—in Dock Street, dazed; and he was just crossing Whitehall Crescent to Union Street from the pavement before Mathers' when he noticed a man running on the other side. The one in haste dived into the open space of moonlight at the end of Union Street, glanced up at the clock over the station there (the station where one takes train to Perth), but did not enter it. Accelerating his speed, he ran on to the station beyond.

An impulse, right or wrong, withheld Ted from pursuing his father this time to say—to say what? What could be said? George Murray ran on, his son on the other side of the street, stock still, staring after him. It was a back far more aged than the back Ted had seen moving through the crowds in the Caledonian Station at Glasgow; and as Murray, seeing how the clock announced that the last train south was all but due, increased his speed, there was something rendingly pathetic in that run to his son. There was a tottering in it more like the tottering of a child than the tottering run of age. Ted stood there watching his father running so until the old man disappeared into the sloping covered way down to the platform. A second or two after a puff of smoke and steam volleyed up at the tunnel's end—of the south-bound train running in.

Ted walked slowly along a back street of sinister aspect called Yeaman Shore, to be away from the crowds of people, from all those human beings. He recalled the final scenes at home with his father; he recalled all that had led up to them, as far back as his memory availed; recalled also, with horror, human and memorable walks with his father, as well as these nights when Murray was but a grunting and snoring carcase. The memory, on one hand, was of vinegar cloths and incoherent mumblings, on the other of country rambles around Dundee (or farther afield, on the too brief holidays—holidays of ten days to a fortnight), when his father told

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him the names of trees; or of strolls on the wharfs, when his father posted him on schooner, brig, barque, ship. And behind all these memories now was a picture of his mother as she had been during this last week—grim, taciturn, frigidly waiting until he should submit to her law.

He took a passage-way that led on to Nethergate, a flagged passage-way between whitewashed walls lit by bracket gas-lamps, and came out to its hum as on to a sea beach, his thoughts all at sixes and sevens—pitying his father, pitying his sister, pitying his mother. It was a bitter mess of a business under that sky and flying moon. He wondered suddenly what his father had meant by playing hunt-the-slipper. He had heard him once, long ago, growl something like: "Oh—she! Huh! She needn't quote 'look not upon the wine when it is red'—'a little for the stomach's sake' is more in her vein." Of his father's people he knew nothing, for his mother was always silent regarding them. It was of the Wests and all their relatives that she spoke when minded to discuss "folks." His occasional inquiries seemed but to strengthen her distaste for speech of the Murrays. He knew little more than the bald fact of his grandfather's profession.

All the while the dissipated face of his father was before him, more real than the faces of the throng he subconsciously threaded. Drawing near the Royal Hotel he looked up, by custom, at Melville's windows. They were not lit, and for a moment he came out of his own, no, not thoughts, but troubled mental fumbblings. Melville would be gone from Dundee to-morrow; should be packing to-night. Ted halted to consider the advisability of mounting to his flat and asking when he could be seen to say good-bye. He entered the court, climbed the stairs, which felt different to-night, passed along the corridor, rang the bell.

The tall, handsome landlady opened.

"Oh!" she said. "Mr. Melville's gone."

"Gone!" cried Ted.

The woman's eyes went moist. "Yes," she answered. "He found he did not need to go to the office to-morrow, so he came home early to-day, packed up all in a rush—for he said he can't stand final delays," her voice trembled; "he went off with his luggage no more than an hour ago."

"Oh," said Ted, and considered: "By the same train as my father very likely."

"He told me if you came up I was to," she smiled and blinked, "jump on you for not coming before, and I was to tell you he'll write to you."

"Thank you very much. Good-night."

"Good-night."

He came down the twilight tower stair, thinking the place very dismal, lugubrious. And again he had a feeling that it was all unreal—Melville unreal, the stairs unreal, himself unreal. It was as though he dreamt he was descending thus—round and round and round.

## CHAPTER X

"DIAMETRICALLY opposed! Utterly incompatible!" Ted voiced aloud, thinking of both mother and father as he walked home. "I don't know. I can't understand."

Still, if he could not understand wholly he was certainly growing older and understanding a little. After all, he had not always known them; he had no explanation for them. He dismissed the question of his parents as beyond him. As for Mabel—she was what she was in

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great part because of that father whom she had too often seen drunk, a revolting carcase, in the sitting-room, had heard snoring, a whistling snore, with a grunt at the end. Frightful! He was sorry for her. She had a hard time; she was a worker; she was distinctly the main prop of the home; and that sort of thing—to be a main prop—was hard upon a woman, mused the young man, with, it would appear, a view different altogether from that of his sister—a view of woman as a creature who should go in satin, walking upon velvet.

