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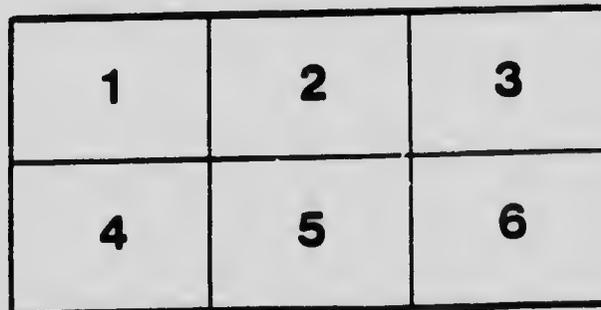
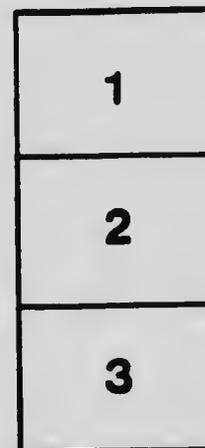
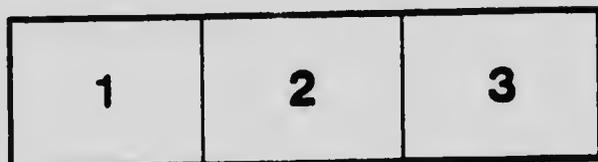
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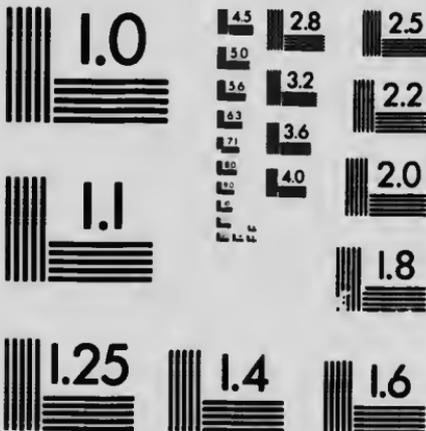
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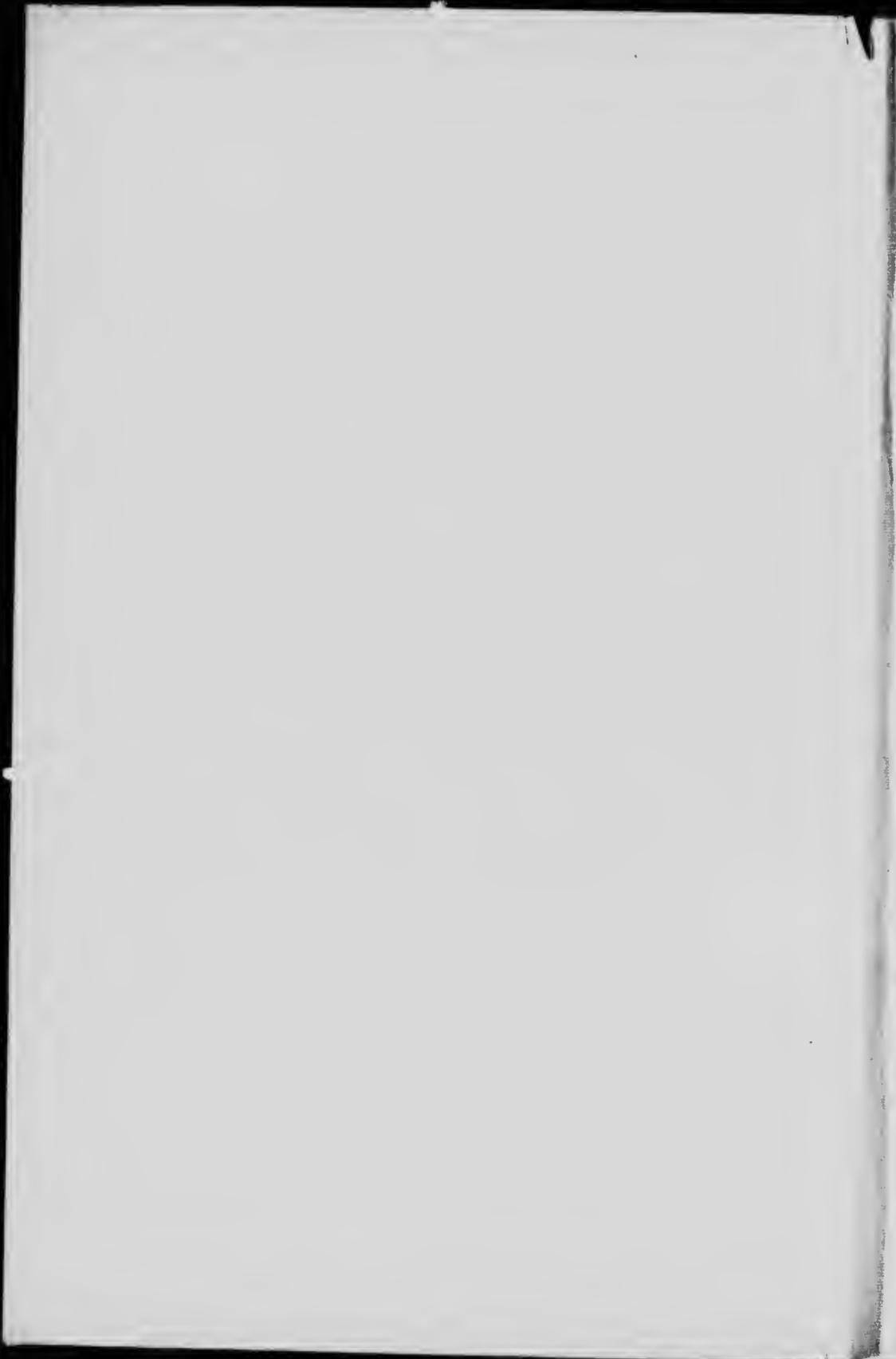
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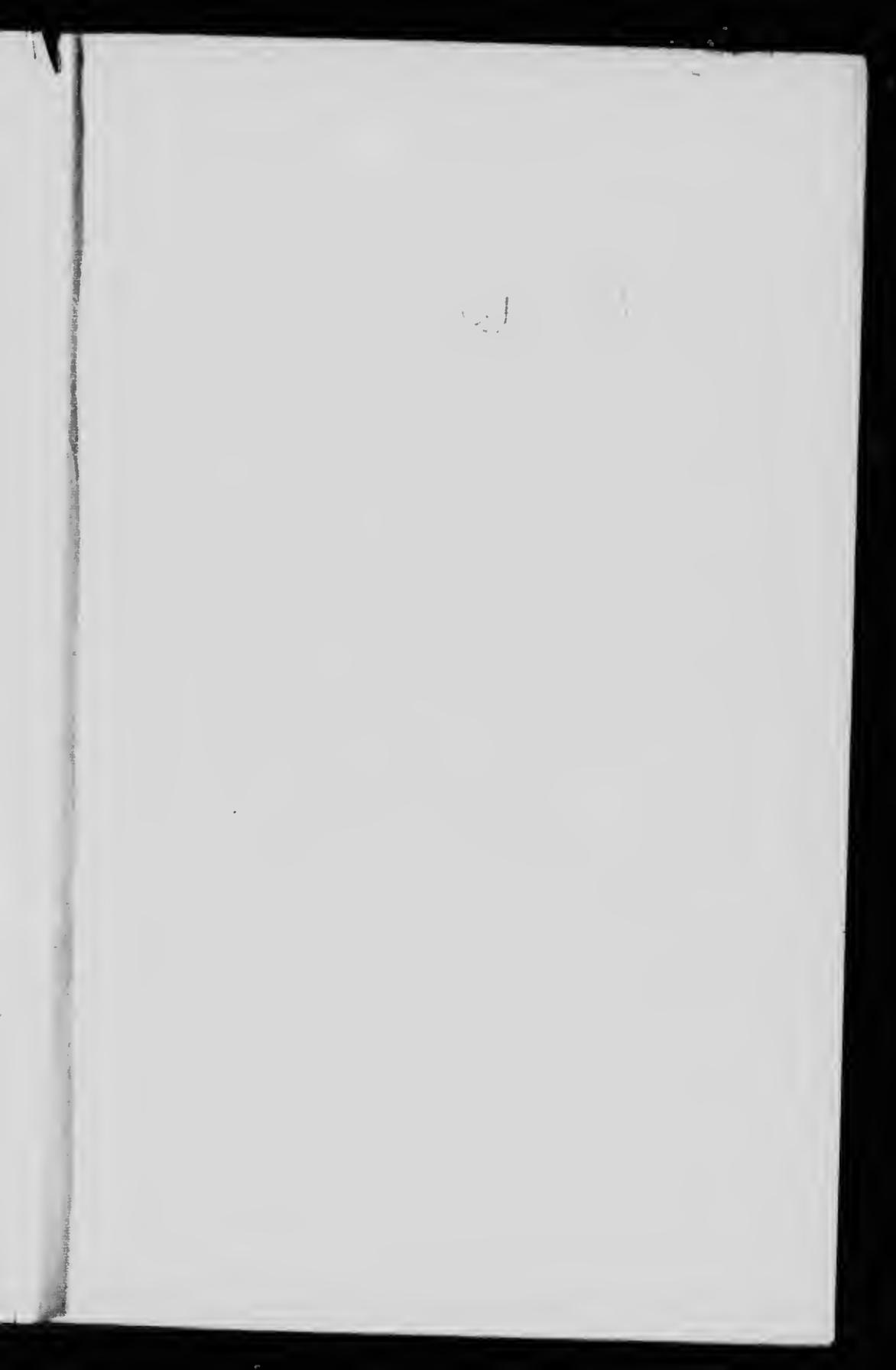
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MR. TEDDY
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MR. TEDDY

CHAPTER I

It was with a certain sense of shock that Edward Heaton remembered, as he began applying his razor this morning to his pink well-lathered face, that it was his birthday, and that in consequence he was no longer in his thirties, but had arrived at the fortieth milestone in the pleasant vale (miscalled 'of tears'). Luckily the shock was not so great as to make him cut himself, but he judged it prudent to hold the razor for a moment suspended in front of his upper lip, on which he was just about to begin operations, in case his hand might have suffered some temporary loss of steadiness. Certainly he had known for a year now that he was thirty-nine, and indeed had thought himself quite content to be soon forty, but the actual hard fact of being forty was here now, and as he proceeded to shave himself he scrutinized with an egoism that was most unusual to him both his face as it emerged strip by strip from the lather and the internal picture of his own mind, and saw what they made of the fact of which he was as yet but a freshly introduced acquaintance.

Certainly his face looked as if it was not yet within sight of the total of the days that had passed over it : it might easily have belonged to a man who was his junior by ten years, and you would not have been in the least surprised to hear that he was but thirty. Something of the elasticity of youth still lingered on it : the eyes, set rather far apart, were quite unwrinkled at their outer corners, and in them there still lurked the sparkle of early manhood. As yet there was no slackness or droop about his mouth or the lines of his chin, and the oval from ear to ear was lean and well defined. His hair, thick and uncompromisingly wiry, was still untouched with grey, and his whole head, carried very erect, was young and vigorous. His face, it may be added, did not boast a single feature approaching distinction of any kind, but it was an extraordinarily pleasant one, and would certainly do very well for a man of forty, since there is no harm, even at that mature epoch, in any one, man or woman, appearing a good deal younger than he is, and so candidly amiable.

Edward Heaton's face was a very faithful incarnation of his mind, but whereas no physiognomist can seriously object to a man of forty looking like a man of thirty, the psychologist must be listened to with respect, if he tells us that a man of forty ought not to have the mind of a man of thirty. Mental youth, elasticity, the power of looking forward and planning eagerly are very excellent things in their way, but it

is obvious that these attractive qualities are not sufficient by themselves to secure the entire approval of the recording angel. For the time certainly comes when it is better to cease making vague and cheerful plans, and indeed scrutinizing the future at all, but to take hold of the present and without further pause begin doing something with it. And if the psychologist in his sour way tells us that a man of forty ought to have done that long ago, it is impossible wholly to disagree with him.

Edward Heaton found himself so much in accord with the sour psychologist that as he finished dressing he made some excellent resolutions, such as he often did when he looked cheerfully forth on the morning of another day, and this rather unpleasant reminder in the fact that he was indubitably forty put an edge on to the steel with which he prepared to carve himself into the immediate future. He told himself that, though he felt young enough (and in matter of physical and artistic vigour was young enough), it was certainly time to give visible token of the reality of his powers, and set to work without delay. There, below his bedroom window, was the roof of his arena, the studio in which he had so many delightful little gatherings, which grouped themselves round different sketches of his, in each of which, when he began it, he divined a potential masterpiece. There they stood, some slightly dirty, some even a little faded, some still not yet quite dry,

so recent were the last fervent splashes of paint on their unfinished surfaces. Miss Daisy Macdonald, with her smile that showed the edge of healthy red gums, would stand before one—perhaps the river below Lambton—(twilight sketch, with a big yellow star, as a hint of the mysterious nocturnal dimness, stuck into an unfinished sky and reflected waveringly in an unfinished stream) and say how wonderfully poetic was its quality. There was another (perspective not quite yet in order) showing the Norman west front of Lambton church, which Mrs. Vickary (it was so suitable that Mr. Vickary should be a vicar) admired chiefly because her husband had actually stood in broad sunlight for that black figure that showed up so well in front of the yellow and glowing background of round arches. Then there was the sketch for a portrait of Miss Daisy Macdonald herself, unfinished as to the face, but with a charming background of varnished leaf and purple flower of the clematis which grew outside the studio, and which had wanted so much coaxing to induce it to live at all, and so much subsequent severe treatment to prevent it strangling every other plant to which its encroaching tendrils could reach. There was another sketch of Miss Daisy (this belonged to the class of the dusty ones) begun some ten years ago, and ten years ago left in its present state. This Mrs. Vickary openly and Miss Daisy secretly considered to be a far better likeness of the sitter than

was shown in the subsequent essay. This was not perhaps to be wondered at, for the earlier portrait showed a glimpse of Miss Macdonald as she still thought she was, which fully accounted for her preference for it, while Mrs. Vickary's vote in its favour was almost certainly due to the hope to which she still clung that the artist would dive into years just a decade or so below the surface, and fish up for her, too, something equally satisfactory. Then there was an unfinished sketch of Edward's mother, and an unfinished portrait of himself, as seen in the big cheval glass that stood in his studio. By this Miss Macdonald chiefly lingered, and would often say to her friend, "Oh, Mr. Teddy, you must be good and finish that!" And Mr. Teddy almost invariably replied, "There's enough of me without, Miss Daisy."

All these beginnings (and in this lay the seeds of Edward Heaton's threatening tragedy) showed great promise. Had they been executed by a boy of twenty, any artist of the least perception would have predicted a future of achievement for him. But, on the other hand, any boy of twenty who had painted three or four instead of a score of such beginnings would surely have finished one or two of them. Edward Heaton had not, and this array of promise extant in his studio on his fortieth birthday was somewhat in the nature of the flowering of peablossom in September. Six months ago such flowers would have encouraged a legitimate hope of pods

fattening into fruit : now in September, with no fruit yet arrived to substantiate their promise, they but made the gardener leave them with a shrug, knowing that they would never come to maturity. He might even pull them up in order to give to more profitable vegetables the soil which they did no more than misuse, substituting for them those that would give him a crop in response to his care. For artistic achievement, like peas and beans, will not come to fruition in late years, if up till then it has done nothing but flower in a spasmodic and podless fashion. Yet in the dining-room of this comfortable house, where Edward three times a day ate his meals and his mother refused hers (she ate a good deal between meals, in the shape of nutritive little soups and sandwiches brought her on trays), there hung just one pod from his otherwise fruitless stem. This was a finished portrait of his mother, executed fifteen years ago, a model of filial discernment and artistic achievement, done with all the perception of a son and the recording power of the true portrait-painter. But neither before that nor after that was there anything that showed more than the measure, just a scale, of what he might have been. He had done it once : there on the wall was the mark to which his head had once reached, a faint pencil-mark, but authentic. Since then, so to speak, he had sat in a chair and eaten his dinner, and, incidentally or perhaps primarily, been something instead of doing something.

That he had, all these years, 'been something' did not enter into his head as he walked downstairs, shoes in his hand, lest his shod feet might make a disturbing vibration inside his mother's room, by the open door of which he had to pass. She slept nowadays with door and windows wide open, since the last faddist to whom she entrusted her health had recommended a course of open-air treatment, in order to overcome that anæmia which made her perpetually feel too tired to do anything but go for drives, listen to Teddy reading the most sentimental trash with which the circulating library was competent to supply her, scold him in a feeble and dribbling manner in the intervals, parade her greatness to sycophantic inhabitants of Lambton, and, generally, under the guise of unselfish ill-health, devote a very ingenious mind to the task of making herself as comfortable as possible. As a matter of fact, she succeeded in making herself very comfortable indeed, for if the whole attention of an adult human being is directed towards that one end, the chances are that however real ill-health may be, he (and especially she) usually attains a very solid measure of success, unless some natural deficiency of the brain prevents her from forming sufficiently coherent plans. Mrs. Teaton (Honourable in her own right, being the daughter of a peer) had no such natural deficiency, and she was very well satisfied with her position as invalid empress of Lambton, without duties to her subjects.

The sad case of Mr. Teddy, that pea-blossom abloom in September, begins to be adumbrated. To a large extent his unfruitfulness was not his fault, and his amiable soul would have been extremely vexed if any one had hinted that it was his misfortune. For a devoted son, such as he undoubtedly was, will not with equanimity hear the cause to which he has devoted himself called a misfortune, since his very devotion proves that to him it is the chiefest of his treasures. It was so at any rate with Mr. Teddy ; for the last fifteen years, which had been so barren to him in fruition that could be said to add to the wealth of the world, had been busily spent by him in looking after his mother. She apparently took it for granted that it was his business in life to attend to her, to read to her, to drive with her, and generally play the part of companion, and it never entered the heads of either of them (hers, because she was so unswervingly self-centred, his, because he was the most unselfish of sons) that anything could have a call on his time and energies prior to that which was concerned with her. Solid slices were thus taken out of his time every day, and a natural indolence, mixed with a natural gaiety, led him to amuse himself and make things agreeable for other people with the remnants. Had he known that imperative need of production which makes the true artist, no doubt he would, without any curtailment of the hours he spent with her, have made use of the

minutes when she did not want him : have painted while she rested in the afternoon, or before she came down in the morning, and have used to good effect the interval between her bedtime and his. But a thousand trivialities for ever cropped up to occupy his spare time, and these trivialities had become a habit. But to-day, as he went downstairs on the morning of his fortieth birthday, he was very stern with himself in the matter of resolutions, which so far took effect that, while waiting for breakfast, he cleaned his palette, and would have telephoned to a shop for some cadmium yellow had there been any chance of getting attended to at so early an hour. Then, unfortunately, a tendril of rambler rose tapped against his window and it became instantly necessary to get some bass string and tie it up. This gardening act led on to another and yet another, and he spent a very pleasant half-hour out of doors in this early June sunshine, neatly doing little things, and planning an industrious schedule of the day. That should come into action 'as from' to-morrow : his birthday he determined to enjoy as a holiday.

Here, then, was a second characteristic which all these years had militated against the production of masterpieces. He could be violently busy with a variety of small affairs each of which soon attained completion, but a sustained effort, an occupation of which the end was far distant from the beginning, he was in the habit of putting off till to-morrow. To-day

was always so filled up with little affairs that must be cleared off in order to give him that freedom from trivial preoccupations which is essential to the inception of something on the grand scale. It would never do to begin, really begin a masterpiece say at half-past two in the afternoon, when he was already engaged to play lawn tennis at Miss Macdonald's at half-past four, and when next day he found himself at half-past ten in the morning with a spare hour on his hands before he skimmed through the morning paper to his mother at half-past eleven, it was surely better to determine to start earlier with his work next day, than here and now to embark on a scheme which would so soon be interrupted and the thread be lost. So instead he sat down and did a humorous little pen-and-ink sketch for Mrs. Vickary of the vestry door banging to behind her husband and imprisoning his coat-tails. That had happened yesterday, and if the incident was to be commemorated, as surely it must be, it must be commemorated at once, while it was still fresh. . . . Then Miss Daisy Macdonald had had a very remarkable partner at the last lawn-tennis tournament, who opened his mouth wide each time that he took a ball. That must be illustrated now or never, since otherwise he would forget how Miss Macdonald's partner's face 'went.' He would do that this afternoon while his mother was resting. But when these were done he would start a careful schedule of his day, and never deviate from it.

This morning, pleasantly pottering about the garden while he waited for breakfast, he made, for him, a rather depressed review of his life. His record of achievement, as represented on the walls and easels of his studio, was not indeed one of which any one but a boy who was trying his wings, experimenting with his growing powers, could have had any reason to be proud. And his human record—or so it seemed to him—was of an equally unsatisfactory character. He had neither wife nor children: he had not built for himself and so for the infinitesimal progress of the race, that little cell, minute as that of a coral insect, which yet helps, in so far as an individual can help, to carry on the progressive history of the world. The first stroke of that middle-aged loneliness which falls on men with as sure if not as severe a blow as an unmated woman, fell upon him, and he saw himself a mere devourer of earth's substance, a parasite that contributes nothing, and at the end lies down on its back and passes away without leaving the world one atom the richer for its fugitive presence. But then, regarding himself with a wholly modest and depreciatory eye, he knew that in this respect he could not have done differently. It was inconceivable that while his mother lived he could make a home of his own: it was equally inconceivable that he should introduce a wife into hers. Some ten years ago—was it ten? Mr. Teddy's definiteness about

years was already dimmed at the edges—some ten years ago when Miss Daisy Macdonald was a little less wiry and more like her early portrait, he and she had begun to approach each other in the slightly timid way of those who do not experience the imperative call, and yet see comfort and happiness possibly in front of them, and he had begun to idealize her a little, as is usual when the echoes of Love's footsteps fall distantly at first. He had begun to see the halo round her, to hear the music of her voice (naturally rather shrill) evoke certain vibrations within him, and could imagine an act of complete self-surrender to her. But when things were in this state (Miss Daisy it may be taken for granted was similarly affected) Mr. Teddy's mother had found occasion to say to him in accents that would have cooled the emotion of Romeo, "You must be careful not to encourage Miss Macdonald in false hopes, Edward." . . .

Somehow that unsympathetic breath blew the froth off: it caused him to see quite clearly that he did not look for rapture in that possible union, that no imperative call was wafted to him from the yet distant figure. His mother's attitude towards the question was quite unmistakably indicated in these meagre words, and the image of Miss Daisy which had perhaps begun to be printed on his heart, faded like an unfinished photograph when thus exposed to the light. He began to settle down into the condition, so often the prelude to perpetual bachelorhood,

of vaguely intending to marry. Less vague was the knowledge that his mother had no thought of matrimony for him, and being naturally of the type that has to be instigated and encouraged towards mating, this very marked absence of encouragement relegated his vague intentions to a district of his mind which his emotions rarely visited.

For his personal comfort, if not for his advantage, these birthday reflections, which have the habit of growing less of the nature of festival thoughts as the years pass on, were here interrupted by the sound of the breakfast gong, and he hurried indoors so as to wash his hands and avoid keeping his mother waiting. But she was already in the dining-room before he got there, and on his entrance just lifted her eyes to the clock on the mantelpiece that indicated he was four minutes late, and made no comment whatever. But it is safe to suppose that she knew he would see that she looked at the clock, also that her silence on the point partook of the Christian spirit, which suffers without complaint or reproach.