There was no denying that the face of his father—which still hauntingly moved before him—was the face of one debauched and sunken. One had but to look at George Murray and at Mrs. Murray and Mabel, and there was no room for any doubt as to where was Uprightness and where Downfall, where Respectability, where Ruination. His mother was to be pitied; thus did Ted commune to himself; and Mabel—poor Mabel—he should be lenient toward her rancours, for Fate and circumstance had dealt hardly with her. As for the encounter of tonight, he would say nothing on his return. His father, he believed, had gone from the town, as from the home, for ever. Under the stars, walking home, Ted decided to try skilfully to make the family really a united family, and to give his mother at least a happy old age.

But there are two sides to every story—and those of whom he thought had, during these last days, been greatly exercised on the subject of taboos. It is all very well to set up a taboo; but the taboo is worthless when the one tabooed seems happier under it than free of it. There is no sense of satisfaction in it then. During the tenure of former taboos Ted had shown that he was aware of what went on around him, that, even if he did not acknowledge his guilt under the constraint of the taboo, it had a punitive effect. When mother and sister, talk-

ing together, talked at him he would flush, or there would be some slight indication (biting of lip, sudden frown, or what-not) to convey to them that he realised he was being spoken at—that “the cap fitted.” But this taboo, over God knows what (for that was how he was beginning to feel about it), seemed not to disturb Ted. That would never do; there must be some change in the tactics. Mrs. Murray had tried to make a change once (and cause him to break the silence she had imposed but grew weary of) by talking of people who “took a pet.” With a side-glance at her son she expected that this would rouse him to utterance and give her opportunity to tell him she awaited apology! He had paid no heed. It was as if he had not heard. He did not say, as it was hoped he would: “Oh, no! I have not taken the pet. I have been silenced.” He had a strength, as Mrs. Murray had expressed herself hopeful he would have, beyond his father. The sole result of her remark was to make him consider what tenacity his mother possessed.

To-night, on his return, it would appear that the taboo had been removed by one member of the family. Mabel was looking over a box of curios in the sitting-room when he entered, a box of old family locketts, miniatures, gew-gaws.

“Hullo, Ted!” she said.

“Hullo!” he replied, scarce hiding his astonishment.

“What sort of a night is it?” she asked.

“Brilliant moonlight. Brilliant moonlight. Beautiful night,” he responded a trifle nervously, still unstrung after the scene with his father.

Entered the room, at this, Mrs. Murray, who had been out visiting her mother, under the roof of the good son-in-law, Jack Burnett. On her way home, being near Ted’s office, she had gone a mere stone’s throw out of her way to look at the windows, even as had Mabel on previous nights. And behold they were dark! Over this

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fact mother and daughter had solemnly conferred; and now, as the mother came into the room, they exchanged glances.

"Is the late work all over?" Mrs. Murray asked gently. The taboo was evidently removed.

"Yes, all over," said Ted.

It had been her intention not to come straight to the point, to handle him as a clever woman can handle a man.

"This is the last night of it?" she went on.

Ted looked at her, for her manner was of one asking a most casual question, a trifle too casual. Candidly, he did not trust her. Mabel bent over the curio box subdued.

"Wasn't working to-night," said Ted.

"Oh! Where were you?" inquired his mother.

"Had supper in town, and strolled round afterwards," he told her.

"And where do you get the money for supper?" she asked.

"Our supper is paid for when we work late," he patiently replied.

"But you said you were not working late to-night!"

Ted sighed. "Quite right," he said, "I was not; but I don't necessarily spend all I get every night, and after four nights of late work I might quite easily have enough over for supper on the fifth."

She noticed, with aptitude for such subtleties, that he didn't say: "I do not spend" nor "I can quite easily"; she noticed that the phrasing made a suggestion to her, not a statement. However, that might be only due to insolence.

"And have you been *alone* all the evening?" she persisted. "I really can't understand why you don't come home to supper. It is a needless expense."

Resolves took wing. "Needless?" he said. "Oh, I

don't know. It all depends on where one places one's breaking point."

"I don't understand what you mean, and that's not an answer to my question," she replied. "If there is a girl in the case there can be nothing to hide so long as it is honourable."

He recalled his father's words on a former meeting: "If ever you have a son, Teddy, just you antidote what his mother teaches him. Mother teaches him to be courteous to women for the sake of other women. You teach him, my boy, to be very courteous to women for the sake of himself." And he considered how apt were the words to this moment. Also he felt indignation that his mother should be seeking to protect some possible, problematic, unit of her sex from her son, the more indignant because of the non-existence of that unit of his mother's sex.

"It can't be serious, anyhow," put in Mabel, glancing at her brother as he so pondered, "for Ted could not support a wife. And no man should make love to any woman until he sees the way clear for that."

He came back from his consideration of the appositeness of his father's counsel.

"But perhaps, like you, she thinks she should support herself," said Ted with a chuckle.

"Maybe have to support her husband!" Mabel snapped.

"Maybe would like to, for a change—just one step more—is it advanced?—than you!"

Mrs. Murray sat down at the table, folded her hands, and waited until he had finished speaking. Then:

"You have not answered my question," she remarked.

"Neither I have," he admitted.