"Good-morning, Edward," she said (everybody else in Lambton called him Mr. Teddy). "It is your birthday, is it not? I wish you many happy returns of it, though I shall not be here to see it return many times. Dear me, forty!"

She presented the side of her face to him, as if offering some plate of cold refreshment. When he had refreshed himself, she took it away again.

Teddy was wise enough from experience not to make any jocular application of her statement that she would not see many more of his birthdays.

"Thank you, dear mother," he said. "And it's a birthday sort of morning, isn't it? Glorious sun. The tennis-court is in good order, too. We shall have some great games this afternoon."

"I hope you are not counting on me to play tennis," she said.

This was not a very promising omen for the day. Teddy, of course, had no more notion that his mother would play tennis than that she would start that morning on an expedition to the North Pole. She was perfectly well aware that friends were coming in to play tennis to-day, but when she felt not up to the mark, she was in the habit of introducing these icicles into conversation.

"No, my dear, of course not," he said. "But I'm having a little birthday party you know this afternoon."

She dipped a piece of dry toast into her tea.

"Are you? I thought perhaps that as it was your birthday—But it doesn't matter."

"But what did you think? We talked over the party, you know, last week."

"No doubt, my dear, if you say so, we did. I only thought that now that you and I are the only ones left, we might have spent your birthday quietly together and thought over old days."

Teddy could not help wishing that an attack of this kind had not seized his mother to-day. The allusion to their being 'the only ones left' applied to the death of her husband fifteen years ago, and that of a daughter thirty years ago. Every now and then Mrs. Heaton had a day of old times, and with all his devotion to her Teddy was not devoted to such days.

"Well, mother," he said, "if you don't feel up to our little party we must just put it off. Do you wish me to do that?"

She finished her toast.

"I wish you to do exactly as your best feelings prompt you," she said. "Whatever you settle to do, I shall not complain. As you know, I never permit myself to complain."

Now Teddy knew quite well that she had been rather looking forward to this party, for every one in Lambton, on these rare occasions when she entertained, made much of her, and sat round her in a spirit of cheerful humility, so that she often got quite gay, and talked (in quite a different set of old-times) of the number of horses her father used to keep, and the quantities of pheasants which he shot, and even on this day of sadder old-times, if she was sufficiently bowed down to by the party, there was every chance of her enjoying herself. So with a view to ascertaining her real wishes on the subject, he answered with really consummate cunning.

“ Very well, then, we’ll put it off,” he said. “ I will telephone directly after breakfast and tell our friends you don’t feel up to seeing them.”

This did not suit his mother at all, as he had thought might easily be the case.

“ It is a pity you find me such a death’s-head with your friends,” she said. “ But, since that is so, it is but natural that you should not care to have them here ! ”

Now this was a severe attack of old-times, and Teddy had found by experience that the severer the attack the shorter usually was its duration. So he resigned himself to an uncomfortable hour or two, and augured a brilliant afternoon.

“ Ah, that’s all stuff and nonsense, anyhow,” he said. “ So we won’t put off our party at all, and I’m sure you’ll enjoy it. Now, as you won’t get your drive this afternoon, I’m going to take you out this morning.”

“ I do not think I feel up to anything but resting this morning, if you wish me to entertain your friends this afternoon,” she said.

Teddy showed invincible patience and an excellent appetite. He cut himself a slice of cold ham.

“ Well we’ll see how you feel after breakfast,” he said. “ What sort of a night did you have ? ”

“ Much the same as I am accustomed to. I slept a little towards morning.”

This was not to be taken too literally, for he

remembered with great distinctness hearing the sound of what might be called profound breathing as he tiptoed past her door up to bed last night. But he naturally refrained from mentioning that.

"What a pity it is I can't give you some of my superfluous sleep," he observed. "I always sleep an hour or two more than I have the least need of. But I'm going to turn over a new leaf for my new year, and get up every morning at seven, and have a couple of hours in my studio before breakfast."

He got up from the table, and, according to custom, lit a cigarette. A thin streamer of smoke drifted across the room towards his mother, and she fanned it away with a languid hand.

"It is foolish of me, dear," she said, "but the smell of your cigarette makes me feel a little faint this morning."

He threw it into the fireplace.

"Well, and I'm much better without it, too," he said cheerfully. "Now what can I do for you? Would you like me to read the paper to you a little?"

"Yes: you might just read the list of deaths in the *Times*," she said. "A day seldom passes without my finding that some one I know has gone."

To-day, luckily, there were no such agitations in store. It is true that a certain Leonard Smith had gone, at the age of twenty-three, whom for the moment she thought was very probably an elderly Mr. Smith whom she had known when a girl, and

whose initials she felt nearly sure included an L. But since now this Mr. Smith must have been at least a hundred and ten years old, if he was the individual whose demise was recorded, there was still a hope that it was not he, when Teddy drew attention to his age. But Mrs. Heaton did not feel certain about it.

"I'm sure I often see misprints in the paper when I feel strong enough to read it," she said. "They may easily have got his age wrong."

"But your Mr. Smith could not be less than a hundred and ten if he was alive now," remarked Teddy.

Mrs. Heaton considered this sad disappointment.

"It may be his grandson," she said with relief, and indeed that seemed, though not definitely proved, at least far more likely.

The news in the middle pages of the paper was naturally rather barren of interest after the tragedy of Mr. Smith, though Mrs. Heaton remembered, when she heard of disturbances in Mexico, that she had a presentiment that there was trouble coming. Very likely the United States would get involved, and if that was so, who knew how soon England might not be embroiled? Her genius in anticipating trouble indeed was only equalled by her genius for remembering it: in her faded life that power alone stood out brilliantly, like one star hung in a twilight sky. And, indeed, when there is always so much trouble about,

it is perhaps a good thing that there are those (and Mrs. Heaton was high-priestess among those mournful worshippers) who really enjoy trouble. She did not, it is true, have much of it in her comfortable and cosseted existence, but she made the most of what there was, and imagined the rest. She dealt with her ill-health in the same way: there was not much of that, but again she made the most of it, and filled in the rest with wholly imaginary ailments, in which she soaked as in a hot bath.

Teddy had not got far into the ominous state of affairs in Mexico when his mother interrupted his reading to ask him faintly at what time, since he insisted on dragging her out, he had ordered the carriage. This he naturally interpreted as a sign that she wanted to drive with him, though it was expressed in the mode common with her on 'old-time' days, and presently they started in the victoria which at one time had belonged to Mrs. Heaton's mother. It still bore on its panels and on the mild horse's blinkers the coronet that had once appertained to her, though, as her tombstone so appropriately said, she had exchanged her earthly coronet for a heavenly crown many years ago. But the carriage was still serviceable, and though pieces of the mild horse's harness had been renewed so often that probably there was little left of the original leather, the coroneted blinkers still pre-

vented the horse's eye from beholding vanity. Mrs. Heaton would not have thought it right to order new harness and carriage with a coronet on it since she had no conceivable right to emblazon her belongings with such a decoration, but it would have been a failure of filial piety not to use "dear mamma's things" as long as they escaped the disintegrating effects of age. Faintly, too, at the back of her mind, she enjoyed having a coronet on her carriage, irrespective of it having been painted there for dear mamma, for it reminded her, like the scent of lavender in Victorian wardrobes, of that section of 'old days' which was so pleasant to look back on, and which, without doubt, Lambton enjoyed hearing about. Lambton also (so she was quite certain) enjoyed seeing her victoria creaking gently down the main street, with the sun shining on the heraldic blinkers. It gave forth a certain titled and territorial note, and when Mr. Vickary, as often happened, darted with his obsequious steps to the side of the equipage, as it stopped at the chemist's, to exchange a word or two with her, faintly, at the back of her mind, Mrs. Heaton felt that before the reverent eyes of those who witnessed this interesting meeting, there was taking place the visible union of Church and State. It must not be supposed that those fatuous reflections took any active or prominent part in the motions of Mrs. Heaton's intellect: they belonged to that sequestered playground of silliness

which exists in all our minds, the playground in which quite foolish notions make their antics, and are observed by our rational selves, as from a little window, with secret satisfaction. It was her secret pose to be titled and territorial, though it never entered directly into her conversation. Indirectly, however, its presence might be detected when she spoke of how many horses Lord Withermere had kept, and the stream of pheasants (in old days) that fell to his gun. Nowadays the title was extinct, dearest papa having had no heirs male of his body, and the covers where the pheasants used to darken the sky had been sold to pay dearest papa's debts. Though he had been the first and the last of barons of his name (the peerage had been awarded to him to keep him out of the Cabinet without hurting his feelings) he belonged (in the secret playground of Mrs. Heaton's mind) to the old aristocracy, before the fatal penetration of brewers and such-like diluted the wine of England's hereditary legislators.

But those glories had a very small part in Mrs. Heaton's active consciousness, they existed only like sunset gilding the peak of some remote rock summit. Night, so to speak, had already fallen in the valley where she dwelt, and her mind was chiefly wrapped in the shadows of her cherished ill-health and the sorrows of existence. She sighed as Teddy tucked the fur rug round her, and professed her entire indifference as to the route of her outing.

CHAPTER II

It is impossible to say why Lambton began, or why it left off, or why it started in the Sussex valley where it now stands, and not somewhere else. It is a couple of miles from the nearest railway, and three from the nearest main road, and has no visible means of sustenance whatever. It has no factories, no industries except the industry of shops that apparently sell things to each other, and it is surrounded by acres upon acres of unprofitable downland and water meadows which belong to a non-resident landowner. Early in the history of the country, certain Norman builders chose to begin erecting a church here, and certain other fourteenth-century builders found it in their hearts to finish it, but there is no trace of intervening centuries until in the age of George I. a number of commodious houses were erected round an oval of grass which thus, automatically, became the village green. Then, we must suppose, a demand for the necessaries of life began to make itself heard, which accounts for the little nest of streets that formed itself just below this exclu-

sive village green. The butcher, the baker, and even the candlestick-maker established themselves, and later enterprise brutally cut down their monopolies by erecting a general store shop, where, if you enquire at any one counter for anything, you are told that you will find what you want at the second counter on the right, and are referred from there back to where you got your information from. The hill behind the village green was parcelled out into plots, and Victorian residences with spacious gardens fore and aft were erected there. It was in one of these that Mrs. Heaton lived, and this morning the victoria passed down the hill, traversed the road that looped the village green, and after stopping at the chemist's, as usual, for some decoction to be taken by Mrs. Heaton in conjunction with the current open-air treatment, ambled away into the country. Mr. Vickary had darted out from the village school a moment too late to converse with its occupants and say how much pleasure he and 'his missus' (this was an old joke, but it is obviously impossible in the country to have new jokes every day) would have in coming to play lawn tennis this afternoon.

Miss Daisy Macdonald, who lived with her elder sister Miss Marion in one of the Georgian houses round the village green, had also seen the carriage pass while she was putting the flowers, which she had just cut from the garden beds, into their vases. Marion was correcting the proofs of her serial story

in the Lambton Parish Magazine with her back to the window, and Daisy naturally kept the news to herself, for fear of breaking the train of Marion's thoughts. These thoughts may or may not have been very deep, but by the more educated readers of the Lambton Parish Magazine they were considered wonderfully daring, and even the gifted authoress herself was a little nervous as to how Lambton would take this Chapter IX. where she was at present embarked, in which the vicar's wife (no possible allusion to Mrs. Vickary could be suspected) was giving up Christianity, and would be seen in her place below the Norman window no more. Marion felt that this might produce almost too painful an impression, and wondered whether it was her duty to render Chapter IX. less harrowing by stating in a footnote that Lady Clementine (the vicar's wife) had already emerged in manuscript from the dark valley of doubt, and was seen again below the Norman window on Christmas morning. She did not want to harrow her readers too much, and could hardly bear the thought of Lady Clementine being suspected, even temporarily, of turning out a female Mr. Robert Elsmere, for she turned out exactly the opposite. On the other hand, from a literary and dramatic point of view it might be a pity to tell your readers in Chapter IX. how the story was going to end. Art seemed at war with Religion.

She looked out from the window (not the one that

commanded the village green, at which her sister was standing) on to the garden to seek inspiration. It was no use consulting Daisy on the matter, for Daisy had expressed the firm unalterable view that Marion ought not to try the faith of her readers too excruciatingly. The arguments for Lady Clementine's rejection of Christianity had been given with terrible power; Marion, in Daisy's opinion, should relieve the strain and just state that Lady Clementine was coming back into the fold.

"You needn't say that she was seen again in church on Christmas Day," Daisy had urged, "nor need you hint at the manner of her conversion, which equals anything you have ever written. But I don't think you should leave her as an atheist for a whole month. You can't tell what effect it might have on those whose faith is weak."

Marion pondered this firm opinion to-day as she looked out on to the riotous colour of the June garden, still uncertain as to whether to add that momentous footnote or not. She had not a very exalted opinion of Daisy's value as a critic, and read her compositions to her much in the same spirit as Molière read his plays to his housemaid, to observe the effect of them on the average mind. She did not want to be the cause of an epidemic of atheism in Lambton, but there certainly was force in Daisy's contention that matter published in a serial is not to be judged in the same way as when it appears in

book form, for when you have the complete volume in your hand it is possible (if the strain is too great) to give a hurried glance at the last chapter to see what happens to them all. On the other hand, there was her duty as an artist as well as a Christian to be considered. . . .

The brave sunshine poured lustily in at the open window, the herbaceous border had the glory of midsummer upon it, a thrush sang a cheerful phrase of repeated song from the pear tree just outside. All Nature seemed very vigorous and young, and something of Nature's joyful audacity invaded her as she sat there with pen still poised. She had a large face that reminded you of a horse's, and short grey hair cut in masculine fashion surmounted it. The note of masculinity was also struck in her dress, for she wore a stiff collar with a tie pinned down to a stiff shirt-front, over which she had a garment that resembled a somewhat ample Eton jacket. Like many manly women, she would have had no use for a man's affection had she chanced to inspire it, and often smoked as many as six cigarettes a day. Her chief occupation in life of course was Art, but not very far behind it came her second duty, which was to chaperone her sister who, now within five years of the austere decade which Mr. Teddy had entered this morning, was still, in her elder sister's opinion, a little flighty and thoughtless. From having grown through girlhood into middle age with

her, Marion still saw her sister as she had seen her in the years of the twenties, and, though not in the least being an enemy to gaiety and thoughtlessness in the young, was aware that it was her duty as elder to keep a sobering hand on Daisy's shoulder. It seemed to her but yesterday that she had found that Mrs. Andrew and Mrs. Joyce and other ladies who inhabited the Georgian houses round the village green had begun to ask sly little questions as to when they might expect news of Daisy's engagement to Mr. Teddy, and Marion had felt that Daisy was too young yet to think about such things. And for the next fifteen years, until, in fact, Daisy was getting too old to think about such things, Marion had still reposed in the belief that there was plenty of time yet, and that in the interval Daisy's affairs must not be talked lightly of. But lately she had begun to consider that if Daisy was thinking of marrying she might legitimately think about it now, and that without doubt her choice would be indicated to her by Mr. Teddy. On the other hand, there would be difficulties : the young people would be happier in a home of their own, where Daisy's mother-in-law would not rule everything with her faint imperative ways, but Marion doubted whether Mrs. Heaton would ever consent to let Mr. Teddy go. Perhaps it was best to wait until (for we must all die) Providence should deem good that the pilgrimage of Mrs. Heaton's days should close. Mean-

time—this was so pleasant—the two young people were the greatest friends, and jointly planned and led the multifarious gaieties of Lambton. Marion, wrapped up in the pursuit of her Art, did not take much share in these, but if her sister was engaged in the pursuit of social success after dark had fallen, she went to call for her like a policeman when the proper hour had come, with a bull's-eye lantern, goloshes and, if wet, a mackintosh. Daisy's descriptions of bridge parties and her reproductions of the light interchange of talk was most useful to her sister in the more worldly section of her novels, and a great deal of Lady Clementine's conversation in those happy days before doubts assailed her was really a *réchauffée* of tit-bits of Lambton wit, brought home under her cloak, so to speak, by Daisy. Lambton had been thrilled when that sparkling Chapter III. came out in the Parish Magazine, for here Lady Clementine was staying in town at her father's house. He was the Duke of Brighton, and all that was brightest and best congregated there, and proceeded, to Lambton's infinite content, to enunciate at the brilliant soirée, all that Lambton had already said. It was little wonder that Lambton fell upon it with gusto, and parted the witticisms up among themselves, assigning to each its appropriate fount. Lambton would be once more thrilled when, next spring, this testimony to itself would appear again in the apotheosis of two shillings net. For it must

not be supposed that Marion's novels, having run their course in the Parish Magazine, were lost to the larger but scarcely more intelligent world. They appeared on the bookshelves in this room where their author now sat working, in neat green covers with the imprimatur of Spendwell & Co. on them, in Spendwell & Co.'s library of Modern Christian Fiction. Even Mrs. Heaton had been known to say that the descriptions of the highest circles were remarkably true to life, and secretly supposed that Miss Macdonald must have picked up the materials from intercourse with herself. But she said the other out loud, which was all that mattered.

Daisy had not yet finished arranging the Spanish irises and forget-me-nots in the cut-glass vessels, when Marion gave such a thump on the table where she worked that the ink leaped in the inkpot.

"I have made up my mind, Daisy," she said. "There shall be no footnote, and any one who thinks that Clementine is going to remain an atheist may. After all, life is full of doubts and uncertainties. But, if you like, I will put at the head of the chapter, 'Behind the clouds is the sun still shining.'"

"My dear, what a lovely line," said Daisy. "Is it yours?"

"I wish it was. No: Longfellow. Some days be dark and dreary, don't you remember? Or do you think that lovely line of Goethe's, '*Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruhe.*'"

"I forget what Gipfeln are," said Daisy.

"Peaks, summits. I think perhaps the Long-fellow would be best."

"Poor Lady Clementine," said Daisy.

Marion lit her third cigarette.

"Well, I have done a good morning's work," she said. "Sometimes the correcting of proofs seems to take it out of me more than the actual writing did. One lives the struggle over again, and has to look after the commas as well. Thank goodness, nowadays, a woman can lead her own life, and compete with men in any pursuit she chooses."

Daisy did not quite like this subject, because a month before a bunch of Suffragette colours had been fixed to the pump that stood at the edge of the village green, and she suspected that it was her sister's hand that had tied it there. Marion had always professed Suffragette sentiments, though as an artist she did not dabble in practical politics, but she had never told Daisy directly that she had put those ribands there. Only when, after breakfast next morning, she saw them being removed by the policeman and taken to the police-office opposite, she had turned so red in the face, and been so bitter all day about the tyranny of men, that Daisy had no real doubts on the subject. Consequently when now it loomed, though distantly, on the horizon, she made haste to get away from it. Both sisters, it may be remarked, had quite grasped the essential

secret of success in living together, namely, that neither ever dreamed of probing into regions not confided to the other.

"Indeed you have done a lot this morning, dear," she said. "Sometimes I wish you were not so hard on yourself. You haven't stirred from your table since ten, and if it hasn't gone one already, it's just going to!"

Marion contracted her eyebrows a moment over this appallingly loose grammar, but she only called attention to it indirectly.

"I haven't heard the chimes yet," she said very correctly, "but perhaps I missed them. Now, dear, I suppose you are going to drag me away from my work."

This was one of the polite fictions that made things so pleasant. Whenever Marion had had enough of her work, she always supposed that her sister was dragging her away.

"Yes, let us go out," she said. "And would it bore you, Marion, to stand near the net in the tennis-court and hit balls rather hard at me? You know there is Mr. Teddy's tennis party this afternoon, and I should like not to disgrace myself. If he is my partner, I should want to play well, and if he is my opponent, I should like to be able to put up a fight."

Here was a sporting if not a coarse expression. In case it was only sporting, Marion wanted to include it in Lord Henry's conversation.

"Is that what they generally say?" she asked.

"Put up a fight? Oh, quite! Anybody might say it," said Daisy.

"Well, come along, and try to put up a fight against me."

Marion did not, as may easily be supposed, play lawn-tennis herself, but she was capable of standing near the net and hitting balls at her sister. She even enjoyed doing it, for it gave her exercise, and also encouraged a feeling of the predominance of the mind over the body, for without much physical skill she could send in stingers which Daisy, the professional athlete, found it hard to cope with. Then followed a retrieving of balls which she had hit quite sideways into the herbaceous border, where it was undefended by netting; indeed she had been, without practice, a devastating mistress of the situation.

"There! I hope I have been of some use to you," she said, as they recovered the last of the balls. "And I feel that I can't work any more till perhaps after dinner. I think I will come with you to Mr. Teddy's. I shall like to talk to Mrs. Heaton. She is often very suggestive. Who is going to be there?"

This was one of Marion's grand ways. She condescended to such frivolities, and yet kept her soul intact, instead of getting wrapped up in them. She moved about among the pleasure-seekers, coming from a higher sphere, and when she had unbent her

mind enough, she straightened it up again, and went back to her work. Even Mrs. Heaton could not really compete with her, for Mrs. Heaton could only certify to the truth of Marion's imaginings. She was but the witness: it was Marion who drew up the deed and signed it with the awe-inspiring name of Desmond Howard, for so she appeared in the library of Modern Christian Fiction. She would talk to Mrs. Heaton with her legs crossed and a cigarette in her mouth, and took no notice as to whether the smell of it made Mrs. Heaton feel faint or not. Then perhaps she would stroll across the lawn-tennis court, when a game was in progress, absolutely unconscious of the tingling anxiety that attached to 'advantage server' or 'advantage striker,' and would stop and talk to him for a little. She moved in a world of her own, and though Mrs. Heaton, as before stated, was the acknowledged Queen of Lambton, Marion shot across any other orbit like a comet. As she passed other stars were dimmed: Mr. Vickary and Mr. Teddy stood to attention when she came before them, and even Mrs. Heaton became a shade more animated. As for Mrs. Joyce and Mrs. Andrew, they assumed sycophantic smiles when Marion stood in front of them and creaked her stiff white shirt. They were proud of her, but after her very uncompromising remarks about fifteen years ago on the subject of gossip regarding Mr. Teddy and her sister, they had always treated her as if she was

one of the Earls about whom she wrote so convincingly. It was always an honour if Desmond Howard was there, but it was a little more comfortable if she wasn't.

Daisy had been asked by Mr. Teddy to arrive in good time, so that together they might make out a schedule for those who were going to play lawn-tennis, golf-croquet, and to talk to his mother who would sit in an arbour between the two lawns and hold her court; consequently she walked up there alone after lunch, leaving her sister to follow later. This arbour, approached by a short pergola, had been personally executed by Teddy, the design of it being based on faded reminiscences of his mother concerning a similar but much grander one at Withermere, and the erection of it had given Teddy an admirable excuse for not having done a stroke of work in his studio for the whole of one summer. He had put up the trellis-work sides of the arbour and roofed it: he had built the brick pillars of the pergola, and connected them with iron chains for the embraces of the creepers which he had planted, and during the ensuing winter he had carpentered the semicircular oak table which stood in the arbour, which was charmingly carved, and had very pleasantly kept him occupied for several months. It pleased his mother, too, and she sat behind it to-day, looking rather like a faded Venus in the cave of the Venusberg, while her guests refreshed them-

selves with tea and hock-cup, and offered homage at this shrine of her greatness. They came up to the Presence in little relays of two and three. As Teddy had hoped would be the case, the attack of 'old-days' had ceased by lunch time, and now she was in an almost rollicking condition of convalescence.