Mabel smiled, for his tone was of one irritated. Holding up a silhouette portrait of Granny West in youth, she turned to her mother.

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"Look," she said, "am I like that?"

"A marked resemblance, my dear."

"Like that?" and she held up a little miniature of some dead and gone Murray, one of the few heirlooms George had possessed. Perhaps, indeed, he (according to his mother's view) had filched it on his flight from home; for Mrs. Murray, senior, though having a few such relics, had (dog-in-the-manger) objected to his interest in them, out of her cross-grainedness; though, to be sure, those that were *objets d'art*, as well as clan or family treasures, the dealers had carried off when the librarian went to his long home.

"Oh, no, Mabel! You are not a Murray! You are a West."

"I suppose I have the Murray look," said Ted, with that exasperating air of: "Allow me to put myself in a better posture for being kicked."

His mother took that eagerly, for she was losing her temper over her own miscarried taboo.

"Yes," she replied. "There is no doubt you are a Murray. You grow more like your father every day."

"I believe," he went on, in a mock declamatory manner, "many people hold the theory that the child gets its nature from one side of the house and its face from the other."

"Absurd!" cried Mabel.

"I think so myself," he agreed. "Or else how could you tell people's natures from their faces?"

"One *can!*" she snapped.

"From the expression, I expect," he answered. "Expression."

Mabel's eyes went left and right as she considered if she was walking into a quagmire or on to a victorious hilltop.

"I am only talking like this," Ted added, getting nigh to the end of his tether, "so as to advise you to have

all your arguments clear, and the flaws in your evidence well hid when you are trying to be nasty."

"Nasty!" she cried. "I nasty! Oh, that is really too delightfully masculine."

The word masculine reminded him of his recent intention to remember, when revival of such domestic scraps seemed imminent, how her environment had shaped his sister. She was a child of circumstance.

"Oh, well—God help us all, and good-night," he said.

"You certainly are more Murray than West," said his mother. "You say your sister is nasty, but it seems to me that you have done nothing but bicker since I entered this room."

He came back a step. It was a pity; he should have escaped. He shrugged his shoulders; he felt very tired suddenly. He nearly turned away again.

"One must live up to one's reputation," he replied. "If I am a Murray I'm a Murray, and it won't help much to be reminded that the Murrays were rotters. 'If I am the Devil's child I will live then from the Devil.'"

The chronicler gathers that even the mere dipping into the volume advised by Melville had been dynamic.

"Oh, Ted!" cried Mrs. Murray. "What would Miss Gordon think if she heard you make such a depraved statement?"

"Or Cathy Hope," suggested Mabel, in a low voice. "But, of course, he would not let other people hear him talk like that," and she dipped her fingers again into the jewel-box.

Ted shook his head slowly, comprising both in the gesture, finally acknowledging their alliance. He ignored the *sotto voce* reference to Catherine Hope.

"I *am* sensitive, but that remark of yours, mother, does not hurt, does not sting," he said, in the tone of

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one admitting a weakness, "and Miss Gordon was not such a bad sort—the best of Mabel's bad lot; but you haven't got the right spot to stick your knife in."

This was the baffler of catechists rising again—for he recalled the remarks which showed a suspicion on the part of his women-folk that there was (as the feuilletons say) a girl in his life. He was a West as well as a Murray.

He turned again to Mabel, and looked at her directly.

"A friend of yours could not possibly be a great friend of mine, and besides——" he looked into nothingness between them both, "I have seen far too deep now to be worried at all by this sort of thing. I have found an antidote for your poison." He lost his head. "And, by God," he shouted, "it is not drink!"

Mrs. Murray sank back in her chair and burst into tears.

"From my son, too!" she sobbed. "What a life I've had; what a life!"

He wanted to use their pet phrase: "If the cap fits you can wear it; I'm sorry if I touched a sensitive spot"; but he had not yet been driven so far. He couldn't speak the words, took a step or two toward his mother, halted, stood staring.

With a triumphant glance of disdain Mabel met his eyes.

"Now I hope you're proud of yourself!" she said.

At the sound of her daughter's voice Mrs. Murray's sobs redoubled; she hid her face, and shook, weeping. Ted had an intense inclination to hasten to console his mother; he mastered it by the thought that she wanted, not his consolation, but his subjugation, servitude. Agonised, he dragged himself away, walked into the hall, put on his hat, hung it up again, passed into his own room—for the hour was now very late, and all would have been in bed ere this had the trouble in the sitting-

room not begun on his return. He locked his door. He had intended not to be paltry; he had intended to remind himself that Mabel had seen much calculated to make her what she was; to see the pitiable side of his mother's life; to recall that she must have endured much, and he was bickering.

"Oh, hell!" he said.

The ejaculation might have been prophetic. It was indeed hell during the next days, for the taboo was again in order. On the Sunday mother and daughter, after a silent breakfast, departed to church without a word. Ted went afield, far up the Carse of Gowrie; and the open world of fields and woods and skies was too inviting to allow of an early return. When he did, at supper-time, come back there were renewed hostilities. It transpired then that Mrs. Murray and Mabel had accepted an invitation to lunch, and had also been gone all day. The crux of the trouble was in the fact that Mrs. Murray had left the daily girl with instructions to attend to Ted's lunch.

"You might have told us in the morning that you were going to be away all day," she said.

"I did not know," he answered. "It was not until after I got miles out that I decided to make a day of it. If you had told me that you were both going out for lunch, and were leaving the girl to look after me, I could either have come back or have made up my mind, before you went, not to come back. How am I to know your plans when I'm only allowed to speak so as to say something that calls for apology, or else to apologise?"

"Oh, there is no need to be rude about it," she said. (He recalled, from a book of travels of an American that he had been reading, the phrase: "Say, what t'hell's the game?" He wondered what the game was.) "The trouble about you is that you always think you are in the right. Conceit is what is wrong with you. I wish

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your father was here to talk to you about your behaviour."

"My dear mother," he begged, "can you tell me, reasonably, why all this fracas? The girl was left to prepare my lunch because you knew I was not going to church——"

"Oh, we don't expect you to go to church," interrupted Mabel.

He paid no heed to her, but continued, addressing his mother: "If you had only consulted me; if you had told me you were going out to lunch—but you see you are not speaking to me just now. That is the root of the trouble! You've got some silly——"

"Ted!" she cried. "You shall not speak to me like this. I am your mother. I am a woman. I am much older than you."

"Ah, well," he sighed, "if these are reasons why I am to suffer this sort of thing to-day, then I expect it will be always so, to-morrow and the day after, with always some fresh twist to the boa-constrictor business; for you will always be a woman—you will always be my mother—and you will always be older than I. I think the best plan for me will be to get a situation away from home."

There was no answer to that.

"I'll tell you what I can do," he suddenly brought out. "I don't need to wait to get a post out of Dundee so as to relieve you of my distressful society. I can go into diggings here."

Mabel pealed with harsh mirth. Mrs. Murray drew erect.

"You will certainly not do that," she said. "You will stay here and try to conduct yourself better. A nice thing it would be for you to be in lodgings in the same town with your mother—pretending to be ill-used. Oh, no; you don't do that! All that I say," she went on in

gentler accents, "is that it would have been more thoughtful of you to have told us in the morning what your plans were. However! However! I don't suppose you will do the same again. We'll have supper now, at any rate. You must be hungry after the long day in the country."

Ted could not understand her. Just when he thought he understood she invariably provided some new bend for his consideration on what lay beyond. As she spoke her manner changed by degrees, so that, though she had begun in most stern fault-finding, she ended almost gaily; if he had only been not thus personally mixed up in it he might have admired the thing. It was a *tour de force* in change of accent and expression. An actor would have watched and listened enthralled. Over the meal she was so pleasant that he could scarce live up to her. Where had he been? What had he seen? Were there many people on the country roads? When she was a girl, before she married, she and his father used to go for Sunday walks in the country. She even assured him that he looked better for his long day's outing, while Mabel sat quiet, utterly non-committal.

Thus the Sunday ended in an unbelievable, if meretricious, peace.

But the next day the condition of the atmosphere, as Melville would have called it, was decreed by Ted, to the astonishment of the others. The evening's peace had not prevented him from pondering his home, lying awake at night—and as he dressed he was highly excited, inwardly telling himself: "I can't stand it. I can't stand it—neither the peaceful interludes nor the rows. Neither of them!"

"I want," he said, "to speak very seriously to both of you."

Here was a new Ted. One night had changed him, and they gave ear in wonderment.

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"I have thought over the position," he informed them, "and I have decided to leave here." He paused for comment, but there was none. "I am willing to admit that all that is wrong is with me; but I really cannot stand the everlasting scrapping."

Mrs. Murray spoke then:

"Scrapping! And you went to bed last night in quite a nice mood! You remind me of your poor father. This is just the way he used to get up. But if that is your view, you know who is responsible, and you can easily reform."

"I'm afraid I cannot," he told her. "That is the trouble. I cannot reform. I am sure that whatever happens I shall always be in the wrong. I am sure that to stay here any longer would be most calamitous. You see, I have a quarrelsome nature, and I am always making trouble. I constantly do things I should not do, and leave undone the things I should do. Frankly, I cannot stay on. As you are aware, mother—though, of course, you have never reproached me with it—I do only a little for the upkeep of the home. I support myself, however. My going would not, monetarily, be a loss to you in any way."

"And pray what do you intend to do?" she inquired.

"As I said last night—go into 'digs.' I am, as I say, always in the wrong; if I am not apologising I am non-existent. I find it extremely tiresome. It must be very tiresome to you, also, to have such a son. I find it difficult, as well, to forget I am in disgrace privately, but publicly to appear as a happy and beloved member of the household."

There was cold menace in the two pairs of grey eyes at that.