Mr. Vickary, flushed with success over Mrs. Andrew at golf-croquet, had come into the Presence just now with really thrilling news, namely, that the board 'To be let or sold' which had looked over the front gate of the house next to Mrs. Heaton's for the last year had that day been removed; this, taken in conjunction with the fact that the defeated Mrs. Andrew had seen only yesterday a stranger woman talking to the house-agent in the village green, constituted a strong case for the house having been let. As the two establishments, Mrs. Heaton's and the adjoining house, were only separated by a not very formidable garden fence, the matter was naturally of the intensest consequence.

"I hope they will not think of letting it without making the strictest investigation into the character and position of the tenant," said Mrs. Heaton. "I should object most strongly to having next door somebody who might be anybody. They must make all possible enquiries before the lease is drawn up."

Mr. Vickary had an apostolic face, and long thin legs which, when he was sitting down, he curled

round each other like barley-sugar, till it was barely possible to tell which was which.

"Indeed I hope they will do that," he said, "not only for your sake, Mrs. Heaton, which is the most important, but for all of ours. It is years since we had any new-comer here: I am not sure it is a good precedent."

"And what was the stranger whom you saw talking to the house-agent like?" asked Mrs. Heaton of the fortunate Mrs. Andrew who had seen her.

Mrs. Andrew, by an inexplicable lapse of memory, could not remember anything about her, except that she was a woman.

"Too stupid of me," she declared, "but little did I think that it might be a matter of such importance. But then I never had your extraordinary powers of observation, Mrs. Heaton."

Mr. Vickary gave a loud gleeful laugh.

"Ah, if we all saw as much as Mrs. Heaton," he said, "there would be little left to see."

What this might mean was not very easy of conjecture, but its intention was clearly complimentary, and Mrs. Heaton inclined her head on its long thin neck by way of acknowledgment.

"I am not sure that I like the idea of having such close neighbours at all," she said, "however worthy they may be. But then I suppose my early life at Withermere Court spoiled me for having any sort of neighbour at all. Indeed till dearest papa's death,

I hardly knew what it was to have a neighbour, for my husband and I used really to live at Withermere. Papa used to say he could not get on without his sunbeam, as he always called me in those dear old days. At Withermere the park stretched in all directions for over a mile; the nearest houses were the keepers' lodges, and the village lay another mile beyond the gates."

"A glorious place, I have always heard," said Mrs. Andrew.

"It was my home," said Mrs. Heaton. "I assure you when it was sold in plots, every acre that was purchased was like a stab in my heart. The lawn and gardens! The expanse of grass! The pheasant covers!—Papa was a wonderful shot. The wooded glades where I used to ride.—Papa kept eleven riding horses not counting those for the carriages, of which he had an immense number. And not a neighbour, as I said, for miles."

Mr. Vickary ventured on a joke.

"You will have to come to my Sunday School class," he said, "and learn your duty towards your neighbour."

Mrs. Andrew began to laugh, for though Mrs. Heaton was the first object of adulation in Lambton, Mr. Vickary received quite as much as was good for him. But the joke was somehow not quite to Mrs. Heaton's taste, probably because it implied a certain derogation of her dignity, and seeing the gravity of

her aspect, Mrs. Andrew cut short her laugh as suddenly as if she had heard that a friend was dead. But Mrs. Heaton, being a perfect lady, cou'd not be pointedly rude to her guests, and so the moment that the awkward pause which followed had lasted long enough to show her displeasure she broke it to show her breeding and her powers of forgiveness.

"You will let me give you another cup of tea, Mr. Vickary," she said magnanimously.

Naturally Mr. Vickary accepted this, though he did not in the least want it, for to do otherwise would have been to fling away the extended olive branch. And the momentary cloud was further dispersed by the arrival on a separate tray of a specially nutritious sandwich made of milled nuts for Mrs. Heaton, and that of Marion Macdonald. She merely nodded to her hostess and the others without shaking hands, but in Lambton her brusque ways were taken to be eccentricities of genius, and the eccentricities were forgiven for the sake of the genius.

"You've a nice afternoon for your party," she said to Mrs. Heaton. "Prayers for fine weather, eh?" she added to Mr. Vickary.

There was always 'badinage' between these two, and he shook a forefinger at her.

"Now, Mr. Desmond," he said, "I will pray for you in church if you are not careful."

This time Mrs. Andrew watched Mrs. Heaton's

face, and seeing her pursed mouth (pursed for the moment with nutritious sandwich) expand into a smile, she laughed.

“Are they not naughty?” she said.

“Then I shan’t come to church,” said Marion. “Besides, it’s a great liberty to pray for people. It’s libellous, I think. You announce to the congregation that they are far from what they should be—libel, I call it.”

Mr. Vickary was not so quick at the uptake as this native Scotswoman, and it was rather a relief to him when Marion, without waiting for a repartee, lit a match on her stout boot, and a cigarette from it in her large mouth. This diverted her from the question of libellous petitions, and she became quite serious again.

“I’ve finished the correction of this month’s proofs,” she said. “But Spendwell wants to publish in the autumn, so they’ve just written to me, instead of next spring. So can I double the instalments in the Parish Magazine? You can have Chapters IX. and X. next month. In other ways, too, it would be rather a good thing. Daisy thinks people might not like Chapter IX. by itself.”

“I hope Lady Clementine doesn’t——” began the vicar.

“Yes, she does.”

Mr. Vickary puckered his brows. He had thought that Lady Clementine in the earlier chapters was a

little loose (or call it smart) at her father's brilliant party, but he had hoped that it was only her paradoxical tongue that had run away with her.

"She doesn't elope, I trust?" he said.

Marion laughed.

"Oh no, not that," she said. "But she gives up Christianity."

Mr. Vickary felt relieved. To give up Christianity, provided you came back to it, was quite in accordance with the highest religious fiction. But to give up your husband, even though you returned to him later, was not so edifying.

"She comes back," said Marion, "but I think it would be better to double the instalments. Spendwell's wanting it in the autumn is an additional reason. Now don't let us talk shop."

She turned to Mrs. Heaton, who under pretence of eating her sandwiches was listening with both ears to this undertoned conversation. She had her own views about the propriety of conversing in undertones, but if people would do so, regardless of breeding, the least that those of breeding could do was to attempt to hear what they said.

"There's a strange thing happened, Mrs. Heaton," she said. "That board 'To let' next door has gone. Does it mean you are going to have a neighbour? That will be nice for you."

"We were talking of that before you came," said Mrs. Heaton.

"Were you? Then it is not news to you. How depressing! I have fallen flat. I hate falling flat, it hurts."

Mr. Vickary, relieved of the tension of whispered conversation in the presence of the Presence, gave his little falsetto giggle. Marion was clearly in form this afternoon. She varied so much: sometimes she would sit as glum as a muffin.

"Let me pick you up," he said daringly.

Mrs. Andrew drew a long breath. She was going to be daring too.

"Ask Mrs. Vickary's leave first," she said.

This fell flatter than ever Marion could have fallen. But Mrs. Andrew was noted for going a little too far. She had gone a little too far when, fifteen years ago, she had made sly allusion to the approaching nuptials of Teddy and Miss Daisy, and apparently the years intervening had not brought wisdom. Baffled by another dead silence, she waited for some change in the conversation. Marion supplied it almost at once, going back in a forgiving manner to the last subject.

"It is so flat to announce news that is no news," she said. "But I'll tell you what I think. I believe Mr. Teddy has got engaged, and has taken the house next his mother's."

To her dying day Mrs. Andrew could never understand why this remark, surely as indelicate as anything she had ever said in her well-spent life, should

have been received with favour. Mrs. Heaton actually invited Marion to take the remaining nutritious sandwich which she did not want herself. Then she shook her head, and summoned to her eyes that 'far-away look' with which she often damped further discussion when she had had enough of it. Brusque as Marion was, daring as Marion was, there was something about her, probably derived from the class from which she sprang, that to Mrs. Heaton's mind excused and even justified speeches which in Mrs. Andrew's mouth would have been merely vulgar. Mrs. Andrew, for instance, could never have said exactly what Marion had just said without forfeiting her chance of salvation. As it was, the far-away look came into Mrs. Heaton's eyes and she said :

" Dear Edward ! "

" Dear Edward " appeared at the entrance to the pergola at this precise moment, perspiring freely, and having just wafted Miss Daisy into victory at lawn-tennis, against that redoubtable pair Mrs. Vickary and her son. The latter was a mingled joy and sorrow to his parents, for, though he had just passed into the Indian Civil Service with great distinction, he was inclined to agnosticism and wore spectacles. Socially he was rather difficult to deal with, for both in mind and body he was angular and bony, and though boys who were like boys were a rare and valued product in Lambton, he could not

properly rank as a boy. Indeed the only boy in Lambton, from the social point of view, was Teddy, who to-day was forty. Similarly the only girl was Daisy, who was thirty-five. But if the little circle at the head of a country village do not marry and have children, what is left for them but to remain young themselves? It was just this that Lambton had done for so many years, and who shall question its collective wisdom? Wisdom, after all, is the adaptation of what you have to what you need, and if boys and girls did not happen to be growing up (with the exception of Master Vickary who was essentially sixty) in the exclusive circle who were bidden to Mrs. Heaton's house, it was clear that the youngest of them must still fill the rôles of those who should have been young. And again, after all, the young are those who feel young, especially when there are no actual young people to contradict their feelings by their own appearance, and for buoyancy (in spite of his middle-aged resolution of this morning) it would have been difficult to find any one who felt more in the twenties than did Teddy, when, after making up a fresh set for lawn-tennis, he hurried to the croquet-lawn to "take on" Miss Daisy Macdonald. Even as he left the arbour he heard his mother say, "Dearest papa was so good at croquet. He used to play croquet all August, when there was no hunting and no shooting! . . ." And Marion's awful rejoinder came to him like the boom-

ing of a gun. "Poor thing! Was there nothing he could kill in August?" He had not heard his mother's reply and was glad.

There were many things to talk about to Miss Daisy, and on arrival at the croquet-lawn, they did not at once claim 'Blue and black' or 'Red and yellow,' but sat on the bench at the side of the arena while he smoked a cigarette, and she, after satisfying herself that no one was in sight (for officially she did not smoke, and it made her cough), lit one from his burning end, and subsequently persuaded him to light another from hers. Their conversation was at first of the most public sort, for it concerned the lawn-tennis tournament in July, and the croquet tournament in August, and the plan he had of extending the Venusberg pergola along the lawn where they now sat, but, as happens between old friends, it gradually slid down into more personal and intimate levels.

"I made such a quantity of good resolutions this morning," he said, "as to how I should paint for two hours every day before breakfast, and do black-and-white every evening, after my mother has gone to bed. But what does it matter after all whether I paint or not? A jolly pergola—my mother suggested it—is as much of a fact, if not more, than the sort of picture I am capable of painting."

Daisy felt rather bold after her cigarette. A cigarette always went to her head.

"Don't you think you might do a little more painting, Mr. Teddy?" she asked. "You've got such a lot of good beginnings in your studio. Besides, couldn't a bricklayer make your pergola?"

"Of course he could, and he would do it in half the time I should," said he.

"But he couldn't paint your pictures."

He laughed.

"But I'm not sure that I can either," he said.

He was silent a moment.

"I'm forty, you know," he said, "and that's a great age, as my mother reminded me to-day. The question is what it is worth while doing when one is forty. I made such strong resolutions this morning, you know, and already I am questioning them. I used not to be like that: everything seemed worth while doing. At least I used not to think about it. I went and did it. But now the question occurs whether this is worth while or that is worth while."

He looked at her in some perplexity.

"I don't like that question," he said. "I feel as if somebody else was asking it me, and I'm sure I don't know who is."

"I'm sure I'm not," said Daisy. "I feel quite certain it is worth while for you to be very industrious with your painting."

He jumped up.

"That's nice of you: that's encouraging," he

said. "And you shan't hear any more of my vapourings."

"But I love your telling me."

"But there'll be nothing to tell. I won't indulge in any more of them. Anyhow, it's worth while my having a game of golf-croquet with you. Now look here, Miss Daisy, there's a half-crown in my hand, or it may be a florin. If it's heads, you have black and blue and begin; if it's tails, you have red and yellow and don't. You beat me last time we played, you know. I'm thirsting for my revenge."

Victory again dogged Miss Daisy's footsteps, but when she returned home that evening instead of being pleasantly elated with the doings of the day, she found that the question he had suggested, as to whether it is worth while doing this or that, somewhat haunted her. She was not accustomed any more than he to 'obstinate questionings,' and hitherto was a stranger to 'mute misgivings.' All these years she had looked after the house, had managed the servants, ordered dinner, put fresh flowers in the vases, and, with her co-leadership with Mr. Teddy in the gentle gaieties of the place, she had found that the days streamed very enjoyably by, without asking her inconvenient interrogations. But if forty was a great age for a man to have arrived at without any conspicuous achieve-

ment, was not thirty-five an even greater comparative age for a woman to have attained without leaving, as Mr. Longfellow said, 'footprints on the sands of time'? A woman's footprints were different from a man's: there ought to be the print of very little feet toddling beside her. . . .

She sat down in the chair in front of her dressing-table to look those thoughts steadily in the face, for now they had arisen it was no use shirking them. Her looking-glass was opposite to her, and holding a candle in her hand she scrutinized what she saw there, and at the sight her heart rose again. Without doubt she was thirty-five, for she knew the year in which she was born, but, though habitually honest with herself, she could not see that she was in any way different to the picture Mr. Teddy had begun of her ten years ago. She was still young, there was still time. And if there were to be baby footsteps by hers, there must be the prints of a man's feet as well. And she knew what man that was.

She was as yet only half dressed for dinner, and at the moment the resonant gong (brought from China itself by her father) sounded through the house. Instantly she dismissed all her imaginings, for whatever she had missed, whatever was not yet quite gone from her grasp, it was perfectly certain that Marion must on no account be kept waiting for dinner, for Marion was punctual, and Marion's

time was precious. And she arrived in the drawing-room before Marion had so much as dreamed of sending up to enquire if she was coming to dinner or not, as was her rather severe custom if Daisy was not up to time.

But beyond doubt, Middle-age had left calling-cards, so to speak, on both her and Mr. Teddy, though both returned the answer that they were not at home. So Middle-age, that dame who is so ill favoured when a welcome is not extended to her, strolled incredulously away, fully intending to call again.

CHAPTER III

ONE very hot July morning, about a month after the birthday party, Teddy, pushing and leaning on his bicycle, was walking up the hill that led from the village green to his mother's house. The white road reverberated under the glare of the sun, and opposite the gate of the empty house next him he stopped to wipe his pleasant and perspiring face. The day was broiling, but it was the terrific pace that Lambton had been going lately that was so overwhelming. This uninterrupted spell of fine weather no doubt had an additional incentive to the gaieties of the season, but never before in all these years could he remember such a whirl and rush of social engagements. It really had been necessary to do something, for entertainments had begun to clash, and on one occasion Mrs. Joyce had been obliged to give up her river picnic although she had already warned the pleasure-boat establishment that at least six safe commodious punts would be required on Saturday, June 26, and had sent corresponding advices about strawberries to the

fruiterer's, for she found, to her astonished dismay, that she received a series of notes that regretted to be unable owing to a previous engagement. Further enquiries led to the discovery that Mrs. Vickary had already invited her friends to a croquet party that afternoon, and since the two ladies had, of course, precisely the same circle of friends, which in both cases included the whole of Lambton society, it was clear that the river picnic could not take place, for Mrs. Joyce could not go up the river alone in six punts with no other companion except her husband and immense quantities of strawberries. Rather painful circumstances had attended this particular case, for in the natural course of events Mrs. Vickary would surely have asked Mrs. Joyce to her croquet party. This she had not done, because there had come to her ears a most impertinent remark of Mrs. Joyce's about Mr. Vickary, in whose apostolic face that lady had found a likeness to the notorious murderer Crippen. Of course there was not really the slightest resemblance, but, to mark her displeasure of such ill-placed badinage, Mrs. Vickary had, just for once, left Mrs. Joyce out of her list of guests (indeed some said that she had determined on her croquet party and sent out the notes on the instant, having heard that Mrs. Joyce was thinking of choosing that Saturday for the river picnic). Mrs. Vickary had followed up this staggering blow with yet another,

for she had said that Mr. Joyce always reminded her of a paroquet; and for a few days there had been a good deal of strain and discomfort in the general social atmosphere, for there were so many subjects, like birds and murder, that had to be avoided. Then Mr. Teddy had asked them both, unknown to each other, to come and look at the new picture he had begun, and after a few haughty and polite minutes, he had melted the ice of their estrangement in his sunny geniality, and Mrs. Joyce had gone to Mrs. Vickary's party after all. Subsequently her cook was very busy making strawberry jam, for the fruiterer insisted that the order had been definitely given and sent hampers of that delicious vegetable round to the servants' entrance of Mrs. Joyce's house.

In this particular case there had therefore been exceptional circumstances, but again and again there had been difficulties about dates, and in consequence Miss Daisy and Mr. Teddy had started an Entertainment Bureau, from which, held at Miss Daisy's house, he was now returning. There, in the pages of a large Boots-Cash-chemists-Diary, the intending hosts and hostesses of Lambton engaged dates, which were duly entered in the diary, so that if Mrs. Andrew wanted her friends to rally round her and help her at her annual school treat, she could call at the Entertainment Bureau and fix a day for the school treat on which she would

find her friends unoccupied. Incidentally, also, the Bureau distinctly put a premium on truth, or at any rate a penalty on falsehood; for, though you did not feel inclined to be buried under haycocks and run races with shining children, you could not with impunity say that you were engaged when any one by a glance at the Boots-Cash-chemists-Diary could see how very improbable that was. It became necessary to go to London for a visit to the dentist or the Royal Academy, which was an expensive way of getting out of a local invitation, unless your dental deficiencies or your artistic cravings absolutely called out for treatment. For in Lambton there was no such churlishness possible as to refuse an invitation merely because you did not want to accept it. If Society was to be kept up at all (and who could doubt that it was?) everybody was naturally compelled to go to everything, for there was no social end served in giving a party if people did not go to it. Marion Macdonald and Mrs. Heaton were the only cases in which exemption was granted from this joyous conscription: Marion, because she was engaged in those lofty pursuits in which no moment of casual inspiration must be thrown away; Mrs. Heaton, because the state of her health demanded that she should always do exactly as she felt disposed.

But the Boots - Cash - chemists - Diary and the Bureau of which it was the record seemed to Teddy,

as he sat cooling himself under the hedge opposite the unoccupied house, to have had an effect beyond that which its projectors had intended. It had been designed only to regulate the course of entertaining, to avert such catastrophes as the Vickary-Joyce business, but it really looked now as if it not only regulated but stimulated social festivals. Already, though it was still early July, dates in August had been earmarked, and Mr. Vickary with almost an excess of ecclesiastical zeal had recorded that there would be carol-singing in church on Christmas Eve followed by supper at the Vicarage, or, as he had humorously entered, the Vickary-age, which was a new joke as far as Teddy was aware. This Christmas Eve party need not really have been put down at all (probably the splendour of the sudden thought 'Vickary-age' was responsible for its entry) since it was as much a fixture as the service in church next morning; but the idea of engaging afternoons and evenings a month ahead was certainly a new phenomenon, and, though it was pleasant to look forward into this sunlit haze of gaiety, it rather puzzled him. Gay and sociable Lambton always was, but this ebullition, this boiling-over of pleasure-seeking was almost excessive. He knew that in London people sometimes went to dine at one house and dance at another, and even proceeded later to a third, and it really seemed that Lambton in its little circle was beginning to outflare Mayfair.

Yet some instinct in him, ill-defined and dim up till this moment, responded to it, and now for the first time he suddenly realized what that instinct was. They were all getting rather middle-aged: they were all clinging desperately to the last skirts of youth that were slipping through their fingers; they wanted to retain that dear phantom as long as possible. He felt that himself; he knew that Miss Daisy felt it too. Only this morning Mrs. Vickary had come in to see about a bridge party (winnings to be given to the harvest-festival fund) on next Tuesday, and found that there was already a picnic planned for that day. But Daisy had said, "Oh, Mrs. Vickary, we shall all be back from the picnic by seven: we can easily come on to play bridge at nine. Let's cram in all we can."

That was a *cri du cœur*: Teddy felt the echo of it in his own heart. A month ago, in a depressed moment on the croquet-lawn, he had lamented to Daisy that he had begun to question whether this or that was worth while, recognizing that in that very question he was waving a farewell to youth, in which all things are worth while. Since then he had flung such questions away; he had stifled and sat on them, and had filled his days to overflowing. Old age and its shadows had left a card that day, but had not imperatively demanded to see him. He had found that card, and to emphasize his refusal of it he had multiplied the hours, getting

up at six and forgoing his usual hour of quiescence after lunch. Much of his day, as always, was taken up by ministrations to his mother, and there was no curtailment of those offices, but each one of these new days, as based on the resolutions of his birthday, contained the activities of two of the old ones. He wanted—and he felt that Lambton generally and Daisy in particular were in the same case—to get the utmost out of life before the grey mists came down. And more directly symptomatic than all these added gaieties was to him the fact that he had really set to work on a picture that he meant should be a masterpiece. On the very day after his birthday he had set about it, delaying no longer, and on the easel in his studio was the fruit of a month's industrious and regular work.

Certainly he had planned ambitiously, and his canvas was of the ample size of six feet by four. The subject was an ambitious one also, and one that had been attempted before by him in half a dozen sketches and unfinished beginnings. Now, in the intimation that had prompted those multiplications of social gatherings in Lambton, namely that there was still some of the wine of youth left in the cup, but not too large a draught, he had gone bravely to work, scorning the small scale and attacking a big canvas. On it was to be depicted the scene of the meeting of Dante and Beatrice. By Arno they were to meet, not

in the town but in a pathway between flowery meadows, with the sunlit city in the background. A month in Florence years ago had given him abundant material in his sketch-books for the setting. His composition of the scene in the foreground was satisfactorily grouped, as his inward eye saw it, and he had set to work with the pathetic haste and industry that realizes that if achievement can be grasped at all, it must be grasped now. There was no time to waste, and for not less than four or five hours a day he had throughout this last month plied his industrious brushes. The flowering meadow was a tangle of jolly wild-flowers; in the Arno were reflected the dim domes and spires of the city; the sky was of a really exquisite tone of blue; Beatrice's nurse, already quite finished, whose tender elderly face was a transcript from his own portrait of his mother, stood a little behind the girl, and to her advanced the figure of the poet. These two were still but sketchily put in, and deep in poor Teddy's heart there was implanted the conviction, which as often as it raised its horrid head he chased back into its lair, that the time for painting them had already passed for him. He had not the inspiration which could so realize the divine romance, that his hand would be able to interpret it. It would be a young man undeniably meeting a young woman, but no more. The two might be Ananias and Sapphira, or Miss Smith and

Master Jones. He could be industrious and deft, but he could not put Dante and Beatrice on the canvas simply because he could not experience that authentic thrill which is the base of all inspiration. Stifle the horrid doubt as he might, the horrid doubt refused to give up the ghost: it still bleated through his strangling fingers, "Are you sure it is worth while?" It came to him in agonizingly vivid form now, and again he attacked it with the utmost gallantry, and his form of attack, which, paradoxically enough, was the best that could be adopted, was to run away from it. He refused to face it, he stopped his ears to the bleating voice. He determined to recapture the sense of youth which alone makes achievement possible, for, as he knew well, an unconvinced effort, an elderly imagination never accomplishes anything worth doing. But he felt that some stimulus was necessary. By habit he could enjoy this spate of social festivities, by habit he could render himself a vivacious companion, but he was afraid that something fresh was needed to bring back the colour to the youthfulness of his vision. Yet where was this audacious wisdom of youth, which hangs rainbows round the most trivial occupation, to be found?