"And so," said Mrs. Murray, "your intention is to go into rooms and let all the world know we can't get along together. Much better to mend—and remain."

"You could say I was a bad lot," he replied. "There are two of you—I am just one. Or, better still, you could hint, as if it was a pain to you—a sorrow you couldn't mention—that I was a bad lot. I wouldn't mind."

His mother was bereft of speech at his cruelty. Her lips were drawn; she drew a deep breath and expelled it. Mabel clenched her teeth.

"I am sure you could manage that all right," said Ted in hopeful accents.

And at that the letter-box flap clicked.

Perhaps some feeling all had as of an *impasse* caused a unanimous interest, curiosity, regarding the mail. The lull that followed was of waiting for the letters to be brought in. And when the little daily drudge entered presently she carried a letter to Ted. He took it from her, opened it, glanced at it, read it with expression they could not fathom, and then rose.

"Perhaps," he said, "I shall be able to do even better for you after all. I see the objection to going into 'digs' in the same town with you."

Before either mother or sister could recover to institute inquiries into the full significance of his speech he was gone. They heard him step across the hall—and then the front door closed. Evidently he had gone off to the day's business without more ado—leaving them in a state of suspense. Mrs. Murray wept for herself. This was so much the way his father had upset her and made her never know what was to come next. But that boy had a will!

"Volcano! Ugh!" said Mabel, and departed to prepare for going off to business too.

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## CHAPTER XI

MRS. MURRAY and Mabel had but newly sat down to supper when Ted returned. A change seemed to have come upon him; he had the look of one who could move mountains—or of one who felt that he could move mountains.

"Hullo, you people!" he said. He was offering them the cheeriness that last night had been offered to him on his home-coming.

Mrs. Murray looked up.

"You are just in time for supper," she remarked, not too drily, for she had a great curiosity to know what was afoot.

"I've had grub—in the train."

The women glanced briefly one to the other.

"I've got a post," he announced, and sitting down in an easy chair beside the fire he drew forth his tobacco pouch. Opening it, he spilled some grains of tobacco, and his mother's eyes noted and looked away. "I believe she hates me," he thought, "because she hated my father. And well she might hate him; it must have been awful for her. Still——"

"Yes, I've got a job," he said aloud, "as a librarian in Glasgow."

"A librarian!" cried Mrs. Murray with vigour. "I think it is a very idle calling." (She was not at all like the sweet mothers one reads of in books. One who knew women only from novels would have found it difficult to believe his ears now.) "I think it a very idle calling to hand out books to idle people to pass an idle hour."

Mabel came to the rescue.

"Oh, my dear mother!" said she, "you are old-fashioned. Poor Ted!" and she smiled sisterly upon him.

"You must not suggest to him that he is going to be only a kind of superior waiter handing out light refreshment for the idle library subscribers," and she looked again at Ted. But her words of sympathy toward him over the mother's unbelievably confined, unbelievably purblind, views, turned, as she smiled again, to a sneer at his new vocation—or was it his imagination? Had he encountered so much of that kind of sweet and bitter blent that he imagined it now? No matter! He was going away—even from such uncertainties.

It would be well for him soon to be gone from this united family. He was getting raw instead of callous. Then he had private thoughts. Was his mother really so purblind, so tiny in outlook? He sat staring at her, chin on chest.

"My grandfather was a librarian," he said, "a scholarly man—highly esteemed." For so his father had told him on one of their Sunday rambles, when the father (in Ethel's view) was not altogether a good influence—instilling a preference in the boy for wandering on the docks on the Sabbath and looking at ships instead of going, all in order, and as is usual, a great phrase of hers, to church.

She met his gaze with eyes opened wide, with no more expression in them than are in eyes held open steadily for scrutiny of an oculist, whose interest is in the mere flesh of them and not in what they tell of the person within.

"I believe she hates all his family," Ted said to himself, and he fell silent again, pondering pictures of the other past—of his father, hearing echoes of drunken snores, drunken utterances. Oh, doubtless, doubtless, there was cause for it all; doubtless it was all comprehensible if one expects not too much of simple human beings and realises that even one's own relatives may stagger one, may seem unbelievable, impossible.

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"You will be interested to know, mother," he went on, "that I got the job through my books," this with sincerity, for it came to him that her trouble was chiefly a vast ignorance, child-like.

She merely raised her head and, unblinkingly eyeing him, waited.

"It struck me that I must tell you that—it would please you, for you would feel that they were not bought in vain. The chief of the library asked me if I was keen on books, if I really wished to be a librarian, or was only wanting a situation. He explained that there was generally an apprenticeship to serve, but at the moment none of his apprentices were ready for the post he had to offer. He asked me to give a specimen of my handwriting, and I was handed a sheet of paper. I filled it with just what came into my head at the moment—all sorts of quotations from books—and when he saw what I had done he laughed and said: 'Well, when can you come?' So all of these books were not useless, mother; the money on them was well spent."