Teddy rose hastily from his cool seat under the hedge. Certainly it was not to be found by lamenting its absence, and with the natural instinct of the active he proceeded to occupy himself by trundling

his bicycle up the remaining feet of the ascent. Even as he entered the gate the gong sounded for lunch, and he hastened up in order not to keep his mother waiting, even as one evening Daisy had done the same, so that Marion's golden moments should not be poured out into desert sands.

The hot weather suited Mrs. Heaton, and Teddy found her in a mood of extraordinary amiability.

"No, dear, you haven't kept me waiting at all," she said. "I had only this moment come in from the garden. I walked twice right to the end of the croquet-lawn, and even looked over the paling to see if there were yet any signs of life in the house next door. And I am not nearly so tired as usual, though I read the paper to myself, as you were gone to your Entertainment Bureau."

"Well, I needn't go there again for the next week," said he. "Miss Daisy had got in rather a mess by confusing Wednesdays and Thursdays, but we're all straight again now."

"That is a good thing. Dearest mamma used always to get her accounts straight every Saturday morning—or was it Friday? If it was neither of them it must have been Monday. Such method she had; she used to say that I had inherited it from her. Often in the country she had spent nothing in the way of cash from Saturday till Saturday, except for the offertory on Sunday, and then she just drew a diagonal line down the ex-

penditure page, and wrote down the total again so that it balanced. But I would not have you neglect your Bureau ; I am sure Miss Daisy would get in a dreadful muddle without you, for mamma always used to take accounts to dearest papa if they would not add up. And to-day Miss Marion and Miss Daisy are coming here to dine, are they not ? ”

“ Yes. You asked them last week. ”

“ To be sure I did, and to play a little bridge afterwards. That will be pleasant for me if I am not too tired ; and if I am, I daresay they will not mind sitting and talking instead while I close my eyes, and going away rather early. But how odd it is that we have no more news about the people who have taken the house next door. A whole month has passed, and there is no sign of them. Perhaps they have changed their minds. I declare I should be rather disappointed if they do not come. ”

Teddy laughed.

“ But you were not sure you would like having neighbours so close, ” he said, “ when you thought they were coming. ”

“ I know. But that was only the first shock. I have got used to the idea of them now, and I am quite anxious to see them. I certainly shall leave cards myself if I hear well of them. If not, my wretched health must excuse me. I think, dear, you might give me just a little of that custard. ”

I do not think a little custard would hurt me, for it seems very light. And how is the picture going?"

Teddy shoo'ed his misgivings round the corner.

"Famously," he said. "I was up by six this morning painting in the garden. You haven't seen it for several days: you must come and look at it after lunch."

Mrs. Heaton held out no positive assurance that she would do this, for she felt that she had already been putting a rather severe strain on herself by walking twice to the end of the garden, when there was to be a bridge party that evening if she felt up to it; but she encouraged Teddy to smoke a cigarette while he opened the letters that the second post had brought him. But he got so suddenly and completely absorbed in one of these that she had to ask him twice whom he had heard from before he answered. It was her habit when she saw anybody reading a letter to ask who the correspondent was. Dearest Mamma had had the same amiable inquisitiveness and got told some lies in consequence. . . . Then he put his half-smoked cigarette into his half-drunk coffee where it fizzed and expired, with a slight suggestion of caramel.

"Dear me! This is a most unexpected proposal," he said.

Mrs. Heaton's habitual irritability returned.

"Whom is your letter from?" she asked. "And what is the proposal? I do not know why you

should keep me in the dark like this. Am I not worthy to hear about it ? ”

Teddy looked up from his second reading of the letter.

“ It’s from Uncle Harry,” he said, naming his father’s younger brother. “ He has just been offered, and has indeed accepted, a post in the financial department in Egypt. He goes out there in the middle of September.”

“ And I suppose the unexpected proposal is that you should go with him,” said Mrs. Heaton in her most blighting manner.

“ No, dear mother, of course not,” he said.

“ I am sure nothing would surprise me from Harry,” said Mrs. Heaton. “ He would be perfectly indifferent as to whether I was left alone here with no one to look after me. I hope I am not hard in my judgments, but I could never bring myself to think that Harry was not a monster of selfishness, and no one shall persuade me he is not.”

“ But he doesn’t make any such proposal,” said Teddy. “ What he proposes is that we might perhaps make a home here for Robin. Robin has got a year yet at Cambridge, and Uncle Harry wonders if he might spend his vacations here. He couldn’t go out to Egypt three times a year. Of course he doesn’t want us to say ‘ yes ’ or ‘ no ’ at once. He suggests that Robin should come down for a few days, and let us see if we like him, and he

likes us. He proposes to pay us whatever you and I think fair."

Teddy felt his heart suddenly warm to the plan. "Robin's an awfully nice boy," he said. "Upon my word, I think it's a very good notion. Besides, we are Robin's only near relations. I think we're bound to do it. What do you say, mother?"

Mrs. Heaton rose. Secretly she rather favoured the idea, for there would be an additional person in the house to look after her. But it would never do to let so wonderful an opportunity of being disagreeable pass.

"I do not see that it matters what I say," she observed, "since it is quite clear to me that you mean to have that great rowdy boy here. Of course I am not to be consulted at all: every one knows that my opinion and wishes are of no account. Oh dear me, yes."

"But I am consulting you," said Teddy mildly. "That is just what I am doing."

"Having quite made up your mind."

Teddy had that most admirable gift of masking his virtues. When he was doing his best to be patient he never sighed or closed his eyes, or smiled in a Christian forcing-house manner. He merely was patient.

"No, dear mother," he said, "I haven't made up my mind at all. How could I make up my mind without ascertaining yours?"

"I know I have no say in the matter," said his mother, instantly proceeding to have a pretty good 'say,' "because you are master of this house, and I am your pensioner. Whether that was or was not a kind and a considerate way of your father to leave his money, so that I was necessarily dependent on you for the ordinary comforts of life, I hope I have too great a loyalty to his memory to say. Nothing shall induce me to open my lips on that subject. You will perhaps tell me when you have decided what room to give Robin; and if you settle to give him my bedroom, I'm sure I will sleep wherever you choose to put me without a murmur—not that I sleep much at the best of times."

Teddy had been afraid that there would be a reaction after his mother's amazing activities and cheerfulness that morning. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he was right.

"But, my dear, it is sheer nonsense to talk of your being turned out of your room," he said.

Mrs. Heaton had paused, with her mouth open, so as to be able to begin to speak again the moment Teddy's interruption was over.

"And there is only one wish I should like to express," she said, "namely, that if it is not too much to ask, Robin will avoid leaving both the hot- and the cold-water taps of the bathroom full on when he climbs out on the roof to get swallows' nests, as he did when he was here last two years ago, so

that a perfect cataract of warm water pours down the stairs and wrecks and ruins everything, especially the ceiling of the dining-room."

Teddy was not yet at the end of his patience, though his mother's attack was of an unusually acute character.

"Poor old Robin," he said, "what a state of mind he was in about it!"

"Nothing to the state of the dining-room ceiling," said his mother. "Well, that is all I ask—that he should turn off the taps in the bathroom when he leaves it, and that I should have two days' notice when you require my room."

Teddy folded up his Uncle's letter, and changed his tactics. "I'll write to Uncle Harry," he said, "and tell him that we find it impossible to take Robin in. Perhaps I'll run up to town to see him."

This did not at all fall in with Mrs. Heaton's views. She had intended, after having got rid of this 'perilous stuff,' to be gently and affectionately talked round, so that at the end she should write a charming letter to her brother-in-law, saying that they would gladly welcome Robin, and make him as happy as the wretched state of her health allowed. She would also dexterously insinuate that Teddy had been inclined to see difficulties in the way, and that she had taught him (though without seeming to teach him) the great duty of sacrificing himself to others. Her previous manœuvres seemed

a somewhat roundabout method of arriving at this saintly attitude, but, such as they were, they were peculiarly her own.

"And you will add, I suppose, that it was I who was against the idea?" she said.

"No; I shall add nothing of the sort," said Teddy.

"Thank you, my dear, thank you," said Mrs. Heaton effusively. "I am glad you do me that justice."

Teddy felt that there was probably material here for a decision, material enough anyhow to enable him to propose that Robin should come down for a week.

"Then are you in favour of the plan?" he asked. "Shall we have Robin down for a week, and see how we pull along together?"

"My dear, what more could I say that I have not said?" asked Mrs. Heaton plaintively. "Have I not offered to give up my room to Robin if you think he will be more comfortable there? I cannot understand what you mean by saying you will write to say that we find it impossible. Or is it because I hoped that Robin would not leave both taps on? I am quite at sea."

Teddy, luckily, was no longer at sea. It was clear that Mrs. Heaton thought well of the scheme, and he was accustomed to her roundabout methods of expressing approval.

"That's splendid then," he said. "We'll have

Robin down for a week to see if he can stand us and our funny ways. We must be on our best behaviour, mother. Wouldn't it be awful if he told Uncle Harry that he really couldn't endure us? Perhaps you'll write a little line of welcome too. Robin would like that."

It was thoroughly characteristic of Teddy that when his mother had gone to rest in preparation for the debauch of the evening, his thoughts did not dwell critically on this outrageous interview. He said to himself that she had been a little worried at first (the phrase denoted his impression of his mother's most hopelessly impossible moods), and he reflected with great cheerfulness on the fact that she was not worried any more. That summed up his attitude, and after writing a warm welcome with regard to the proposed trial trip of a week, he strapped himself, so to speak, to his Dante picture again, until he should be summoned to take his mother for a drive. Daily, he was afraid, that required a more conscious effort.

Marion much enjoyed an occasional game of cards, and played auction-bridge on certain well-ascertained principles of her own. It was not worth while for one whose mind was so incessantly employed on the construction of Lady Clementine's to fatigue the brain over what she called the minutiae of the game, such as finesses, and the possible trick-

taking qualities of low cards after all the higher ones had been played, but she had clearly grasped one principle vaguely connected with bridge, and that was the soundness of retaining command of a suit. This, a critical observer might have thought, she almost carried to excess, for in her application of it she habitually hoarded kings and aces until one if not both her opponents were in a position to trump them rather than let her make them. Daisy, on the other hand, who was always her partner (since if they played against each other the Macdonald coffer neither grew fuller nor emptier), went on the opposite principle, for which also there is something to be said. It seemed to her that an ace could, even under the most advantageous circumstances, only make once, and under disadvantageous circumstances such as those in which her sister often placed these valuable cards, would not make at all ; and thus, if she was so fortunate as to hold any, they poured in spate from her hand as soon as she got the lead. So far their play was easy to understand, but even Teddy, who was a really acute diviner in such matters, could not, even after years of sanguine study, grasp the principles on which either of the two sisters made trumps. He had come to the conclusion that the partner of either of them (when they were not playing together) was wise to disregard anything that she said. Sometimes tragedies happened, as when,

for instance, Marion had declared hearts, holding nine of them, and he had ruthlessly overbid her with but a moderate tiara of diamonds to wear. But taking the thick with the thin, you lost less if you paid no heed whatever to Marion's declarations. No doubt they were founded on a principle, but since no one could ascertain what that principle was, it was impossible to act in accordance with it.

To-night Mrs. Heaton felt quite up to a game, which meant that she kept up a flow of agreeable conversation during the play of the hand, and finished her periods up at the conclusion by telling Teddy, if he was playing the hand, that he ought to have made another four or five tricks; and if she was playing it, by implying in a way that left no doubt about the matter that nobody else could have made nearly as many.

"Dearest Papa," she was saying, "was quite one of the best whist-players in Europe if not the best, and he used to win and lose immense masses of money at it. What quantities of sovereigns I have seen pass to and fro at this very table! He always said that to be a fine whist-player meant that you could succeed in any profession that you chose to take up. He would certainly have done so if he had taken up any. Dear me, Teddy, is that all you've got in your hand? Well, we must make the best of it."

She paused aghast as a torrent of aces and kings

poured from Daisy's hand. Why Daisy had not made no-trumps no one knew (least of all Daisy), and Marion greedily raked the cards in. But Mrs. Heaton quickly recovered from this first shock of the leaping aces, for Daisy (on another principle not clearly discoverable) was rapidly making good all Teddy's nines and tens. And Mrs. Heaton prattled merrily on again.

"Dearest Mamma did not play; she could never grasp the difference between spades and clubs, they looked to her quite alike. It was odd, because she had a remarkably quick eye in all other respects, and could tell her twin-sisters apart, which no one else could do (your great-aunts, Matilda and Mary, Teddy, whom you never saw for they both died when, oh, so young). I hope we shall have plenty of pleasant games like this all the autumn. We must play when Robin is here: perhaps Miss Marion and Miss Daisy would come up here on alternate evenings and make a four. There! We get two odd after all, and with that hand on the table I do not think dearest Papa could have made more. Had it been possible I should have liked to hear his opinion on it. You will observe, Teddy, that I made all those little diamonds of yours. It shows what can be done with a bad hand."

The baffled Daisy cut the cards to Teddy. But even in her discomfiture she did not forget the proper sycophancy due to her hostess.

“ Well, I’m sure it’s wonderful to see cards played like that,” she said. “ I must get a manual and study more. I thought with all those lovely cards I should be certain to fine you. I wonder if I shall ever learn to play like that.”

Mrs. Heaton felt that this was highly improbable, and though too truthful to hold out any false hopes, administered a queenly consolation.

“ But then, dear Miss Daisy,” she said, “ you have so many talents. Your lawn-tennis, you know, and your croquet, and your management of the Entertainment Bureau! And then there’s your sister’s writing. I consider you a most talented pair, really very talented indeed.—No trumps did you say, Teddy? I hope you are not counting on me to support you.”

“ No, dear, I’m counting on myself,” said Teddy amiably.

“ Well, then, you’ve got to play it if neither of these ladies has anything to bid against you. There! not such a bad hand, after all that I’ve given you. Those little diamonds ought to be valuable if you manage properly. Oh, there come the king and the ace of that suit from Miss Daisy. I shall be indeed curious to see what you made no-trumps on. Dear me, this gets worse and worse. Well, I am sure I thought you must have had the ace of spades! Ah, that’s what comes of not finessing. Now they catch you finely. Well, that is a disaster, is it not?

I did not think you had such a bad hand ; but even then if you had only played a bolder game, you might have retrieved matters. With that knave staring you in the face you might have ventured a little more, and see how well it would have come off."

Marion meantime, though she was only unbending her mind, was learning something, and had determined to put a great deal more talk into the mouths of the bridge-players at Lady Clementine's atheistic parties ; for she took to bridge when she gave up Christianity, and played for immense stakes, like dearest Papa. It was on the second Sunday in Advent (for Sundays were no longer sacred) that she had a dreadful fit of remorse after her guests had gone, and this was the beginning of her enlightenment. But it was news to her that people talked so much when they were playing ; this would brighten the chapter up.

Mrs. Heaton kept early hours, and it was not yet ten when she exhibited symptoms of having had enough bridge, and in consequence the unfinished rubber was abandoned. There was a little talk round a tray of lemonade and biscuits, and Daisy produced the titbit of news which she had been saving up for this moment with the utmost difficulty, so much did she look forward to announcing it.

"I declare I had almost forgotten to tell you what I heard to-day," she said. "I've got a piece

of news for you, dear Mrs. Heaton, which I think will interest you."

Mrs. Heaton's animation and flow of spirits had suddenly dried up in the disconcerting fashion characteristic of her. She had had enough bridge, and now wanted to go to bed. She looked as if nothing in the world could possibly rouse the smallest interest.

"It's about the house next door," said Daisy. "I have found out who the new tenants are. They come in at Michaelmas."

Mrs. Heaton drew in her breath with a hissing sound and closed her eyes.

"Ah, then we have but a few weeks more of peace before us," she said. "They will probably have a barking dog and a gramophone. If ever I get a few hours' sound sleep it is early in the night, from ten or so till twelve, and that will be just the time when they make gay with their gramophone. What is the name of the intruder?"

"A widow lady, Mrs. Paulton, and her daughter. Mrs. Joyce heard from a mutual friend."

This news had a most surprising effect on the exhausted Mrs. Heaton.

"Mrs. Paulton?" she asked. "Dearest Papa's sister married a Mr. Paulton; it is all in Debrett, I have read it a hundred times. What a strange thing if they are connections of ours! What else did Mrs. Joyce's friend say?"

"Mrs. Paulton's husband was a soldier. He died two years ago. The widow is very charming, and still young, not more than forty."

Mrs. Heaton almost sprang from her chair.

"I make no doubt at all that they are the ones," she said, regardless of Marion's shudder at such grammar. "I remember Major Paulton's death some year or two ago. Undoubtedly he was a cousin of mine, Reginald Paulton, the grandson of Papa's sister. Well, if that is not a coincidence! I hope Mrs. Joyce will not go shouldering her way in the moment my cousins arrive. It would be like her, I am sorry to say, to do that. To think that Reginald Paulton's wife is coming next door! What a family party we shall be! I wonder if she will remember her husband's grandmother. Perhaps, dear Miss Daisy, you could worm out of Mrs. Joyce (you have such tact, as I often tell Teddy) what Mrs. Paulton's address is, and I will instantly write her a little letter of welcome. How very delightful! I am sure she is a sweet woman. Fancy finding that a cousin is coming to live next door when I only expected a gramophone. I am sure I shall not sleep a wink all night with thinking of it. Well, if you positively insist on going——"

Miss Daisy had had no such intention; she was merely rising to get another Osborne biscuit, for the excitement of bridge had made her hungry.

But with her great tact she abandoned this idea, and she and Marion said good-night. Marion firmly refused Teddy's escort ; and indeed since they had only three hundred yards to walk, and they both had goloshes to defend their feet from a perfectly hard dry road, and Marion lit a large lantern that burned bravely and smelt of tin to supplement the effulgence of a full moon that rode high in a cloudless sky, it seemed possible that they might reach the village green without misadventure.

Teddy returned from seeing them off at the front door to his mother. Two minutes ago he had left her in a state of pleasurable excitement, but now that was ebbing from her.

" I shall be a wreck to-morrow," she said, " after all this. I think Miss Daisy ought not to have told me to-night, when I was already tired out with the fatigue of entertaining your guests. However, I think they enjoyed their evening, and perhaps they will remember it afterwards if this is the last game of bridge I ever play. What with Robin coming next week, and our cousins settling in next September, I do not expect to be fit for many more exertions of the sort. It is half-past ten already : I ought to have been in bed by this time. Well, no one can say that I do not wear myself out for your sake, dear. How very wild and *farouche* poor Marion Macdonald looked to-night ! But if you

think she liked my attempts to entertain and interest her, I am sure I am well rewarded, even though I have a racking headache to-morrow. Good-night, dear. Perhaps if you come to bed very late as you did last night, you will try not to make such a trampling all along the passage."

CHAPTER IV

FOR a couple of miles below Lambton the river Locke flows, peaceably and slowly, over its bed of topaz gravel between level water-meadows, tall in this serene August weather with the red spires of loosestrife and the creamy umbrellas of meadow-sweet. These meadows and the beech woods which frame them are the rendezvous for the Lambton picnic parties which had been so numerous this summer, and many times had the woods re-echoed to the sound of Miss Daisy's banjo and her thin pleasant voice when, after tea, she was induced to give the company a song or two. But beyond the limit of picnic parties, in which a great deal of punting was done with a minimum of progress (unless indeed the punt was in charge of that champion waterman, Teddy), the river suddenly drops its pastoral and inland character, and scenting the sea, hurries through a deep-cut channel, with high crumbling banks on each side, to join it. Here the seawater, when the tide flows, pierces the freshness of the stream with the savour of salt, and the stones

that are scattered along the banks begin to be fringed with brown podded tangle and wisps of stringy green. A final corner round which the stream whisks swiftly at the ebb, but is heaped with still water when the tide is high, leads to the broad debouchment of the river into a bay with a sandy beach, framed by two rocky promontories that run out into deep water. The place is remote from the stir of human life, but great companies of sea-gulls hover and fish at the mouth of the stream, and the landward side of the bay basks in a honey-sweetness of gorse.

On the beach this morning was drawn up out of the tiptoe fingers of the tide a boat with a pair of sculls lying by it, and a substantial paper parcel with a bottle of wine laid in the sharp-cut strip of shadow indicated that some picnickers from Lambton had come far for their outing. Clothes and a couple of straw hats indicated their sex and their present occupation, and, half closing your eyes against the glare, you might have seen two heads and an occasional flung-out arm nearing the extremity of one of the promontories. Then, after a pause, there was a noise as if a whip had been cracked, and immediately after a shout of boyish laughter. Then came a neat contained splash and sounds of talk.

Robin, the author of the neat splash, pushed his hair from his eyes as he reached the surface again.

“ Oh Lord, that was funny ! ” he said. “ There

was never anything so flat, Teddy. Please do it again."

Teddy obligingly clambered out on to the rocks again, while Robin trod water.

"I don't think from quite that height," he said.

"Why not? The higher the easier as long as you don't funk."

"But the lower the easier it is not to funk," said Teddy with strong common sense.

"Oh, do be brave," said Robin, "it makes me laugh."

"Well, come and take a somersault," he said.

"Right."

Robin threw out an arm, kicked a leg, and sprang through the water with a great wash of bubbles behind him. He was a great tall boy, long-thighed and low-shouldered, with a brown merry face, and eyes that looked as if they but reflected the blue of the seas.

"Now observe," he said. "And if I break in pieces, I trust you to pick up all the bits, and give them decent Christian burial."

He stood poised and taut on the topmost edge of rock, and then flung himself outwards in a Catherine wheel of gleaming limbs through the air. One shriek of fearful dismay came from him as he spun over, and an enormous splash put an abrupt end to it.

"Let no one say that the race of heroes is dead," he said. "Now your turn, Teddy."

Teddy made less resonance this time, and together they started to swim across to the beach again. It was rather galling to the elder man, who for so long had been the acknowledged champion of Lambton in all athletic and manly exercises, to find that he had to swim his hardest, with positively no breath left for conversation, to keep pace with the boy who lazily kicked his way along beside him, and talked and laughed as he went. But he had rowed Robin all the way from Lambton in good brisk style ; he was really a little tired, not tired in the sense of being conscious of fatigue, but enough so to lose the edge of instinctive vigour.

“ This is just a perfect sort of day,” said Robin, “ at least it will be when I’ve eaten large quantities of sandwiches. All this last week I’ve been in that foul hole of a London, walking on hot paving stones, and going to stuffy theatres. Not but what theatres aren’t good sport, but when there’s the sea and sun knocking about, it’s a waste of time not to knock about with them. I say, do you think Aunt Emma will be able to stand me ? Do give me a hint now and then if I talk or laugh too much.”

“ You’re doing quite nicely,” gasped Teddy.

“ Am I really ? How ripping. It would be an awful tragedy if I thought my coming here for the vacations was such a good plan and you felt that you really couldn’t stand it. I should have to get diggings in London, or something awful.”

"No need," said Teddy, who was careful about extravagance of breath.

"Well, it's frightfully nice of you and her," said Robin. "Why, we're nearly there. I'll race you for the shore. One, two, three—off."

He flung himself forward, burying himself in the sea, and for a few strokes Teddy, seized with the demon of emulation, cast himself wildly after him. But a dozen heaves through the water were sufficient to finish him, and with a sympathetic joy in the vigour of that foaming body that hissed away so swiftly from him, he watched Robin's progress. Very soon he shot out on to the sand from the swiftly shelving beach and lay there panting with arms and legs spread out. Teddy followed more sedately, determining to get up his swimming again. But an excursion to this beach meant the consumption of the greater part of the day, and between his attention to his mother, and the fulfilment of his birthday resolution, he had had few days to spare.

Robin entirely refused to dress before having lunch, and, girt with a towel, made portentous inroads into the sandwiches and the wine. Then in order to get hot again (really uncomfortably hot) for another swim, he raced to the end of the beach, raced back again, and jumped clean over Teddy as he sat and smoked. In vain Teddy warned him of the awful things that happened to those who bathed when in such a state of repletion as Robin must be

in, for presently when the requisite discomfort of heat had been secured Robin rushed into the sea, running across the sand with eyes shut so that he should not know until he fell forward into it when he was going to meet its embraces. Of course he forgot to divest himself of his towel, which floated away half submerged in the ebbing tide, and he had to swim out again to get it.

The two were to join a picnic party from Lambton in the water meadows that afternoon, to which, an unprecedented affair, Mrs. Heaton had promised her personal patronage. Not for years had she undertaken so risky and prodigious an adventure, but when Robin had said that morning at breakfast, when the arrangements were being discussed, "Oh, Aunt Emma, you must come too, it'll be no fun unless you come," Aunt Emma, after only once asserting that it would lay her up for a week, had promised to do so. Some infection of vitality seemed to spread out like a shining pond round Robin, so Teddy felt, as the boy raced along the shore and leaped into the sea. Whether it was an illusion or not, he made you feel young until the breath failed in your body; the tingle of his youth spurred you to strip off the years and do as he did. Nor was it his mere physical vigour that was so infectious: there was May in his mind, the eager romantic outlook of boyhood laughed in those jolly blue eyes, and last night, after their bridge was over, Robin had made Aunt Emma,

Miss Daisy, and Teddy play two games of Old Maid. Twice was that dingy future fastened on Aunt Emma, and at the second time, with her fingers in her ears to shut out the opprobrious salutation, she had positively run from the room. Indeed a sort of Pied Piper had come to Lambton, making children of them all, and causing them to follow when he went before.

So in view of this honoured picnic party, Teddy insisted on the reluctant Robin clothing his vile body again, and together they pulled their boat down to the stream. Of all Teddy's athletic accomplishments, his skill with the oars was paramount, and it was with a secret sense that he would be able to give his cousin a hint or two that he heard Robin propose that it was his turn to row them back, as Teddy had rowed all the way down. This certainly was a generous proposal, for Robin would meet both stream and tide, and Teddy offered very willingly (though rather tired) to take one of the sculls. But this Robin seemed to think unnecessary.

The boy was still gloriously loquacious, and by reason of complete inattention to what he was doing, presently caught a magnificent crab and quoted *Alice in Wonderland* all in one sentence.

“ ‘ Feather,’ said the sheep. ‘ Why do you say feather so often ? ’ said Alice. ‘ I’m not a bird.’ ‘ Yes, you are,’ said the sheep, ‘ you’re a little goose.’ Riling for Alice : there’s no reply possible. Teddy,

I hope there'll be plenty of tea, will there? And who'll be there besides Miss Daisy and Aunt Emma and you and me? Gosh, what funny sculls these are. I should think Noah must have made them in the Ark. There's another crab. 'Feather,' said the sheep. Oh, I said that."

This was also a magnificent crab, very complicated, and Teddy felt it would be merely kind to repeat his offer of taking an oar.

"Oh no, thanks," said Robin. "I'll get along all right as soon as I get used to them. But they are funny ones, aren't they?"

"No, they're all right," said Teddy. "If you just turned your wrist over when your blade is leaving the water you'd do better. Shall I show you?"

Robin made no reply for a moment, and Teddy, looking at him, saw that he was biting his lip in some struggle not to laugh.

"Better let me show you, old chap," he repeated.

Robin dropped both sculls and went into a shout of laughter.

"Really, I'm awfully sorry," he said. "But when a thing tickles me I cannot help laughing."

"But what about?" said Teddy amiably. "About an old fellow like me teaching you how to scull?"

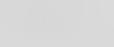
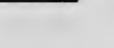
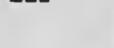
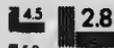
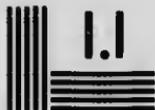
Robin looked at him with dancing eyes.

"You're not old," he said. "You're one of the youngest fellows I ever saw. But the joke is this—



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you see you didn't know. Why should you? But I happened to win the Diamond skulls at Henley last June."

Teddy had half risen from his seat to begin this kind course of instruction, but he sat down again with a howl at this surprising intelligence.

"Lord, that's the best joke I ever made," he said, "and I made it by accident. But why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, I couldn't come marching in saying, 'I've won the Diamond skulls.' I wish I hadn't laughed, but I simply couldn't help it. And Noah did make these blooming oars."

Noah-made or not, they seemed to serve the purpose, and with a frill of foam round their bows they came to where the festive punts were tied up, showing that the picnic party had arrived. Daisy was there with her banjo, and Marion and the Vickarys and Mrs. Joyce (who was the host), and, most wonderful of all, Aunt Emma seated in a deck-chair for fear of the damp, with a rug under her feet for fear of more damp, and a parasol to keep off the sun, and a fur boa to protect her against the wind, and an air of amazing condescension to show her position, and plenty of anecdotes about dearest Papa to show she wasn't proud. And once again the compelling wand of real youth was waved over those who still clung to the fleeting skirts of it, and after tea, before any one knew what was happening,

there was Robin dancing with Marion to a waltz measure that lingered dimly in Daisy's repertoire ; and Teddy was entangled with Mrs. Vickary ; and the Vickary boy, who had no hand in this wand-waving, had fallen down in his attempt to move Mrs. Joyce round on her own axis ; and Aunt Emma, whose dearest Mamma had always said that she had a wonderful sense of rhythm, was beating time with one gloved hand, and tapping it out with a foot on the rug that was spread for her. Pathetically, perhaps, but surely wisely they had all clung to their amusements and games, the more so because in this little circle of friends there were none growing up (with the exception of the aged young Vickary) who would take the reins from them. But when this big vital boy, with his huge enjoyment and his sky-scraping spirits, came among them, with what ecstasy they followed his lead. Even so might Dionysus have strayed into some ancient and deserted wood, where the nymphs had grown old and the fauns rheumatic, and at the sight of him the stiff joints relaxed and for a while feet grew nimble again.

And then Robin hinted shyly that he could play the banjo a little, and set free Miss Daisy whose toes were tingling for a dance ; and the strings gave forth a more compelling melody than hers as he sat at Aunt Emma's feet, and she beat time on his shoulder to make him mark the rhythm better.

And the sun was low, and the shadows long, before the hampers were packed again, and Aunt Emma tucked up in the punt under Robin's charge as if she was starting on a Polar Expedition.

The last morning of Robin's probationary week approached all too soon, but already in Teddy's studio the face and figure of Dante recalled something of the boy's fiery youth. The fire had been rather difficult to get : Teddy's first sketch resembled the attitude usually adopted by some one hailing a bus, but a second attempt was more satisfactory. In his slightly aquiline face could easily be conjectured the presentment of the youth who grew into the stern Florentine, and with the utmost good humour he had consented to pose for Teddy.

" I don't know what to look like," he said. " Must I think of 'er, as the humorous photographer suggests? Whom shall I think of? Miss Marion, do you suggest? Now, I'm going to meet Miss Marion for the first time."

He clasped his hands over his chest, and gazed into the corner of the studio where Teddy had bidden him look with the intentness of an intelligent dog learning a trick.

" Good dog, Fido," said Teddy. " Paid for."

The boy laughed.

" How discouraging you are ! " he said. " Really, I think I'd better look at you, if there's no girl

about. You're very pleasant, you know, and I wish I wasn't going away so soon."

He looked at Teddy with that eager affectionate glance that the older man had begun to love. But a few days ago Teddy had felt slightly piqued that he, the general athletic champion of Lambton, should be deposed; now it seemed only fit and proper that Robin should be able to do everything so infinitely better than he. One pang of jealousy he had certainly had that was more than a superficial prick, when he saw how instantly his mother, who on one of these mornings had been particularly odious and querulous with him, was instantly smoothed into serenity by Robin's mere entrance. He had but said, "Morning, Aunt Emma; do you mind my smoking here?" and Mrs. Heaton, who the moment before had complained that her drawing-room smelt like a smoking carriage, gave the required permission and scolded him archly, and in how different a tone from the acid criticism she had been passing on her son for not having come in to see her sooner. All that effervescent life came like sunlight wherever he entered; often he was boisterous, and yet he was never rowdy; and though he was quiet, reading or talking, it still shone round him like a halo. He *was* that—an incarnation of vigorous affectionate youth; it was only natural that whatever he did, whether he swam or rowed or, as by some celestial india-rubber,

erased the peevish lines on Aunt Emma's high dry forehead, that he should touch everything with the unconscious royalty of sunlight. Whether he was serious or wildly flippant, he shone. Among his peers and contemporaries he might not have been more than a handsome high-spirited boy; among them his atmosphere and light would have merged and been melted in theirs; but here, in this circle of those who, growing middle-aged together, were unconscious how far they had travelled from youth, he was like a window suddenly flung open admitting daylight into a room that was lit with candles. He made no intellectual or spiritual illumination: he was just young without effort by reason of his youth.

To-day something of the inspiration which had been so wholly and fatally lacking from Teddy's picture stole into it. He felt the interior impulse, without which all creation is valueless, reanimate his brush, and need no longer strap himself to his canvas with the rusty buckle of birthday resolution. Instead of setting himself to paint the meeting between Dante and Beatrice, the idea of it, now that Robin was doing his best to think of 'er, set him to it, making him feel the need with which all creative artists thirst. He had wondered during the last month of uninspired work whether out of the earlier portraits of Miss Daisy he could, so to speak, dig his Beatrice, quarrying down into the

mine of memory with lamp and pickaxe. Now he saw the futility of that. By sympathy with the youth and vitality of Robin he could make the young Dante live on his canvas, and if he had to wait for some similar impulse to catch and clutch his Beatrice, well, he must just wait. . . .

And as the days went by until the last of Robin's stay, he no longer felt himself old by unconscious comparison with the boy, but young by the infection of Robin's youth. Young, too, in essentials he must have been, for Robin himself had no sense of the disparity of their years, but both felt and behaved to Teddy as if he was a contemporary of his own, talking and chaffing with him, and ever and anon lifting a corner of that shy mantle with which youth is clothed, and letting him see, in little blunt words and sentences, what life looked like to one before whom it was only just beginning to spread out. And in this very point consisted the bond of sympathy between them, for Teddy, the unachieving, the unmomentous, had, through the years of patient and eager ministrations to his mother, preserved the quality of youth. He still, when this fire of real boyhood was brought near to him, knew in spite of his forty years, and his birthday resolutions, that he was capable of flaming with the ardour which in him had never yet caught light in actual living experience. His faggots had not grown damp nor had smouldered away in dull consuming

and clouds of profitless smoke: they were still piled and dry and built up ready when the flame descended to flare into a beacon of evening sacrifice

Robin's father was to sail in the last week of September, and it was finally settled, as he and Teddy waited at the station for the train that was to take him back to town, that he should come back straight to them from Southampton, where he would see his father off, to spend the few remaining days before he went up to Cambridge for the Michaelmas term and establish his household gods. The signal had just gone down to show the approach of his train, and now a streamer of white steam showed among the woods where they had picnicked.

"Here it comes," said Robin. "And, do you know, I haven't said a word of thanks yet to you!"

"Better not begin them now," remarked Teddy. "For, if it comes to that, I haven't thanked you. But friends don't thank each other."

Robin held out his hand as the train slid into the station.

"Friends? I like that word," he said. "Well, give my love to your mother and Miss Marion and Miss Daisy. Back on September 25. Bless you, Teddy."

He looked out of the window till the train turned the corner a hundred yards farther up, and as he put his head back into the carriage his hat fell off. There was a wild scream heard from the train, and

the hat, under conduct of a stiff wind, came bowling back along the line on its rim till it came to rest below the end of the platform. Teddy carried it home and hung it up in the hall, as representative of Robin and hostage for his return.

The Boots-Cash-chemists-Diary was even in July, as we have seen, invaded by prospective gaieties for August, and the stimulus that Robin's presence had given Lambton had led to a vast multiplication of these. One night during his stay he had bought a box of fireworks, and after dinner had let them off on the lawn outside Aunt Emma's window, shouting with admiration at the soaring rockets, flying from squibs that pursued him, and finally sending up a fire balloon in the form of an elephant which mounted so high that it was indistinguishable from the more regular stellations. Fireworks had not found their way yet into the sports of Lambton, but this had been so brilliant a success that foolish Mrs. Andrew imagined it was the fireworks and not Robin which had so entranced Aunt Emma and her party. Consequently she wound up her bridge party a few nights after Robin left with a similar display, which produced less pleasure than anything probably had ever done in the history of social entertainments. The gardener's boy and poor Mr. Andrew, driven out for that purpose by his wife, and wrapped in a fur coat, for the night was chilly, let them off,

and nobody cared how high the rockets flared, or how brilliantly the Catherine wheels revolved. Mrs. Andrew too found that she strongly distrusted her husband's and the gardener's boy's ability to deal with these flamings and fiercenesses, and, standing anxiously by the window, kept up a running comment of anxiety and misgiving.

"Oh, Mr. Teddy, do you think that Charles has pointed that rocket sufficiently away from the house? It looks to me as if it would strike the top story where the maids sleep. Tap on the window—would you be so kind?—and point upwards. There! He has lit it and we are too late."

Marion, who had enjoyed Robin's display so much that she had torn herself away from the final proofs of Lady Clementine to witness this repetition of it, quite shared Mrs. Andrew's apprehensions, and, edging in a cowardly manner away from the window, hoped that the gardener's boy was insured against accidents in domestic service. This proved to be the case, but it did not prevent the next Catherine wheel from flying off its nail and plunging into the shrubbery, where it flared and spat in a manner awful to contemplate. Had that happened when Robin was showman he would have dealt with it in some delightful, ridiculous manner, but it did not add to the gaiety of the watchers by the window when, now the show was suspended, the gardener's boy fetched a bucket of water from the stables to

quench the monster. Daisy and Teddy, it is true, the lives and souls of Lambton gaieties, expressed extravagant delight and clapped their hands at the Roman candles; but there was a latent sense that their gaiety was hollow, and Marion from the safer depths of the room warned her sister of her exposed position.

"Daisy, you had better come a little farther away from the window," she said. "You will see just as well, and if a rocket does go crooked, it won't transfix you."

This roused Mrs. Andrew's fears again.

"And I am so afraid of Mr. Andrew catching another cold," she said to Teddy. "He had a very bad cold all last week, and though he is well wrapped up, he may make it worse again. There—there are no more rockets now, are there? It will soon be over, and I will order a glass of hot whisky and water for Mr. Andrew, and send the boy round to the kitchen to have some supper. Oh, there is Mr. Andrew preparing to set light to one of those great fire-balloons. I wish he would not. Perhaps if we all clapped our hands and stamped and then went away from the window he would understand that we thought it was all finished, and so would save the fire-balloon for some other occasion when Mr. Robin is here to help. Let us do that."

This manœuvre, though brilliantly planned, failed of its deserved success. Mr. Andrew was much

gratified on hearing the applause, but was so busy with an appalling fit of sneezing, and with inducing the fire-balloon (a portentous paper lady, with oil-soaked tow where her ankles should have been) to light, that he never noticed that his audience had left the windows. Eventually she lifted from the ground, and sailed rather indelicately away until she caught in the top of a neighbouring beech tree. Not till then did he notice the absence of encouragement, and observing that the windows, where he imagined there was waiting a thrilled and admiring congregation, were completely empty, he came indoors, chattering with cold, and asked his wife if he was sending up fireworks for his own amusement or that of her guests. That could never have happened in the brief bright reign of Robin; he would have sent up fireworks merely because fireworks were such fun.

But most of all it was at Mrs. Heaton's that his absence was felt. He had galvanized Aunt Emma into a vividness that she had not known for years, and now she sank back into deplorable apathy lit by sparks of acid querulousness. It seemed to her monstrous that Robin's father and mother should have wished to have their only child with them until they left for Egypt.

"But your Uncle Harry was always noted for his selfishness," she said one day to Teddy, "and I daresay his wife has caught it from him. I am sure

Robin was happy enough here, and he could easily have remained with us instead of going away. I cannot understand such selfishness, and I am sure I hope I never may. Your Uncle Harry must have known how few pleasures I had in my sad lonely life, with no one to amuse me or look after me, and I should not wonder if it was not to deprive me of such pleasure. Robin's presence gave me that he said he wanted him back till they sailed."

"Well, it won't be long before Robin is with us again," said Teddy.

"I daresay it won't seem long to you with all the pleasures and amusements you have, but it is different for me. Besides, I do not think, dear, that you have inherited my affectionate and loving nature. I notice that you did not get much attached to Robin, and so you do not feel his absence in the way I do. It must be a very comfortable thing to be made like that, and yet I thank God that I was not. Both dearest Papa and dearest Mamma were singularly affectionate. Neither of them could bear to be parted from me for a minute, until I was married, and they only consented then because they hoped it might be for my happiness."

Mrs. Heaton had now worked herself up into a frenzy of self-pity, and began to cry in a trickling manner.

"My little lamb who was so early taken from me," she said, "might have been some comfort to me

now, if she had lived. I am convinced she would have taken after me and not after your father's side, in softness of heart and affectionate disposition."

Teddy had begun a game of chess with his mother when this devastating conversation took place. In despair he moved his queen to a square commanded by an enemy bishop, and with a hand trembling with emotion Mrs. Heaton removed the poor spiked lady from the board. But this manœuvre served its purpose, and she pursued the advantage with growing relentlessness.

Miss Daisy had, as requested, 'wormed out' of Mrs. Joyce what Mrs. Paulton's address was, and Mrs. Heaton had written a letter of condescending welcome to her cousin and future neighbour, warning her what a terrible invalid she was, but reminding her that blood was thicker than water, and that she looked forward very much to the advent of her and her daughter. This letter produced what Mrs. Heaton considered to be a very suitable reply, and about the middle of September Lambton began to seethe with excitement over the arrival of furniture vans and a motor car. Miss Daisy kept accurate count of them as they went up the hill, where they were received by no less than six servants, including two males, a butler and a footman. Mrs. Heaton shook her head over this: she was afraid that

Cousin Annie was given to worldliness and display, for she herself had always found four servants quite enough for the size of house in which Cousin Annie was going to live, which was similar to her own. Naturally an immense quantity of servants had always been kept at Withermere Court, but she had never heard that her guests found fault with the comfort and elegance of her own house on the hill, where she only kept four. But if there was to be a butler and a footman in the town, she was really rather glad that it was Cousin Annie who was to be their mistress. This gorgeousness, however, but inflamed the hopes of Lambton, and nobody would really have been surprised if Cousin Annie and her daughter proved to be entirely clad in diamonds and balas rubies.

Then one morning the footman was seen in a resplendent livery, which surely betokened that his mistress was to arrive that day. It was probable that she would come by the express from town, and the probability deepened into certainty when the motor from Mrs. Paulton's dashed down the hill, skirted the village green, and disappeared up the station road. Then, by a curious coincidence, the village green began to be peopled with inhabitants. Mrs. Vickary kept darting in and out of shops; Marion and Daisy strolled round and round on the excuse that they wanted a walk, and as the weather was so threatening, thought it wiser not to go far;

and Mrs. Joyce's large white face was seen to be glued to the panes of her dining-room window, where she occasionally put up an opera-glass and thought that no one noticed. All Lambton, in fact, was eager to catch the first glimpse of the new-comers. But, alas, for the vanity of human hopes, the threatening weather ceased to threaten and broke in torrents of rain; and though Mrs. Vickary went back to the Vickary-age to fetch an umbrella, and continue dashing again from shop to shop, the returning motor was no longer open, but, with top closed and windows up, hooted through the green and up the hill, and nobody had the very smallest glimpse of its occupants. Marion thought she saw a white-gloved hand, but she was so short-sighted and at the same time so imaginative that Daisy could not believe her. A minute later the village green was completely empty again, and the rain splashed into the widening puddles.

CHAPTER V

LAST June, as we have seen, Dame Middle-age had paid a formal call on Daisy Macdonald, and, being told that she was not at home, left her card with the promise of calling again, and the certain hope of being what is called 'more fortunate' on a second occasion. This she had done to-day, on a wet and wintry afternoon at the end of October, and was now, so to speak, sitting in the hall, until, soon after lunch, Miss Daisy came downstairs dressed in thick boots and a mackintosh, for she was going out for a long walk all by herself (so she intended) for the good of her health, and, as Marion had unkindly suggested, for the improvement of her temper. But Dame Middle-age had no intention of letting her go out all alone, and when Daisy came clumping downstairs again in her thick boots, and selected from the stand a strong umbrella which would not be liable to be turned inside out by any sudden gust of wind, she got quietly up and slipped out of the front door with her.

The village green, with its pond and its contented

ducks, its towers of elms and its fringe of square Georgian houses, wore a dishevelled and battered aspect, as unlike as possible to the serenity in which it dozed all summer. The ducks, with wet waggings of white tails, were clustered disconsolately at the edge of the pond, the surface of which was corrugated with peevish wind-blown ripples and pocked with rain. The wind roared like a furnace in the elms, stripping from them showers of yellowing leaves, and the twigs and small branches it tore from them strewed the coarse dripping grass. A few rooks were blown about the sky; and a few passengers slanted along, leaning against the gale, hurrying on necessary errands, but no one but Daisy and her companion were willingly abroad on so inclement a day. She paused a moment on the threshold, the wind pressing her skirts close about her, and decided to walk to the station and back. She had an excuse for doing this, since a parcel from the stores which should have arrived yesterday had not turned up, but her reason was that on this road she would not be liable to meet anybody. The alternative was the road up the hill past Mrs. Paulton's house and that of Mrs. Heaton. That she pointedly avoided. . . . And the moment she turned the corner by Mrs. Joyce's house and the road stretched vacant before her, Dame Middle-age came and shook her by the arm and bade her look her in the face.

Daisy was a strong and active walker, and she put herself to her best pace, by way of showing her companion that she had called on the wrong person. She looked her in the face, and refused to recognize her. In her mind's eye she saw herself as the early portrait by Teddy presented her, and for the next half-mile she clung to her rapid movement and this vision of herself. But she could not help yielding: that which she clung to slipped out of her clutching fingers, and moved away from her, till it stood ten years distant from her. That portrait had been done when she was twenty-five, and she capitulated to the undesirable fact and owned to herself that she was thirty-five. But she was not forty yet, and here in a rush came the practical aspect of these reflections—Mrs. Paulton could not be less than four years older than herself. And all Lambton, this was the stab, seemed to be regarding it as a settled thing that in Mrs. Paulton Mr. Teddy would find the wife for whom he had waited so long. It was an allusion to that from Marion, following on an equally unkind allusion to the quality of the coffee after lunch, that had so ruffled Daisy's temper that she thought a walk would be good for her. Marion had been thoroughly unkind; for Daisy had ordered the coffee from the Army and Navy Stores in plenty of time, and it was not her fault if it had not been delivered yesterday. Nobody would have been more ready than she to apologize if it had been her fault; but it

really had not, and she hated the injustice of the spirit in which Marion had said, "A cupful of mud and water is a most refreshing thing after lunch." Marion, it is true, was in the throes of a critical chapter, and at these times she was always difficult to live with ; but she need not have been unjust—she might, when Daisy explained the true state of things, have acted more graciously than sighing and drumming with her fingers on the table. Above all, she need not have followed that up by asking Daisy what sort of dress she was going to wear as a bride's-maid.