"I'm glad to hear it," she replied. "When, may I ask, did you apply for this post?"

"My friend Melville really got it for me," he said. "That letter this morning was from him letting me know of it."

"Did you tell him you wanted to get away from home?" asked Mrs. Murray.

"Oh, no," said Ted. "It was entirely his own notion—" (Mabel, frowning, considered that, looked scathingly at her brother; he smiled to her)—"after his visit here," he added, explanatory. "I'll read you his letter." He produced it from his breast-pocket:

*"Dear Murray,*

*"I was sorry not to see you again. I looked for you during the week, but you did not show up. Perhaps*

*you decided to come in just before I went off—and I left the old Tower earlier than I expected. However, to business. I took the liberty of writing to a friend of mine in the — Library in Glasgow, after you left me that Saturday evening. It was just a chance that I might be able to get you into something more like you than book-keeping. When you mentioned that your grandfather had been a librarian, it struck me that you would be happier among books without money columns in them. It's a nuisance that the reply did not come until after I left and the letter had to be re-directed, and time lost, for you will only get this on the day my friend would like to see you. There is a vacancy. He would like you to call on Monday forenoon and have a chat. I enclose my most formal card—to introduce."*

Ted glanced up, and continued: "So I went right off to Glasgow this morning."

"Oh." Mrs. Murray nodded her head. Then—"where did you get the money for the train fare from?" she wanted to know.

"Dropped into the office and borrowed it," he said.

"Borrowed it! Why did you not ask me for it?"

"I really don't know," Ted answered. "It never occurred to me to do so."

"It's all right, mother," said Mabel, "he'll have to pay it back. We can give it him now."

"Thank you very much for the offer," said Ted to them both, "but I'll sell some of my books—enough to pay for that, and so the books will not only have got me a job, but have paid my fare to it. Well." He rose radiant, in a condition that none could ruffle, pipe filled and in hand, legs spraddled apart the while he considered the carpet. His mother glanced at him; with a curiously blank expression her eye roved him up and down.

"Men get all the chances!" Mabel broke out. "Here

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have I worked and studied all my life, and I'm stuck here in this town." ("Ah," thought Ted. "Here is aid to explain her! Jealousy is one of her qualities! Never thought of that.") "You, who have never applied yourself to anything, can now get away."

"Only to Glasgow," he responded, "where you had a little change once, and I had to follow you. Besides—do look on the bright side. I think most people get what they aim for. All your life you have said you wanted to be a working independent woman—and you are. Splendid! Victory! Do cheer up! And you know you can't pose as the support of the home without being so."

Her face seemed to lengthen. Her eyes were smoulderingly ablaze.

"And I suppose your intention is simply to look after yourself now," she said.

"In what way do you mean?" he asked, urbane in the extreme.

"I suppose you will now be the selfish man to the full and not think of supporting your mother."

"I had, as a matter of fact, thought a little on that head on the way home, considering ways and means; but my intention was dashed a moment ago when I found how mother looks upon library work. I have been privately asking myself, seeing she has such views on the matter, how I can offer to support her. I feel that perhaps it might be insulting to suggest that she has any monetary help from me considering her opinion of the way it is earned."

"Oh, *my* view of your work has nothing to do with *your* duty," said Mrs. Murray; and then she had, as was her usage, an afterthought: "though so far you have not helped much."

"That's all right," he broke in, "I was only trying to be logical when I said that—trying to follow the argument. I really hope to be able—although it's illogical

from the arguments of both of you—to send you some cash from time to time.”

“Good intentions, Teddy boy,” said Mabel. “We can lay it aside for you—against the time when you lose your situation and may need it.”

“Oh, no,” said he, not realising the significance of her accents, and thinking that in her see-saw way she was again “decent.” “Oh, no. I want mother to have it for—”

“If you do send any I can put it aside and save it for you,” said the mother, realising that Mabel considered herself, and was, head of the home. This was merely diplomatic steering. “I expect you will have very little over after you pay your board and lodgings.”

Mabel smiled, head on side.

“Ah,” she sighed. “I can see, far away, a dear little boy-child, and I can hear him saying to his mother, ‘I will give you a carriage and pair some day, mummie.’”

She twinkled with glee as Ted, for the first time in this family chat, wilted; but he recovered, and with imitation of her former mock-pensive expression that had given place to the one of triumph, he said: “Ah! Think of the disappointment for me—remembering that child, now so disillusioned.”

There came the sound of a kettle boiling, the lid a-rattle, in the kitchen. Mrs. Murray abruptly rose and passed out of the room, leaving Ted and Mabel confronting each other; and again Ted had cause to wonder—perhaps it should have been only at her—but, as he felt it, it was to wonder at woman. Her eyes filled. Her lip trembled.

“Oh,” she broke out, “I think you are just fine, Ted. This,” she seemed very tense suddenly, “this initiative—oh, splendid! Oh, how proud I am of you, Teddy boy!” It rang momentarily sincere, if hectic; but the effect was

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to leave him staring. "Oh, Ted, you are not going away at all because you don't think I've been nice to you, are you? I know you find mother trying—but I—I have not done anything to drive you away, have I?"