Here then was the real cause that drove poor Daisy out into this inclement October gale, when she might have sat snugly indoors. She wanted to walk off her ill-temper, to ascertain in a solitary struggle with the gale how her mind really stood with regard to this gossip of Lambton, and incidentally find out whether the box from the stores had come. (She intended, it may be added, by a dexterous application of coals of fire, to extract the coffee from the box, if it proved to be at the station, and give Marion to understand that she had walked all the way there and back in the rain in order to get it for her.) But the real reason was that she might turn out her mind and find what it contained.

She did Mrs. Paulton justice and allowed she was probably not quite forty yet, for she had married very young. Mrs. Vickary thought she had been too

young, for she herself had been married at the age of twenty, and it vexed her that there should be in Lambton somebody who could cap her somewhat frequent ailusion to that fact by the superior experience of being married at nineteen. Daisy did her the additional justice of conceding that even a critical eye would not suspect her of being more than thirty-three. She was certainly very handsome with her big grey eyes, her warm clear colouring, and her wavy brown hair quite untouched by white. She had charming manners, and at their first meeting, when the two sisters went to call, Daisy had emphatically said that she seemed a very sweet woman. Subsequent acquaintance had neither added to nor subtracted from that: she remained a very sweet woman, and Teddy and his mother certainly saw a great deal both of her and her daughter Rosemary. It was also beyond question that she was very well off, for Daisy's housekeeper-experience told her that you could not have dinners like that (she had partaken of three of them) if you wanted to keep your books low; and Marion, in the sarcastic vein which this difficult chapter about Mrs. Anstruther produced—Mrs. Anstruther was turning out to be little better than an adventuress—said that even simple people like Mr. Teddy seemed well aware that it was not a disadvantage to have a constant flow of large sums of money coming into your banking account.

Daisy turned a corner on the station road and

tripped even more swiftly along, for she had got the wind behind her. She took herself by the throat, and at the risk of strangling confessed to herself that, frankly and baldly, she was in the grip of jealousy. Mrs. Paulton had everything to recommend her, she was simple, she was friendly, she was kind, but the thought that Lambton discerned in her a future Mrs. Teddy poisoned the marrow of poor Daisy's bones. All these years, she knew, she had been waiting for him; she had also been quite happy to wait, had passed pleasant and busy years, because he was waiting too. Should Teddy not marry anybody, she felt she would be perfectly content to continue in like state. But after all these years of friendship, she could not bear that another woman older than herself should give him the cup that she had always had ready for him. Had Lambton discerned in him a growing attachment to Rosemary, Daisy believed that she would have understood and acquiesced in his choice of Rosemary's delicious youth and beauty. But the idea of his seeking Rosemary's mother was quite intolerable. And yet Marion, that professional psychologist, trained in the interpretation of mind and motive, had demeaned herself by asking Daisy what she would wear as a bride's-maid. Well, it was to be hoped that there were coals of fire in the shape of coffee waiting at the station.

Daisy had done it now: she had pressed the button, and the light that she threw on herself did

the rest. She looked at the picture that was handed her and acknowledged her identity. She did not like it, but it was certainly she. She did not lay claim to the passion that demands and insists and flames, and she would have stood by contentedly if Lambton had told her, or if she from personal observation had believed that Teddy was on fire for Rosemary. Moreover, if he had been on fire for Annie Paulton, she felt she might have accepted it, but as far as she could see there was nothing of that. There was no light in his eye for her that she had not seen there for herself : the two had been for a month such friends as she had been with him for years. There was the situation.

The walk had warmed her, the energy and largeness of the gale had blown away her ill-temper, and had also wakened in her that autumn vitality, so to speak, that lingers in those by whose side Dame Middle-age treads, and causes those strugglings of youth, the convulsions of the dying, that are sometimes so insistent and robust. A mile back she had capitulated ; now, before the deed had passed from under her hand, she snatched at it and tore it across and across. She was young still ; she would no longer recognize herself in the picture that her intuition had drawn for her. Who but a young woman could walk those two miles to the station in but a minute over the half-hour ? Who but a young woman could have won all those tennis

tournaments last summer? Who, above all, but a young woman could have gone through without faltering that tremendous round of gaiety and athleticism which had lasted without pause during Robin's second visit? She had been as untiring as Rosemary Paulton herself. Youth was a question of will and temperament. She was going to be young.

The box from the stores was at the station, and having induced the clerk in charge of the parcel office to open it for her so that she could carry home a sufficient portion, at any rate, of the coals of fire to supply Marion with excellent coffee after dinner, she strolled up and down the sheltered platform while this was done. There were various automatic machines there, which for an almost nominal charge would supply esurient travellers with sweets and chocolates, and among them was a red pillar showing a disk at which appeared the kit-cat presentment of a young gipsy-like lady who held one finger over her lips, while with the other she pointed at a circumference of printed warnings and encouragements chiefly connected with amatory matters. Daisy glanced up and down the platform; there was nobody within sight, and hastily she slipped a copper into the slot that was the portal to this sybil's pronouncements. Round and round she wheeled at the touch of the coin, and then, after a few pendulum-like oscillations, pointed to one of these mottoes. 'Trust your own heart: he loves

you' was the stimulating news, and Daisy hurriedly retreated again, feeling much as she felt when she had bowed to the new moon with no glass in between. She did not soberly believe that the queen of night was affected by her obeisances, but she felt glad she had had a propitious opportunity of making them.

Marion did not appear at tea when, as to-day, severe spiritual wrestlings were going on, but by dinner-time she had decided to save the soul of the adventuress in the book that was to succeed the conversion of Lady Clementine, and snatch that brand from the burning. Her books usually took this course: she planned devastating tragedies and unspeakable careers for her characters, and indeed those who were fortunate enough to survive to the last page were either heart-broken or heartless. But as in her life, so in her fiction, her bark was always worse than her bite, and as a rule she relented towards her puppets in the course of writing, and the last page indicated happy fresh starts instead of miserable last kicks. This had been the case to-day, and when she emerged from her study at a second repetition of the dinner gong, she was able to announce that Mrs. Anstruther was about to turn over a new leaf. This was her olive branch to her sister, who grasped it in the most dove-like fashion, with the secret consciousness of the superlative coffee that was to follow the meal, for she could not forgo the heaping of the coals of fire.

The two sisters always dined with some little show of pomp ; however urgent had been the adventures of the imaginative world in which Marion lived, she always dressed for dinner, and completely removed by the application of pumice-stone the ink-stains that an imperfectly screwed stylograph had imprinted on the first and second fingers of her ruthless right hand. Similarly, at the conclusion of the solid part of the meal, the cloth was withdrawn, and the dessert and wine set on the reflecting pool of the highly polished mahogany table. Neither of them ever applied herself to the decanter, but it was always duly passed from Marion to Daisy and from Daisy to Marion again, with an inch or two of ruddy fluid and thick brown sediment in it, as left over from the last occasion of a dinner-party, when half a bottle of port would have been deposited in it. Now in late October the era of 'winter dessert' had begun, and while Daisy ate a small green apple, which quite resisted the cutting edge of a silver knife, Marion chose a hard ginger-nut which was nearly as intractable to the teeth. She announced about this period the news of the impending salvation of Mrs. Anstruther.

"Well, that's a great relief to me," said Daisy. "I have often felt quite depressed in thinking of her. I wondered if you would find you could touch her heart."

"Yes, but I think she must die," said Marion.

"Need she?" asked Molière's housemaid.

The ginger-nut suddenly yielded with a crash.

"I don't say it's artistically necessary," said Marion, "but I find a difficulty in knowing what she is to do or say if she repents and lives."

She paused a moment, and took a cigarette: there was a stir at the wicket in the wall communicating with the kitchen, that denoted the arrival of coffee.

"I have noticed," she said, "that when characters in a book reform, as Mrs. Anstruther is going to do, they usually become rather dull, which they weren't when they were wicked. If a person has been wicked, and ceases to be wicked, there is very little left to say about her. Indeed, I think there is less to say about good people at any time. I do not know quite what to make of that. But if a good person goes to the bad there is clearly heaps to say."

Coffee came in at this moment, and simultaneously the telephone-bell rang in the hall outside. The telephone had only recently come to Lambton, and though theoretically it was a great convenience to be able to speak to somebody and save writing a note and sending it round and waiting for your messenger to return, the ladies of Lambton were not yet so familiar with it as to be able to go to the instrument quite without qualms. Probably, too, the system was not in perfect working order yet, for one morning Daisy, on being summoned to it, was not even asked who she was, but took a header, so to

speaking, into the middle of some very firm remarks that Mrs. Vickary (for the voice was unmistakably hers) was making to Mrs. Andrew on the subject of a joint order they had given for coal. Apparently Mrs. Andrew had secured all the big pieces and there was little but dust left for Mrs. Vickary. Consequently, when the telephone-bell sounded now, both sisters were accustomed to take no notice of it, and only talk a little louder, till their parlour-maid had gone to it, and ascertained that they would not be switched on to any embarrassing businesses which did not concern them. Even then, its use was not unattended with shocks and apprehensions, for if it was you who were wanted, such odd quackings and gurglings came to your ear, that until you got used to the knowledge that they were not made by your partner at the other end, it seemed as if she was trying to imitate a duck, or was being choked. So now they both sat, and talked loudly and politely till Parkinson, having served their coffee, went out again to see what was wanted.

Marion took one sip of her cup.

"Ah, that is the right coffee," she said. "When did it come?"

Daisy could not abandon her coals of fire, though Marion had been so pleasant.

"The box had stuck at the station," she said. "I just strolled up there this afternoon, and got them to open it for me, and brought it down."

"My dear——" began Marion. "Well, Parkinson, was that the telephone ringing just now?"

"Yes, miss. It's Mr. Teddy who wants to speak to Miss Daisy."

Daisy hurried from the room with the last piece of apple in her mouth. She returned in a minute or two, looking grave.

"A very poor account of Mrs. Heaton," she said. "The chill which she caught yesterday, which Mr. Teddy thought was nothing to alarm any one, has got much worse. Dr. Stables is up there, and finds that she has pneumonia. And for some reason, Mr. Teddy does not know what it is, she wishes to see me."

"Now, this evening, do you mean?" asked Marion.

"I asked him that, and he said it would be very kind if I just looked round as soon as I had finished dinner. He offered to send the carriage down to fetch me, but I told him that was quite unnecessary. It is but a step, and I think the rain has stopped."

"Did he imply she was seriously ill?" asked Marion.

"He is certainly anxious. I cannot conceive what she wants to see me about."

Marion poured out another cup of coffee as she rose and drank it.

"Most delicious coffee," she said. "I am really touched by your going to the station, dear. Now

I shall be ready in a moment, for of course I shall come up with you. It is not in the least proper for you to go alone."

"Oh, pray don't. I know you wanted to get another hour or two at your work."

"Fiddlesticks. And we must take the lantern. We will start at once. Tell Mr. Teddy to expect us immediately."

The gale was still roaring in the sky, though the rain had stopped, and the moon, tossing its way through racks of flying cloud, made the use of Marion's lantern unnecessary. A few minutes' buffeting against the wind brought them to the house, where Teddy met them in the hall and briefly gave them his news. His mother had been in bed all day with a chill, and this afternoon she had grown suddenly worse, with development of pneumonia. She was, as far as Dr. Stables could see, in no immediate danger, for her strength was well maintained, but she had got it fixed in her head that she was dying. Several times that evening she had asked to see Daisy, and with a view to quieting her Teddy had telephoned. Would Daisy, when she went up to her, try to cheer her up, and if possible laugh her out of her apprehensions, which were her chiefest enemy?

Mrs. Heaton was lying propped up in bed, while the nurse, who had just come, arranged the room

with that exquisite professional orderliness which takes the unusualness away from illness, making it seem natural and provided for, part of the ordinary course of human affairs. All round were relics of the Withermere days ; large photographs hung on the walls of the splendours of Mrs. Heaton's home ; a letter-weight made from the hoof of one of dearest Papa's innumerable horses kept a sheaf of letters together, and a couple of fans of pheasants' feathers on the chimney-piece were a by-product of his battues. The nurse looked round as Daisy entered.

" And here's the lady you wanted to see," she said cheerfully. " So if you wish to speak to her privately, I'll leave you for a quarter of an hour, and then come back and make you tidy for the night."

Mrs. Heaton nodded, and waited till she had left her alone with Daisy.

" I'm dying," she said.

Daisy drew a chair to the bedside.

" Indeed, you're not, dear Mrs. Heaton," she said.

" You're going to be ever so much better after a good night's rest."

She shook her head.

" But I am dying," she said, "and when Robin comes back at Christmas he will be able to have my room. I offered to give up my room to him, as Edward may have told you, when first I heard that he was coming here. I said that to Edward. I said I must not be considered at all, and only

asked for two days to make the change in. I hope that could not be considered selfish of me?"

"Most unselfish," said Daisy cordially. She was still utterly without conjectures as to what Mrs. Heaton wanted to talk to her about. But clearly the poor lady found some difficulty in embarking on it. Her eyes wandered over the room for a moment.

"Dearest Papa never used to think me selfish," she said; "and I'm sure all these years, when I've been ordering dinner, I have tried to remember what Edward liked. And his studio, I think that was always a comfortable room, wasn't it? And I always welcomed his friends here, when I was well enough to receive them."

"Yes, and you'll soon be well enough to receive us all again," said Daisy.

She paid no heed to that.

"I think Robin liked me," she said. "I remember not going for my drive the morning he went away, so that the carriage might take him to the station. It was a beautiful morning, too. I should not have been cold even with the thin rug. And it rained in the afternoon, so that I never got my drive that day at all."

This, to a stranger's ear, or to one not so kindly tuned as Daisy's, might have sounded like the vapourings of incipient delirium. But Daisy divined that somehow, below these trivialities, there was

groping a thought that wished to find expression. Mrs. Heaton seemed to be adducing instances to show that she was not selfish: was she combating some further conviction in her mind that she was? Was she, in the difficulty she found in accusing herself, excusing and justifying herself instead?

"Indeed, that was very kind of you," said Daisy; "and I hope when Mr. Robin comes back at Christmas you'll go driving with him. Only you'll have to take the thick rug then, won't you?"

"And I didn't ask him to stop on here when his father wanted him," said Mrs. Heaton. "I may have thought it was selfish of his father, but I never asked him not to go."

Daisy felt that she had guessed right: Mrs. Heaton was justifying herself against some charge of selfishness that her conscience brought against her. It was this, no doubt, that she wanted to speak of, but found herself unable to bring it out.

"But which of us has ever said you were selfish?" she asked. "You are speaking as if some one accused you of being so."

Mrs. Heaton looked quickly round again, as if to see that no one was in hearing, and spoke in a whisper.

"You might have done so," she said. "Are you sure you haven't done so?"

At that moment Daisy knew, with a complete conviction of her correctness, what it was Mrs.

Heaton wished to talk to her about. But she could not be the first to hint at it.

"Ah, won't you tell me what you want to talk to me about?" she said. "Perhaps I can guess. But tell me."

Mrs. Heaton lay still a moment, her desire to be sincere, to make a clean breast, struggling with her long-formed and indurated habit of complete self-absorption, of considering no interest except her own. Even now, when she succeeded in speaking, the two sides of her both had their say.

"I always loved Edward," she said. "Let no one say that I did not, for that would not be true. I should have been quite miserable without him to look after me. Is not that a sign that you love some one, if you would be miserable without him? Yet, I don't know. Was it myself I loved?"

Suddenly Daisy became aware that she was in the presence of a woman whom she had never known before. There was a real person, so to speak, beginning to appear through the wrappings of selfishness, of fancied ailments, of pose and pretence, with which poor Mrs. Heaton had always clothed herself. And simultaneously she saw how ill, how exhausted she looked. She rose.

"You will tire yourself with talking to-night," she said. "Shall I come back to-morrow, and see you? Won't you rest now?"

Mrs. Heaton glanced quickly at her.

"No, no," she said, "to-morrow it will be too late. I will tell you now. It is this . . . only this. Years ago, ten years ago, I should think, Edward had thoughts of you. He began to think about you as his wife. He might have gone on until he really needed you: it had not yet come to that. But I stopped him. I said some little thing, which showed him I did not want him to marry you. Perhaps I did very wrong. Did I do very wrong, Miss Daisy? Would you have married him?"

Daisy, whose sense of the minor proprieties and privacies of life was almost painfully meticulous, and who would in anticipation have found the faintest allusion to such a subject quite intolerable, suddenly discovered that she was not shocked or embarrassed at all. A need called to her, demanding a truthful reply.

"Yes, ten years ago, I would have married Mr. Teddy if he had asked me," she said.

"And now?"

Daisy's communings with herself on her windy walk to the station, her determination not to be old yet, even her encouragement from the automatic sibyl flared into her mind.

"Yes, if he wanted me to marry him, I would do so now," she said.

Mrs. Heaton looked at her eagerly.

"Ah, may I tell him that?" she asked.

Daisy smiled and shook her head.

"No, indeed, you must promise me to do nothing of the sort," she said. "You must not dream of hinting it."

"But I spoiled your chance before," said the other. "I want to give you your chance now."

Again Daisy shook her head.

"It would not be the sort of chance I could accept," she said. "If Mr. Teddy wants me, he will ask me."

"And do you forgive me? Are you sure you forgive me?" Daisy looked at her again, and was frightened at what she saw.

"There is nothing whatever to forgive," she said. "If there were anything to forgive you, I would do so ever so gladly. And now I am going to call your nurse, and not allow you to talk any more, for you will tire yourself, and then they will blame me. May I come and see you in the morning?"

There was no reply to this, and Daisy saw that Mrs. Heaton had sunk back on her pillow with eyes closed. She went to the door and called the nurse, who was waiting outside. She came across to the bed, looked at her, felt her pulse, and spoke quickly and low to Daisy.

"I should like the doctor to come at once," she said. "Will you please tell him? I think he is still in the house."

Teddy was with him and Marion, and while

the doctor went upstairs, he saw them off home again.

"It was good of you to come," he said to Daisy.
"Did my mother say what she wanted to you?"

"Yes: we had our talk," said she.

"And can you tell me about it, in case she refers to it?" he asked.

Daisy tied herself into knots of embarrassment, as she put on her goloshes.

"No, Mr. Teddy, I can't," she said. "It was a private matter, and she won't allude to it."

He nodded, as he held the door open for them.

"Very well: thank you so much for coming," he said. "I'll telephone down to you how she is in the morning."

Daisy had felt no difficulty and was conscious of no reservation in assuring Mrs. Heaton that there was not even the possibility of forgiveness; but lying awake that night, she found that the question was not really settled yet. At the moment the news that Teddy had once, though it was ten years ago, begun to think of her as his wife, was so stupendously sweet that it left no room in her mind for any other thought but itself. But now the unfulfilled claims of her empty womanhood began to assert themselves, the unmated years cried aloud to her from the banks by which the river of her life had flowed so long ago. Once he had begun to want her,

but his mother had somehow showed him that she did not want him to marry her. No doubt his need had not been clamant, but it might have been, it might have been! All that she had missed, the rapture and the pain of bearing children, rose before her, love and its fulfilment and its fruition. Passionately she wished that Mrs. Heaton, gratifying for her own relief one selfish impulse the more, had not told her: she might at least have kept this wrong she had done her to herself. But even as the bitterness of the knowledge rose acrid in her heart, that same sweetness with which she had heard what had been told her, flooded it again. Surely not forgiveness was needed but thanks. . . .

Then once again the voice of the years that had passed in such emptiness called to her. They had been full, it is true, of trivialities, of little activities, of pleasures, and in that lay their emptiness. The news had come too late: there was no significance in it now. Already Lambton coupled him and Annie Paulton as probable partners—it was clear that though once he had thought about herself, he had ceased to do so. And a flame of jealousy, that one emotion of the mind that is entirely fruitless, shot up within poor Daisy again.

Yes, she had always loved Teddy: she had been very happy all these years in the strong, wholesome friendship which united them; but how much of that

light really came from that, how much from that door in the house of her soul that she never allowed to be more than just a chink ajar? And then, thinking of him again to the exclusion of herself, she found with a sudden pang of shame that for this last hour, while she had tossed and turned on her uneasy bed, she had given no thought to what was happening now up at his house. The doctor had certainly said that there was no cause for immediate apprehension, and yet Daisy blushed in the darkness, knowing that she was remembering this for the first time,—the nurse had evidently been uneasy, for she had sent for the doctor again.

What if Mrs. Heaton was dying? What if, in the morning, Daisy heard that it was all over? She lay very still a moment, as at last she thought of this. Then she slipped out of bed, and knelt for a moment on the floor.

"O God, don't let me be too late," she said. "I do forgive. My entire will is to forgive. Entire: entire," she repeated.

CHAPTER VI

ON a cold November afternoon, some ten days later, Daisy was walking home down the hill from Mr. Teddy's house, wondering, and yet not caring, whether it was right of her to feel so happy. She went briskly, as was her wont, and indeed the clear twilight that followed the sunset was already frosty, making quick movement pleasant; also she was rather late for tea, and as usual, she had a reluctance to keep Marion waiting, which would in any case have prompted a rapidity of return to the house on the green. But her alacrity was not merely an effort inspired either by the nip of the evening air, or by the desire to give Marion her tea with as little delay as possible: it came from within, and she hurried down the road because her happiness prompted active motion.

She could not remember ever having felt so deep-rooted a *joie de vivre* as had been consistently hers since the night when she and her sister had gone up after dinner in answer to the telephoned request. It seemed rather terrible to have been happy like that,

for early next morning had come the news that Mrs. Heaton had died an hour or two after they had left that night. But she could no more banish her happiness than she could stop the beating of her blood. From that morning she had found herself in that position so infinitely dear to all women with unexpanded hearts of having a man unconsciously and instinctively depend on her. That Teddy had done with her, and that he was still doing. Their long friendship had not proved a thing of nought, from which, as the gossip of Lambton arranged, he was turning to find a closer tie in a newer friend. He arranged matters differently, and in the days that followed Daisy knew that she and no other was his 'pal.' It was not more than that. She did not tell herself that in their intercourse there was the slightest hint of more sentimental relations, but in his grief and loneliness he turned to her and to no other. Together they had gone through those heart-rending little tidyings, readjustments, rearrangings that are necessary when there has vanished from a house one who has had her home there, one, too, in this case, who had had the greater part of the house ordered to suit completely her own convenience. There was her corner of the drawing-room, where in front of her chair stood the fur-covered receptacle in which she inserted her feet. By it was the table on which was her work-bag embracing the apparatuses with which, while Teddy read the paper

to her, she knitted or crocheted various little mittens and shawls for her own use. There, too, stood the bookstand of novels, the perusal of which aloud by him after dinner, induced the dozings with which she supplemented the wakefulness she complained of at night. There lay there now, with an ivory paper-cutter marking the place, the volume he had last been reading to her. On a second table by her chair were the three shawls of various thicknesses which met the various requirements of the temperature, the small travelling clock which warned her of the approach of ten, the electric lamp with the long green cord which every evening had to be affixed to a plug in the wall, and the electric bell with another long green cord that communicated with her bedroom upstairs, and warned her maid that the moment for heating her milk had arrived. In the hall stood her bath-chair in which Teddy was wont to wheel her up and down the garden paths, when she thought the threatening weather rendered questionable the wisdom of going for a drive. By it was a certain little platform of boards to be laid down over the steps of the garden door, so that the springs of the bath-chair should not be jolted in passing over them, while on the pegs above the bath-chair hung an amazing variety of cloaks of graduated thickness, and by it stood an umbrella stand full of sunshades and umbrellas. On the dining-room chimney-piece was a small armoury of bottles containing tinctures,

and cardboard boxes contained cachets, and in the fireplace a spirit-lamp and kettle which kept hot the water she drank at meals. In the window was a writing-table which she used after breakfast in the winter, for the early sun came in here, with little sheaves of letters contained in elastic bands, and an apparatus for damping the backs of stamps, so as to avoid possible infection conveyed from their gummy surface to the tongue. There was another electric bell here with another long cord. . . . In all these readjustments and tidying Daisy was invaluable. From these long patient years which he had passed alone with his mother, Teddy had grown into these material aspects of her, in a tender old-maidish sort of way that was infinitely pathetic. At first he could hardly bear even the destruction of the tincture-bottles and the cachet-boxes, or the extirpation of long cords to electric bells which would henceforth be useless, or the removal of the bath-chair and its wooden platform that rendered the approach from the garden almost impregnable. But with quiet common sense she coaxed him into the removal of these relics that had become meaningless: he did not need them to keep alive his love of her, and the clinging to them was sentiment that might become mawkish. She handled him with admirable kindness and firmness, supporting him through those dreadful days which follow bereavement, when the vital forces have not rallied themselves enough to

look forward again, or indeed to dwell on the imperishable elements of the past, but cling to the material and the trivial, and sink rather on to regrets and missed opportunities than rise to robuster levels.

One morning they were sorting out her letters and papers, and Daisy was congratulating herself on the constant sound of tearing that went on from the table where he was sitting. But suddenly that ceased altogether, and presently, looking up, she saw that he was reading in a note-book that he had found on a shelf in his mother's bedroom and had brought down with other papers. He sat quite still, turning a page from time to time, but on his face was so piteous an expression of remorse and misery that presently she spoke.

"What have you got there, Mr. Teddy?" she said.

He looked up.

"A diary of my mother's," he said in a voice that he could scarcely command.

He went on with his reading, but soon came across to the fireplace near which she was sitting.

"I've failed altogether," he said. "All these years I've only been selfish and comfortable, thinking about my own wretched amusements and occupations."

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"There was never any one more devoted."

"My mother did not agree with you," said he, and handed her the book.

It was a diary of the last two or three years, an abominable little record, and she flushed as she ran her eye over the entries.

"T. very unkind to me to-day. . . . T. has been away amusing himself all day, and I have scarcely seen him. I lunched and had tea quite alone. . . . The old days at Withermere, when I was so surrounded by love and attention, are becoming quite unreal to me, and I can scarcely think it was I who was so happy and cared for. . . . T. insisted on some friends of his coming to dinner, and on playing Bridge afterwards. I was terribly exhausted: lost two rubbers. . . . T. is going away to-morrow for three days; this is the second time he has left me quite alone since Christmas. . . ."

Daisy did not trouble about more, but shut the book up, though she did not give it back to him.

"You know that there is no truth in it," she said. "You will do very wrong if you allow yourself to think of it."

He pointed at the book.

"That's what she thought of me," he said.

"Not even that. She didn't really think it. You know, Mr. Teddy, that she often complained to you about what she called your neglect of her. You always put that away from you, and went on doing your best, and a very good 'best' too. Well, here she only put down the things she said. You mustn't dwell on them any more than you did on what she

said sometimes. They aren't any more real because they are written down."

"But again and again she says how unkind I was," he said. "It's true I expect. I . . ."

He sat down on a chair near Daisy.

"I was always losing opportunities of making her life pleasanter and more amusing," he said, leaning his head in his hands. "I could have done so much more, and she knew it. I was so often impatient and cross with her. I often left her alone to amuse myself. . . ."

Daisy had no hesitation in interrupting this.

"Dear Mr. Teddy, you are simply being morbid," she said. "Supposing you judged other people by the same standards by which you are judging yourself? It isn't your conscience that accuses you. You know you did well. At least everybody else does. Now I want you to let me do one thing. I want you to let me put that diary into the fire. She often said things to you like those she has written here. You've put them into the fire: you never heeded them. You are being harsh towards your mother if you take seriously the harsh things she has written there. You are remembering things about her which you shouldn't. It isn't kind to her."

Teddy thought over this in silence.

"Unkind to her?" he said. "God knows I don't mean to be that."

"You are being so if you keep this book."

He got up.

"I see," he said. "Put it into the fire. And—
and thanks ever so much, Miss Daisy."

It was this talk above all others that had admitted her into an intimacy with him, which their years of friendship had never opened up yet. In the singularly quiet course of this Lambton existence, where, as Marion had once said, in starvation of literary material, nobody ever was born or died or married or quarrelled for more than a day or two, their lives had lain side by side like two smooth pebbles over which passed a clear-flowing stream. They had met only on their surfaces. But now some interpenetration had begun, such as might have begun years ago in the solvents of youth and passion, had not Mrs. Heaton intervened with a word and a chilly hint. Daisy did not mistake this middle-age^d exploration for the ardent huntings of youth, and she knew that his quick affectionate glance at her was no more than the glance that one man might give another in acknowledgment of a friend's service. Nor did she so much as dream of using that spark of intimacy which had sprung from one to the other and back again, to light the way to anything further. She might easily have said something to remind him that she was a woman and he a man, or given a touch of sentimentality to the situation, but she would have bitten her tongue out sooner than do so. He had turned to her in his grief and his loneliness,

and she was there in the hope of giving him exactly such help as a brother or sister might have done, or as no doubt Robin would have done if he had been here. Robin, she acknowledged to herself, would probably have done it far more successfully than she, for Robin could have clapped his hand on Teddy's shoulder, or indulged in any of those sexless intimacies which her sex forbade her (since she would have nothing sentimental in their present relations) to attempt. She had to make her service as simple as a man's would have been, and, above all, she must not put him in a position in which when he recovered himself a little from the shock and desolation of his mother's death he would find himself owing her one particle more than he would reasonably owe to another man in such circumstances. Her dealings with him required the infinite delicacy of simplicity. If they were to come together in any other way but this, the approach must unmistakably be initiated by him. She could be ready for it—and God knows she was—but she must not move a finger to set his approach in motion. The part of a brother or a sister, to be executed to the best of her power, was assigned to her, and her heart exulted to think that he had chosen her, not another (that sweet woman in the house next door), to perform it. But for all the delicate rightness of this perception, Daisy felt a barbarous joy in the fact that she and not Annie Paulton was here with him, and would gladly have

made faces and long noses in the direction of Mrs. Paulton's garden gate as she passed it afterwards.

Such was the history of the ten days that made Daisy bubble with happiness as she went back on this November evening to her sister. The privacy of their intimacy, as she knew, was beginning to pass off, as the lapse of days restored Teddy to the levels of ordinary life, and with the finished tidying and destructions and preservations he began to take up his life again. She had made no attempt to prolong these days; they must last only as long as was necessary to put the house in order, while he collected himself out of the past making himself ready for the future, and to-day before she left they had spent an hour in his studio, where a fire had been lighted again that morning, and had put things in order for the resumption of his work next day. Robin's face was eager on the canvas of the meeting of Dante and Beatrice, his figure sketched in, and they clothed the lay figure in the Italian robe for Teddy to begin painting from. Teddy had been a little remorseful for having seen nothing of Cousin Annie and Rosemary all these days and was meaning to ask them to lunch to-morrow, and Daisy with all her yesterdays safely garnered applauded this retarded piety. Would she come too? Well, she almost thought she would not, for she had so completely neglected Marion lately. And in that refusal there lurked, ever so deep down, the germ of

all that which she had excluded from the intercourse of these ten days. He asked if she would be in to tea next day : might he be allowed to come in ? He might : indeed he might. But she had not beckoned ever so slightly.

These were the happiest ten days she had ever known ; she had done a difficult thing well, and in the doing of it had found the huge reward of a fresh arena of friendship with him. Hitherto, during all their years, they had met on the platform, so to speak, of public entertainers ; once and again he had got a little off that with her, and they had talked in the green-room ; but the solitude of those days over this tender business of destroying and preserving, a business that in its very nature belongs to maturity of life, had never touched them before. It had been done, though in private, with frankness and openness, they had met and seen so much of each other over that business and no other. There were no claims entered there which must be satisfied hereafter.

Daisy had not wished to prolong these days, and in the days that followed she saw him emerging again into normal life without a regret that they were over. She still held as her own particular secret the communication that Mrs. Heaton had made her on the night she died, she held also the knowledge that inferentially was Teddy's, that he had chosen her as the companion and assessor of

the task they had been through together. But all this had encouraged her to persevere in the pursuit or rather the retention of youth, that might facilitate his further approach to her. She was not initiating that approach, she was only making herself more ready for it. For he had begun to approach once, as his mother had told her, and the eternal feminine in her bade her prepare for a renewed movement. It would start now from a solidier platform, for she had been with him in the hour of an intimate grief and had given him a man's help, worked with him like a comrade. Then, when he began to go about again, she slid back into her sex.

Dissection, we must suppose, unless performed on lifeless bodies, is always a cruel matter, but it is only by dissection that the workings of the human spirit are made manifest, and to the human spirit when revealed the dissector yields in reverence to none. But the processes. . . . It was noticed, for instance, that Daisy had a bloom of colouring which Mrs. Joyce, at any rate, had not noticed before on her cheeks. Certainly it was very becoming; it made Daisy's eyes appear more brilliant; but did it really deceive anybody? Mrs. Andrew concurred: she had noticed not only that, but that Miss Daisy's hair no longer showed the smallest sign of greyness. She might have been mistaken as to there having been grey hair there before—what wonder if there was, for Miss Marion

had been patched with faded colour when she was only thirty—but she thought that Miss Daisy had been showing a little tendency that way also, which apparently she had checked. Mrs. Joyce concurred, and thought she was not mistaken in believing that Miss Daisy had appeared in two new dresses lately, one tailor-made and most unusual, which accounted for her inexplicable visit to London, the other just such a dress as anybody might indulge in when the severe wintry weather was expected. Apparently also Miss Daisy had managed to learn how to smoke a cigarette : no doubt Miss Marion, who had a stain on her forefinger like that which a constant application of strong iodine might give, had induced her to cultivate this unfeminine habit. These were not unfriendly criticisms ; they only found their way into conversation singly and allusively ; but students of human nature (as seen in each other), such as the ladies of Lambton undoubtedly were, would have been wanting in acumen if they had failed to notice these little changes in Miss Daisy's appearance. They were there, that was all, and it would have been a hebetude not to be aware of them. The registration and momentary discussion of them did not for an instant diminish their sincere regard and friendship for Miss Daisy. But it was true, wasn't it, that since Mrs. Heaton's death she had been up to the house every day ? Mrs. Joyce could not hear that Mrs. Paulton had been there at all.

It was all gossip, but such gossip was founded on fact, which the gossip about Mr. Teddy and Mrs. Paulton had not been. Lambton sincerely wished Daisy well: after all, her friendship with Mr. Teddy was a matter of years, and if now that Mr. Teddy felt lonely she wanted to show her ability of youthful companionship, Heaven grant that Mr. Teddy felt inclined for it too. Years ago, as Mrs. Joyce triumphantly recollected, there had been some mention of this. Indeed, she had mentioned it herself.

None of these rumours and detections reached Daisy; she would not have cared if they had. She was engaged on a serious and legitimate business, and if she employed on that just a morsel of rouge and a dip of hair dye, and spent six pounds of her own money on a tailor-made dress, it was her own concern, and mattered to nobody else. She was perfectly well aware that Lambton might comment on these unusual appurtenances, but that was of no moment to her. She felt young, or at any rate was engaged in the attempt at feeling young; these aids helped her realization of youth when she looked in the little glass above her dressing-table, or in the big cheval-glass that was in Marion's room, which showed her the complete figure in its tailor-made gown. There was no inherent honesty in looking your worst; there was no inherent dishonesty either in looking your best. She wanted to be her best, and for that reason (not ferreted out by Mrs. Joyce)

she ordered a splendid tonic from the chemist's, in which nux vomica appeared as an ingredient. It made her feel young, and she wanted to feel young. And, after all, the stuff for the hair distinctly stated that it was not a dye, but renewed the activity of the cells that supplied the pigment to the hair. Certainly it appeared to do so with amazing celerity, and the colour shot along the hair in question. The rouge? The rouge made no such rejuvenating promises. But it encouraged her, and the little looking-glass above the dressing-table approved of it. She felt the essentials of youth bustling within her, as the sap bustles upwards in the trunks of trees at spring-time. And St. Martin's summer, when unexpected flowers burst into bud, and thrushes suddenly break into song again, as if it was the season of mating, is so extremely like spring to those who have never felt authentic April.

Mr. Teddy was somewhat in the same predicament, though he did not employ the aids to the realization of youth which his friend mildly resorted to. Devoted as he had been to his mother, so that all his untiring surrender of his own convenience and mode of life to her had been a service of love, made with that complete unconsciousness which only love can attain, he could not but be conscious now of the added liberty which her death brought him. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to welcome it, and eagerly would he have gone back into his

servitude, if servitude could have restored her to him, but since by the decrees of life and death his loved burden had been removed, it was but natural that he should expand the wings which he had kept furled so long. The whole day was his, he could dispose it as he willed, and since he had an extremely gregarious and sociable nature, his friends saw far more of him than they had been accustomed to even in the burst of gaieties for which the last summer would be for ever memorable. In particular he increased rapidly in intimacy with his friends next door, for though Mrs. Heaton had given them a very cousinly welcome, even as she had given Robin, there had always been in their intercourse that suggestion of a court, held by her, which she invariably managed to introduce into all her social dealings with Lambton, and a great deal of stately talk about Withermere. Now that was gone; nobody would listen to the tale of dearest papa's hunters any more, and the foliage of a more intimate friendship was given a chance to sprout. It became common for Teddy to go round to the house next door of an evening if he had dined alone and enquire if the ladies would admit him for an hour's chat before bedtime. Soon the last remnants of formality vanished from these gatherings, so that if Annie Paulton was reading, she would but give him a word of welcome and continue her book if so disposed, leaving him to take an evening paper or talk to Rosemary. Or if she and Rose-

mary were battling with Patience, Teddy would interest himself in that, or occupy himself in any way he chose until they had finished. No arrangements or entertainments were made for him: if he dropped in, it was for the sake of being in the room with them, and taking his share in the pot-luck of intercourse. But it may be noted that quite early after the inception of these informal evening calls, when Teddy trotted back about half-past ten to his own house, he found that the surprise of finding it so late was most conspicuous when he had been thrown with Rosemary. On those occasions, too, when he closed his front door and put up the chain, he felt more markedly than on others a certain sense of loneliness in his own home. There was nothing acute about either of these sensations: they were but among those veiled thoughts that move about in the shadowed places in a man's consciousness, and do not stand out in the rank of images definitely formed.

On one such evening, towards the end of November, he was admitted as usual, but found only Rosemary in the drawing-room. The girl had the fragments of a jig-saw puzzle out on the table in front of her, but got up with alacrity when he came in.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," she said, "for mother's gone to bed in order to stifle a threatening cold, and I was afraid I might be reduced to spending the evening over that," and she pointed with a long-

fingered hand to the pile of unsorted fragments. "It's so degrading, you know, to do a jig-saw puzzle."

"But are you sure you don't mind being bored by me for an hour?" asked Teddy, shaking hands.

"Yes, but please don't bore me, or that would be as bad as the puzzle. Why should you bore me? Or is that only a polite way of wondering whether you really want to be bored by me."

"I should like to be bored by you," said Teddy, sitting down. "Now begin. How am I to show when I'm bored?"

"I suppose yawning in the usual manner. But don't yawn, it's so frightfully infectious. Do you know how people look when they try to smother a yawn? Their chins drop, and their eyes fill with tears."

She imitated this with excellent fidelity.

"I saw you do it the other day," she said, "when Ozzy Vickary told you about his Indian Civil examination."

Teddy rubbed his hands over his knees.

"Yes, yes, I seem to recapture something of the sensation," he said. "That young man is really rather hard to bear. He always tries to interest one in something, with but poor results. Is it his voice, do you think?"

Rosemary considered this.

"No, I think it's his hands," she said. "No one

with hands like that could say anything that one cared to hear. Fancy having to listen to Mr Vickary talking on the deaf and dumb alphabet with those hands. They are like hands a child draws, number of fingers correct and a thumb. Now, Mr. Teddy, don't look at your hands: try not to. Talking about hands always makes people self-conscious and they look at their own. I'm getting hideously aware of mine. But if I talked about noses you and I wouldn't jump up and look at ourselves in the glass there."

Teddy laughed.

"I may safely say that I shouldn't," he said. "Try."

The girl drew her chair rather closer to the fire, and rather nearer him.

"Noses, colds," she remarked. "That's the connection I think."

"With what?"

"With what I am going to say. Mother's been rather cross with me, and I was feeling slightly ill-used when you came in. At least she was not so much cross as kind. She had a headache, poor dear, and so of course when I tried to mend the fire, I knocked all the fire-irons down. I picked them up and did it again, and she said, 'Thank you, darling, for mending the fire.' If she hadn't been cross, she would have said, 'That's the second time you've made that horrible row.'"

"Yes, that's quite true," said Teddy. "There's a certain sort of kind Christian smile which is the unkindest thing I know. Miss Marion puts it on sometimes, if you interrupt her work."

"I know it," said she. "But it isn't so much Miss Marion who is cross as her work that's cross at being interrupted. Oh, and I suppose in the same way it wasn't mother who was cross with me, but her cold."

Teddy nodded.

"Very likely," he said. "You've always got to separate what a person is, from what he may happen to do."

"Ah, you comforting person," said Rosemary. "So if some day you see me behaving quite abominably to some one, I will know that you are thinking that it's not me but my toothache, or whatever is happening. Do smoke, by the way, because I want to, so if mother's cold smells tobacco in the morning, I can say it was you. Oh, and if her cold smells tobacco, it will show it's better."

Teddy took the offered refreshment.

"I'm sure you've got to separate what a person really is from what he often does," he said. "What you make friends with, what you love, is the best part of him. And—and you peel off the rest like orange-rind, and throw it away."

"And then foolish people step on it," remarked Rosemary, "and fall down and hurt

themselves. Isn't that going on too far with your metaphor?"

"I think it is. I only meant that you mustn't judge people by their rind."

She sat looking into the fire a minute rather absently, trying to make smoke-rings and most signally failing. She, who had so often seen his infinite patience with his mother, recognized how excellently he lived up to his precept, and, quite wisely, did not intimate or allude to her perception of this.

"I know one makes a great mistake if one lets oneself take seriously little cross remarks, or things of that sort," he said, thinking of his mother's diary. "It makes oneself miserable, and is most unjust and unkind. That was pointed out to me the other day very wisely and well."

Rosemary threw her cigarette-end into the fire.

"Oh, you are a comfortable person!" she said: "at least you are in the sense that you make other people comfortable. I suppose Miss Marion would say that was bad grammar. Mr. Teddy, have you read the last instalment of *Lady Clementine* in the *Parish Magazine*? It's *the* most priceless!"

Teddy looked round, as if to see that there was no one in hearing. Officially, of course, he was bound to burn candles at the shrine of local genius, and he felt a shade treacherous in discussing Miss Marion from any other standpoint.

"Well, I have," he said, "and positively it made me blush."

"When she burns her annotated commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews," said Rosemary in a whisper with dancing eyes.

Teddy's pleasant face got a considerable degree redder, as he bit his lip, and shook slightly internally.

"And she could read the words on the ashes even after the pages were burned," he said.

He rashly looked round and caught Rosemary's eye, and they both went off into fits of laughter, and sat rocking in their chairs. It was quite a long time before either recovered a coherent power of speech.

"Lor'!" said Mr. Teddy at length, wiping his streaming eyes.

"I've kept a copy to show Mr. Robin," said Rosemary when sobriety was restored. "He was the first to tell me about the story when he was here in September. He brought over a number of it, and we howled."

"The wicked fellow," said Teddy. "Why didn't he tell me?"

"He might have heard you discussing it with Miss Marion, you know," said Rosemary, "and thought you wouldn't appreciate the humour. I heard you doing that once. I'm bound to say that you appreciate the humour of it now."

Teddy rose.

"Well, you and I must be as grave as augurs

when it's alluded to, Miss Rosemary," said he. "No one but Robin must ever know we laughed so about it. It does do one good to laugh like that, doesn't it? Good gracious me, if it isn't after eleven. What an hour for me to be keeping you up to. Why didn't you send me away?"

Rosemary shook hands.

"Why on earth should I?" she asked. "By the way, when does Robin—I beg his pardon, Mr. Robin—come back?"

"Seventh of December," said Teddy. "I heard from him to-day. Just a fortnight."

"And he'll be here for a month, you said?"

"Yes, unless he finds me quite intolerable. You must promise to help me to keep him amused."

"If Lady Clementine doesn't, nothin' will," said Rosemary. "Good-night."

It was a singularly dark night, and Teddy as he shuffled out into the blackness, still giggling at the atheistic proceedings of Lady Clementine, ran into a hedge and then his own palings, and finally, still in chinks of laughter, had so long and groping a search for the insertion of his latch-key that it really seemed as if during his absence a new front door with no keyhole in it had been maliciously substituted for the one that was familiar to him. Eventually he discovered its coy whereabouts, and a moment afterwards had shut it quietly again, and stood alone inside. But to-night, though he had spent so friendly

an hour with her, he had no sense of the solitariness that so often succeeded his visits when he was back in his house again. He felt that something of her had returned with him, the pressure of her hand lingered in his, the sound of her laughter still echoed in some memorial chamber of his ear, the aroma of her whole presence still haunted him; to-night it had not been cut off, as at the turning of a tap, when he had closed his door behind him. Ridiculous fancies came unbidden into his brain: had she let herself out of her house to follow him, and, as on one night when he, she, and Robin had talked ghosts together, would there presently come the sound of a tapping on the window-pane, or a scratching on the door outside? Laughing at himself for conceiving so impossible an absurdity, he yet indulged himself in it, as he stood smoking a final cigarette before he went to bed, and strained his ear for the sound of her knuckles. He even unbolted the front-door again, and looking out into the darkness, called her by name, addressing the empty night. "You won't frighten me, Miss Rosemary," he intrepidly declared, and almost waited for the answer of her laugh. Almost he saw her crouching at the edge of the panel of light the open hall-door flung on to the gravel.

This pleasant wraith of his visit moved about with him from room to room, as he went first into the drawing-room to get the evening paper he had not yet glanced at, and then back into the hall again to

look at the news. He had quite transformed this, making a sitting-room of it ; a curtain cut it off from the front door, and by the fireplace, near which had stood the bath-chair and its platform, with the garniture of cloaks and sunshades, there were now easy-chairs and a sofa, and the paraphernalia of sociable half-hours. Here, too, the wraith lingered with him, and walked upstairs with him when presently he went up to bed, passing on tiptoe the door of his mother's room, by which he had so often gone with his shoes in his hand for fear of awakening her.