"That's all right," he said.

"Oh, tell me!" Her eyes were full of tears.

"You must know yourself," he said, and smiled at her as one smiles on a child. "Cheer up—I'm going, anyhow."

Mrs. Murray returned, wearing her woeful and hurt air; and Ted, looking at her, recalled again the sodden epoch preceding his father's departure, recalled, too, how he had felt, on the last times that he met his father, a horror at something in his presence. He experienced a vague wonder where he—this Edward, or Ted, Murray—came from—with naught to do with either of his progenitors. But that was momentary. His mother's broken air moved him. He had an impulse to call himself sinner and beg for her pardon; but he recalled other things besides—recalled that visit to the Taylors, with its significance, to which he could not blind himself; reminded himself that he had not known his father and mother in their early years. "If she behaved with him as she has behaved with me," he thought, "then—no wonder!"

"No wonder!" he said aloud.

"What is no wonder?" asked his mother, and he found that she was watching him with boring gaze. He had spoken aloud without knowing it. Her question brought him back.

"Thoughts," he said, "private thoughts."

He drew out his box of matches, unaware that the gesture was his father's over again. Breathing deeply, with closed lips, Ethel Murray still eyed him, unable to withdraw her gaze. There was something about him, also, unlike his father; he looked less pliable, less

"easy." By telepathy, or observation, he tapped, or surmised, her thought.

"Well," he said again, "that seems all very satisfactory. I think it may improve me to get away. I'm afraid I am rather like my father."

"Poor father," murmured Mabel. "And it was for your sake that we got him to go away"; this as with infinite regret—and never in all her experience had she by a word or two been able to make any such change of expression come on the mobile face of her brother as came at that. She observed it with a tremendous placidity.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Murray, "we had to think of the evil example to a young man growing up."

Ted drew a great breath and expelled it slowly.

"Entirely for you," repeated Mabel. "I may say so now, for though at the time when Uncle Jack spoke of the distress to you, mother, I agreed, I really thought of how bad it was for Ted. I could have triumphed over my environment—I didn't think of myself at all, but of you, mother, and of Ted. I did not say so at the time for fear of hurting him."

"Then all is satisfactory," said Ted, in hollow voice. "Mother thought of me, you thought of mother and of me, I thought of mother and you—chiefly of mother." Mother and daughter sat silent. "At least you can't, on another later occasion, when it might suit better to think so, execute another twist and say that I drove poor father away! By God," he brought out in a kind of whisper, "you are wonderful! Oh, well! We were all thinking of each other, and not at all of ourselves. We can all thus hug to our bosoms a sense of having acted with the best intentions. And perhaps for this last week that we are to be together we will be pleasant one with the other, seeing that that is the way of it."

With that silence fell on all, not now a silence in

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which the women awaited apology, but an aggrieved silence, the silence of persons shamefully treated. It lasted throughout the remaining days that Ted was at home, so that by the week's end he was well-nigh hypnotised into the belief that he was a wrecker of the family peace, that for his sake his father had been flung forth of the home; and behold he, now ungrateful, was deserting his kindred.

"Well, good-bye," said Mabel, on the morning of departure, and gave him her finger-tips. She had dressed her best—perhaps going out to some function where dress was an important matter, perhaps not—she was anyhow her ruffling best. "I hope you will be able to look after yourself alone."

"Thank you," he answered, and bowed. "I need not return the wish to you." She stared. "I know that you will be able to do so."

She elevated her head, drooped her eyelids for farewell, and—"Good-morning, mother dear," she said, kissing Mrs. Murray's cheek. "I shall be back by tea-time."

"There's the cab I ordered to come," said Ted, looking out of the window.

The foolish young man felt an inclination to weep; but they would have been tears such as are shed sometimes by gravesides over the incapacity to feel regret at loss, when there comes a sense of: "There, that's over—and it might have been so different. God! What a barren world!" and the wind scuds in the bare trees round the place, and, turning away, one clutches on and crams down one's hat in the depth of misery.

"Well, Ted," said Mrs. Murray, "good-bye." There were tears in her eyes. "I am sorry that we part like this, but perhaps it is all for the best. I don't think you will go the same way as your father. It will not be for lack of your mother's prayers for you if you do."

He looked at her, and felt indeed that he was a disappointing son to a disappointed wife, and threw an arm over her shoulder, kissed her cheek. As he drew erect again he saw his sister in the doorway, where she had paused, observing the parting with grim lips, eyes blazing.

The cabman's heavy tread was in the hall, and his rough voice could be heard asking about luggage. A few minutes later Ted, his boxes on the roof and dickey, sank back in the cab and expelled a breath; and he sat so, sagging back, like one stunned (like the mourner aforementioned), till he was aware that the cab was rattling along by the top of Magdalen Yard Road. There he bent forward for the open view at the break in the cañon of Perth Road and Nethergate, while the four-wheeler rattled on with occasional skids on the stony way.

He glanced at the entrance to the court whence the stairs led up to the rooms once occupied by Melville. To leave Dundee, now that Melville was not there, was not at all a sorrow. The cab joggled on, a moving box of deafening din. As it took the turning into Union Street somebody stood back on the kerb—Eckie Balgray, the barber, and Ted leant close to the window; Balgray gave a glance of recognition, and they saluted in the brief moment. Then Ted sat back again, reconstructing the meeting with Melville, who, in the most offhand, the most casual fashion, had shown him a way of escape, set him free. That was his chiefest emotion—one of freedom. He was away from the riddle of his family. The town to which he journeyed built up in his imagination, with the glamour of a castle in Spain. It was there that he had received the first confirmation from outside that perhaps the life he was asked to live was a life intolerable. And though, shrewdly, dubious of the sex, he suspected that Nelly Gordon (who had

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thus jogged him) was indeed, as he had said, but the best of the bad lot whom he was wont to ply with tea and cakes and be differential to, like his father in youth he was not extreme. The face of Cathy Hope was mixed up with the vision of the freedom into which he now entered. It struck him, stepping out of the cab and giving directions as to his luggage and paying the cabman—young man of the world at last—that there must be multitudes of "decent" women everywhere. That Miss Hope, for example. Melville greatly admired her, he believed. And Melville was not easily gulled by men or women. Thus his thoughts rambled as he took ticket and entrained—free, and full of hope, tasting the pleasures of that period that had come to him, as to most, for longer or shorter duration, the period of knowing no ruler, of having to rule none. Melville had called it the Ideal State.

## EPILOGUE

So it was a sharply-pointed triangular business—the father now in Edinburgh, Ted in Glasgow, and the mother and daughter in Dundee. For Ted it was a great relief to be gone and drawn off from the storm-centre.

At home, as time passed, Mabel had a deeper adulation. "A splendid hard-working woman!" "You have a treasure of a daughter, a fine, dutiful girl!" that from the friends of the kirk; and the other type found in the Dundee house one more witness to their confused case—"and I know of a family where the father deserted them, and the daughter had to apply herself to study so as to slip into the breach. The son turned out to be the father all over again. There's that girl thrown her life away, lost all her chances of marriage—and mother-love—a willing sacrifice for her mother, when she might have been happily married if only men were not so selfish."

Mrs. Murray's fortitude was often spoken of; forsaken alike by husband and son, she bore up bravely, a woman to pity and admire. And so our desirable happy ending builds up.

A year later Murray died in a room of a house off the Cowgate in Edinburgh, with not so much as a foreign dictionary under his straw pillow, and from papers found upon him it was possible to advise his people of his demise. Ted knew nothing of his father's death (had not even any telepathic or psychic restlessness) until he received a letter from his mother informing him that—"your father

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died on the 8th. I was unable to write to you at the time, being too heart-broken. I fear, from what we have heard of his last days, that he did not come to a knowledge of his sin." (Evidently religiosity was going to be her succour in age as had respectability been in youth. Ted had a sudden vision of the pious barber.) "Mabel and I talked it over, and we thought it better, at any rate, that you should not be wired for to come all that way. You have hardly settled down to your new work, and as you never saved money it seemed a pity for you to have the expense of blacks and of the journey. My sister's husband" (she did not write "your Uncle Jack,"; it was "my sister's husband") "and Mr. Taylor, who had so often helped him and had kept in touch with him, made all arrangements. I thought it better not to send for you from every point of view. You used never to speak affectionately of your father, but, after all, he was your father, and I think it would be nice of you to write and thank Mr. Burnett" (queer, the air of distance even in that "Mr. Burnett" instead of "your Uncle Jack") "and Mr. Taylor for their sympathy in making the arrangements."

He wrote neither to Jack Burnett nor to Mr. Taylor. He realised the irony of the absent son, the son who was not at the grave, who had, like the father, no "sense of responsibilities," the more than irony—the effrontery—that would lie between the lines of such thanks. Doubtless his mother had thanked. That would suffice. He saw that at this stage the story of the Murrays as "a united family" had a possible terminus. A satisfactory conclusion offered here in the interment of a scapegrace parent, and the non-appearance of the scapegrace son. Remembrance of the pious horror in their clan over the fact that his father's mother had not been lowered to rest by her son's hand helped toward the decision to make an end. The whole scene, if only he did not again intrude,

was eminently satisfactory. His wounds from that letter were neither here nor there. He would leave them in the comfortable pose (worn rightly or wrongly, he was too glad of his chance of escape to argue) of saints and martyrs. To write his thanks would be anticlimactic, would a little disturb the picture. The entrance of the postman with his letter would be a jarring note in the tableau. He would leave the tableau undisturbed. They had their desire—pity and esteem. And he—he was free, and alive, alive, and free—which is a great matter.

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