Teddy undressed quickly, and put out his light, expecting as usual to fall asleep without delay. But to-night it seemed that the theatre of his brain refused to put out its lights too, and behind the darkness of his closed eyelids memory was luminous. He saw the girl again sitting in the low chair near him with her mouth pouted out to blow smoke-rings, and her blue eyes, blue even in the red of the firelight, anxiously watching the amorphous streams of smoke. The flame on the hearth lit little focuses of brightness in her hair, and smouldered in the string of pearls round her throat. Or again she turned to him with the light of laughter in her eyes, though for the moment her mouth was grave ; then that quivered into laughter as she spoke of the incendiary scepticism of Lady Clementine. More completely yet the laughter invaded her face and she threw herself back in her chair with her hands clasped behind her head,

and the firelight shining into her open mouth. And once more she stood facing him as he said good-night, their eyes on a level, and the warmth of her hand tingling in his.

He consciously distracted his thoughts, and surveyed, with sleepiness already beginning to dim his brain, the occupations of next day. Daisy and Marion were going to lunch with him, not at half-past one but at two, so that Marion could get in a full morning's work first. He would be busy too in his studio, over the figure of Dante, which was really getting on very nicely. . . . Then a sudden idea sprang into his brain, scattering the mists that were beginning to settle there.

"I wonder if she would stand for Beatrice," he said aloud.

CHAPTER VII

It was only natural that, instead of beginning his work directly after breakfast next morning, Teddy should trot round—trotting was really needful in order to keep warm on this frosty morning—to enquire after Mrs. Paulton's cold, which had deprived him of her company the evening before. It may be presumed also that since he was intending to set to work in his studio immediately afterwards, his mind did not completely keep off the subject of his picture. Rosemary had happened to see his brisk approach up the short drive, and opened the door to him herself.

"No, poor darling, she's in bed," she said, "and won't let me go to sit with her till Dr. Stables has come and pronounced that she hasn't got influenza. Come in for a warm, won't you?"

"Well, just for a minute. I'm going to paint all morning. But do come and lunch with me instead of sitting solitary, in case it is flue. Miss Marion and Miss Daisy are coming——"

"And the Epistle to——" began Rosemary. Teddy laughed.

"Dear me, what fun we had last night over nothing at all," he said. "Then you'll come, won't you? Two o'clock. Give my affectionate sympathy to your mother."

"I will, and I'll come at two. Don't make me laugh again. And now you're going to paint all morning. How is it getting on?"

The artful Teddy had laid a trap for this. She could hardly not enquire how it was getting on.

"I'm afraid I shall be stuck after to-day," he said, "when I've finished Dante. I can't get a model for Beatrice."

"Miss Marion," said Rosemary. "Beatrice is reading a book, isn't she? That'll be the Epistle to the Hebrews. Oh no, it can't. It was burned. There must be another copy of it."

Teddy laughed.

"You don't take me and my work seriously," he said. "But really, I don't know why you should."

"Oh, but I do. I love what you've done. It's just like Mr. Robin too."

"He'll have to stand again when he comes back," said Teddy. "But that must wait for him. What I shall stick about is Beatrice." He paused a moment.

"I say, will you help me?" he asked.

"Me? This thing?" asked Rosemary.

"It really would be kind of that thing," said Teddy.

"Why, of course, if I shall be of the slightest use. But I recommend Miss Marion."

"Oh, do be serious!"

"I can't. You tend to frivolity, do you know? I always laugh with you."

"Well, you may laugh at me if you like, if you'll only come and smile at Robin," said Teddy rather neatly.

"I'll smile at you and Robin. One here, one there," she said, making a pair of wonderful grimaces.

"It's really angelic of you, Miss Rosemary," he said. "Now this is a very fine morning for being painted. Why not come across now?"

"I must wait for the doctor. But I'll come as soon as he's been. And shall I dress up? What fun! I wonder if I've got any gown that will do. All women like being painted because somebody is looking at their pretty clothes."

"I should like to get your pr— face first," said Teddy.

She laughed.

"Very good, my pr— face and I will come across in an hour. Mr. Teddy, why shouldn't we have a gate in the palings that separate our immense estates, so that if by chance we wished to look in, we shouldn't have to go down one drive, and along a bit of road, and up another drive? Mother suggested it to me, but didn't dare suggest it to you until you had suggested it to her. It seemed to me that we

shouldn't make any really great progress on these lines, since probably it hadn't occurred to you, and if it had you would have waited for her to suggest it to you before you suggested it to her. So Rosemary stepped in, a forward minx."

"Shocking!" said Teddy. "But of course it's the very thing. You should have seen me butting into the hedge and the palings last night. I'll send down to the town as soon as I get back, and have a carpenter up this morning."

The pace of Teddy's return home was fully as rapid as that of his outward journey, for quantities of little businesses, all to be executed immediately in the Lambton fashion, which made everybody feel what a whirl life was, speeded his feet along the frosty road. He had to telephone for a carpenter to come up instantly to see about the construction of the gate in the palings; he had to tell his cook that there would be four, not three, for lunch, and since four was a party at Lambton, and three an affair of pot-luck, strive to stir her somewhat sluggish imagination with regard to a savoury. But more important than even these was the preparation of his studio for his sitter. The stove was adequate for the warming of it, but a log-fire must at once be lit in the open hearth to provide a brightness for bright eyes, a carpet must be put on the model's platform, the slightly indelicate lay-figure must be stuffed into a cupboard, and if, on the sheltered

the house, the frost of the night before still spared the chrysanthemums, a vase of these must be plucked to make a winter gaiety of flowers. . . . But already such peremptory little businesses which year in year out had been sufficient to produce the Lambton sense of 'whirl,' were but minutiae in the foreground of the landscape across which his feet were hurrying. His eyes already were set beyond the plain, where mist-like and dim there rose the shapes of the blue mountains. Once only, years ago, he had thought that perhaps he saw a glimpse of some such peaks. Now, dim though they were and distant, he knew they were no imagined or conjectured forms. But the consciousness of their existence did not make him go about his small businesses with less attention; rather it added point and importance to them. For the blue mountains, so to speak, would use the gate in the palings and admire the brightness of the logs, and eat the savoury, and perhaps take a chrysanthemum or two from the vase.

Had it then been only Miss Marion and Miss Daisy who would perhaps pay a visit to the studio after lunch, it is likely that the chrysanthemums would have been left in the south border, and the heating power of the stove proved itself amply sufficient. As it was, when they arrived at the house slightly before two—for the authoress had pumped herself dry of emotion before the morning

had run its full length, and was extremely hungry—they were shown into the studio before lunch, and found Teddy ecstatically engaged, and quite unaware of the passage of time. Pleasant as that room always was, there seemed an unusual sunshine here to-day, for it was not only bright with fire and flowers, but on the platform, with chin a little raised in the attitude in which Teddy had posed her, sat Rosemary. Even as the door opened, he exclaimed, "Ah, one second more, one second more," and in obedience to him the girl still looked a little upwards, a little outwards, with a smile hovering over her lips rather than quite alighting on them. She had caught the nuance of Teddy's psychology with admirable accuracy: he had told her that as Beatrice, she had been smiling at some pleasant thought of her own, when lifting her eyes she saw Dante: the smile must just leave the lips (else the irreverent British public, if ever it was to see this masterpiece, would say that she was smiling at this stranger, which would never do), but it must linger somehow . . . he had often seen her beginning to attend to something serious after she had been laughing. But in spite of the warmth and brightness of the room, of the radiant girl sitting there, of her friend on fire with his work, Daisy felt just a moment's chill as she entered, some clairvoyant shiver perhaps from the well of subconsciousness. It lasted but a second, for, with a final touch of his brush, Teddy

laid down his palette and turned with both hands outstretched to welcome them.

“ And did any one ever see such bad manners,” he cried, stripping off his painting-blouse, “ but I had no idea it was two o'clock yet, and after all I'm sure I don't wonder, for I was thinking of Beatrice, who was thinking of Dante. Miss Marion, if you've enjoyed your morning's work as much as I have, I envy you, I congratulate you. And now let me help the maid down from yonder mountain height ; ah, she doesn't want to be helped, and jumps straight down the precipice on to the floor and alights unhurt ! Now let me take your cloaks and put them down for you. Upon my word, this is a jolly party.”

Teddy bustled into the hall with his visitors' wraps, and came swiftly back again with the news that lunch was ready, to find the others looking at his morning's work, which was indeed an admirable performance. Unfinished though the sketch was, he had already caught the youthful poise of the head, and on the mouth was the hint of the hovering smile.

“ Ah, that's not to be looked at yet,” he said, taking the canvas from his easel, “ but you shall see it when I've transferred it to the big picture. But it's coming : I believe it's coming. Bless me, there's nothing like work to give you an appetite for lunch.”

Marion and Rosemary led the way to the dining-room, and he followed with Daisy. She had on, of

course, the smart tailor-made gown, and a bright cerise riband in her hat, and a very becoming colour on her cheeks, brought there by the walk up the hill on this crisp morning, and ever so slightly assisted exteriorly.

“ And you look so well, too, my dear Miss Daisy,” he said, “ you with your new gown, or I am much mistaken, and your rosy face, if you’ll forgive an old friend for being personal. These first frosts of the winter make one feel young again, don’t they? Yes, will you sit there, and Miss Marion opposite you, for we mustn’t put sisters together, and you opposite me, Miss Rosemary? ”

Teddy looked round him with unutterable satisfaction. The appetite for life, not only for lunch, had come back to him to-day. He had friends with him at his table; his oldest friend and his newest were both there, while on his right was that excellent Miss Marion who had made him and his newest friend laugh so much the evening before. Into his work, at which all these months since his birthday in June he had been so industrious and so uninspired, there had come a touch of the divine fire again, of which he had not really felt the warmth since he painted, years ago, that admirable portrait of his mother which hung opposite him. For, in spite of all the dilatoriness of his life, from an artistic point of view, there still smouldered in him the spark, which the right stimulus, the right pair of bellows,

so to speak, may always cause to burst into flame again. And this morning, as he had worked, absorbed and engrossed, he knew that the ash was not quite dead yet, knew it with that conviction of the artist that is one of the most certain things in the world. He had had moments, when he had been painting Robin, in which he had hoped that this was so, but the completeness of his picture was not then visualized: ahead of him always there had been the unrealized figure of Beatrice, that threatened to remain unrealized. But to-day the light of creation dawned, and he knew it was good. The little candle was lit which casts its ray so far, and illuminates sooner or later all the darknesses and difficulties that lie about the way of execution. He had the trained hand and the seeing eye: what he had lacked, what he knew he had now got, was the light by which his eyes could see. There was the light opposite him now at his table; a light, blue mountains, the face of Beatrice, the face of Rosemary.

The meal proceeded with great merriment, though Marion was slightly morose, in consequence of the afflatus having gone astray. But Daisy, invigorated by Teddy's compliments (she had not in the least minded the personal remarks of an old friend), felt amazingly young and spirited. That momentary qualm which had shivered through her when she entered the studio had vanished like a touch of mere physical goose-flesh, and strong in the consciousness

of her tailor-made gown and rosy face, she felt herself at the top of her form. She and Rosemary were being girls together, and though she did not flatter herself that she had Rosemary's beauty, she was sure that Rosemary could not feel younger than herself. Her hat just a little shaded those spots of colour on her cheeks which, though due to her walk no doubt, had not in the least faded, and, seen like that, as she had seen them in her looking-glass before setting out, they quite justified the testimonial of indetectability with which they had been accompanied.

" Ah, and do you remember how we all played ghosts at night, in the garden, when Mr. Robin was here ? " she was saying to the girl. " I never ran so fast in my life as I did when I caught sight of him among the gooseberry bushes. I flew down the path ! "

" And very stiff you were next day, " said Marion, suddenly and disconcertingly interrupting her conversation with Teddy. " You could hardly hobble. "

" Nonsense, dear ! " said Daisy inextinguishably. " And then, Miss Rosemary, what fun we had over the charades: when you and I were Romeo and Juliet, and Mr. Robin was the nurse. I adore charades. "

Teddy joined in.

" I know, what a nurse ! " he said. " He looked therossest old Mrs. Gamp that can be imagined. "

Send round those chocolates, please, Miss Rosemary, unless you want to eat all of them."

Rosemary held the dish out to Daisy.

"I really think Miss Daisy and I can manage them all," she said. "Do send for some more."

Daisy laughed, with an odd little involuntary squeak at the end.

"Oh, I must have one more before they go," she said. "Too delicious!"

Marion felt rather less morose by this time, and instead of reminding her sister that the last time she had eaten freely of chocolates they had not (what might be called) suited her, she turned to Teddy, making amends for her previous disconcerting speech.

"Those two girls will have cleared the dish before it gets to me," she said, "so I'll light my cigarette now, if I may."

"Do, dear," cried Daisy, "and I hope you won't mind Miss Rosemary and me eating while you smoke."

This was a quip but lately arrived at Lambton, and not at present in common currency, since it so seldom happened that smoking occurred at all in dining-rooms, at any rate till all question of eating and drinking and the presence of ladies had been dismissed. Mr. Vickary had been responsible for the importation: he had heard it in London when he last went to the dentist, and though he had told it Daisy three days ago, she had forborne to repeat

it as an isolated witticism, on the chance of getting an opportunity to do so when it appeared to spring spontaneously out of the conversation. Her economy was well rewarded: it had been a brilliant piece of parsimony.

"Dear me, Daisy, that's very good," said Marion approvingly. (She regretted that she had not heard it in the middle of the morning, when the brilliant company at Lord Agincourt's simply would not be brilliant. A thing like that might have set them off again.) "That's very good. If you don't mind me smoking, no, I mean if you don't mind my eating while you smoke. I like that!"

Daisy felt a momentary scruple about retaining the credit of this, instead of rendering it to Mr. Vickary, but it passed, when she heard Mr. Teddy join his laugh to Marion's. She was being young, she was being gay, and, oh! how delightful it was. But she did not pause to sniff in the incense: she went straight on, in the manner of youth's careless triumphs.

"Oh, then, we needn't pass our chocolates now," she said to Rosemary. "Look, there are just three left. You may have two: I believe I began first. Mr. Teddy, I wish you would ask us all to lunch every day. Cigarette? Yes, I think I will have a cigarette if Marion doesn't mind my smoking while—while she smokes!"

There was further applause at this, and Daisy had

no qualms about assigning the authorship of it to any one : it was quite her own. She was sitting with both elbows rather dashingly on the table, even as Rosemary was sitting, nibbling the last of the chocolates between her small milky teeth that showed below her smiling upper lip. As she smiled, little soft creases, hardly marked enough to be dimples, showed on each side of her mouth, and there were little melting wrinkles, soft as the wave-marks on the sand, below the outer corners of her eyes. As she closed her mouth over the finished chocolate these were completely expunged again, as if the tide had returned and flowed over them.

And then suddenly Teddy caught sight of both of them together, framed in one picture. Hitherto, his glance had gone from one to the other and back again, seeing now the entrancing young girl at the end of the table, now on his left the dear friend of so many years' standing, for whom he had so strong and so true an affection. He knew well her goodness and her worth ; he rejoiced to see her looking so young and so well, and so full of amiable good-humour and spirits. But at this moment, and only momentarily, he saw them together. He saw Daisy's tailor-made sleeves covering angular elbows on the table, and her shoulders pushed into high prominence by the posture : he saw Rosemary's slim round arms moulded by the lines of her jacket, and her shoulders not high and stiff, but low and slack and youthful.

He saw, before Rosemary dropped her lip to finish her chocolate, that the lower edge of her teeth was just stained with brown where she had bitten : he saw a perfectly similar stain on Daisy's rather longer teeth, and it seemed to him out of place there. As Daisy turned her head to him, he saw certain lines, certain hints of strings and sinews below the skin : he saw on Rosemary's neck the soft shadows of the same sort of modelling, but the lines had no edges. Not an atom of his appreciation and affection for the one was diminished, but for that single second his heart leaped past her, as she looked at him, dodging her almost, and lighted on the other.

Rosemary caught his eye, caught it laughingly and lightly, while Daisy's sought it and missed it.

" And do you mind my not smoking while you all smoke ? " she said. " I tried once : Mr. Robin gave me a cigarette ; I gave it back to him instantly, and he threw it away, and told me it had cost a penny."

Marion had the impression that there was glitter going on. She adored glitter, but found it easier to ' do ' the serious parts. When heart-felt emotions, tragic choices, or spiritual conflicts were on the page, she went along swimmingly, because she could so easily imagine these for herself, and clothe them in perfectly suitable language. But the flippancies, the light play of wit on the surface of intercourse, she found less easy to render. It was that which had

stood in her way all the morning, when Daisy had left her in that seclusion which she found so necessary to literary effort. And yet here was Daisy quite naturally taking part in this glitter, and glittering famously. Daisy was not often so discursively brilliant, and her sister wondered where she got it from, little suspecting that it was out of those depths which she herself found so wonderfully easy to portray that this lightness came. In Daisy's heart the 'army with banners' was marching; she was waving her plumes jauntily and bravely on parade, as she showed herself ready for the serious business.

Teddy's guests stopped rather unusually long that afternoon: Marion, for her part, was not unwilling to linger, and pick up more glitter, and though Rosemary and her host had half-projected a visit to the estate paling to settle exactly where the door of communication was to be cut, it was impossible for him to suggest an adjournment, while Miss Daisy still showed a reluctance to remind her sister that it was time they were going. But eventually there came a mysterious message that 'the carpenter would have to be getting back,' upon which Teddy announced the scheme of the communicating gate, and proposed that they should all go out together and determine the most convenient point. This led to general surprise at the lateness of the hour, and Daisy, protesting that Marion would scold her for

having allowed her to stop so long, had one more look at the unfinished head on the small canvas, one more gasp at the big picture, one more fleeting glance at the portrait of herself, executed ten years ago, and so little (if at all) altered from what she was to-day, and declared it would be tea-time before they got home. This really seemed extremely likely, and since Marion wanted to get in a good spell of work before dinner the sisters hurried off down the drive, with as many lookings-back and wavings of hands as if they were on the point of starting for ever to the Antipodes.

If Marion had been a stern critic over the crippling results of Daisy's playing ghosts in the garden, she was not one who forbore to render honour where honour was due, and when they had waved their last to the three figures on the doorstep (for the threatening carpenter had joined the others) she spoke very handsomely indeed.

"I must say that you were in wonderful form at lunch, Daisy," she said. "There were three or four things at least of yours that I wanted to remember."

Daisy felt aware that this was no more than her due, but it is always satisfactory to have justice done. And there was no doubt whatever that when Marion praised there was nothing insincere or sycophantic about her approbation. Marion was not made like that.

" My dear, to think that I should have said anything worth remembering ! " cried Daisy. " I am sure if I did, it was only something very foolish and in high spirits. If you mean that by being in wonderful form, I confess that I was."

Marion marched down the road in silence for a dozen yards. She wore a thick green ulster with large brass buttons, a brown tam-o'-shanter perched like a forage-cap on the side of her short-cropped grey locks, and a faded pink scarf of worsted work round her neck. For Marion had her vanities, and one of them which she constantly indulged was to look like a working-man. The particular species of working-man whom she looked like at this moment was a rat-catcher.

" No, high-spirited nonsense is very far from being foolish," said Marion splendidly. " There must be contrast in life (this was straight from the not very successful conversation of this morning) : there must be foam and sunlight on the crests of the waves as well as the depths below. You two girls at lunch were very bright and amusing."

Here was this gratifying bracketing of herself and Rosemary again, and Daisy so flushed with pleasure that those little exterior embellishments in the region of her cheek-bones looked quite pale in comparison. She felt so pleased that she could easily manage to be modest.

" My dear, fancy coupling me and Miss Rosemary

together," she said, "when I daresay she's a good ten years younger than me."

It did not really require much audacity to say that, as a good fifteen years undoubtedly parted the two. Even Marion, for all her gratifying attitude, could not let that pass.

"Oh, twice as much as that, surely," she said. "She can't be twenty yet."

"Well, I'm not forty," said Daisy.

"Aren't you? No, I suppose you're not. You look about as old as Mrs. Paulton, and I think she isn't forty yet. But what does age matter? Everybody is as old as she feels, and I'm sure you and Rosemary felt like girls. And there sat Mr. Teddy and I like patriarchs."

On the whole, then, Marion's general impression was more than favourable towards Daisy's private focus of her own eye on herself. Certainly Marion had reminded her that a romp in the garden produced stiffness, and that her age was more nearly that of Rosemary's mother than of Rosemary; but each of these discouragements had been provoked by Daisy herself, and strong in her consciousness of youth, that cheque which carried, so to speak, the promise of life to pay, she gloated over Marion's endorsement of it. She and Rosemary had been girls together, there was the honey of it, and if she thought now at all of Lambton's choice of Rosemary's mother as Teddy's wife, she thought only with wonder at the foolishness

of people who gossiped so, or if her reflections turned to Mrs. Paulton herself, she was merely sorry that she had the influenza and hoped she would soon be better. It was pleasant also to hear Marion's opinion that she and Mr. Teddy had sat there like patriarchs. She could not agree that Mr. Teddy was like a patriarch, for she considered him a wonderfully young man in view of his forty years, but the inference that she herself was so immeasurably younger was a most sympathetic proposition.

There must follow even for kings and emperors after their triumphs, a spell of reaction, when their valets take their crowns off and put them in the plate-chest, and should they come to behold themselves in their looking-glasses, they see that the heads which sparkled with the gems of their diadems are a little grey over the temples, or a little thin on top. To Daisy there came a somewhat similar moment when she took off the tailor-made gown to dress for dinner, and for the same purpose washed her face, for she saw her throat and her elbows as Teddy had seen them when for a moment he focused her and Rosemary together on the lens of his vision, and she saw her rosy cheeks as Teddy had not seen them. The evening was cold, and her looking-glass far away from the fire, and as she looked again there passed not so much through as over her the same little shudder as had visited her when first she and her sister had been shown into Teddy's studio that day.

Certainly there was no doubt that Rosemary had looked bewitchingly attractive as she sat there with chin a little raised, eyes looking a little upwards: certainly also Mr. Teddy had something of rapture in the voice of his entreaty for a second more. But then he was looking at Rosemary with the eye of the artist, seeing not her but the Beatrice of his picture. Daisy, incurably optimistic, was glad she had thought of that, for it seemed to explain away that first little shiver. As for the second, what was more likely than that she should feel chilly, standing there in front of her glass with no frock on? She hastened to put on a frock, one that was made rather high in the throat and had sleeves that came to the wrist.

She had come up to dress earlier than was needful, inclined to linger rather than hurry over the operation in the manner natural to us when we have a pleasant background to our occupations. But she finished her dressing with even more than ordinary speed, and came downstairs again to wait for Marion. The fire prospered in the grate, and following that slightly superstitious strain in her that made her always bow to the new moon, and had prompted her to consult the whirligig Sibyl of the penny-in-the-slot machine, she set herself to see what faces the fire held for her. But she could see nothing that could be construed into an augury: only at the corner of the lowest bar was a fragment of charred paper, not quite

consumed. Caught there it swung to and fro, as if on a hinge, in the manner of a gate opening and shutting. . . .

Daisy took the poker and stopped its antics. Of course it was not really in the fire, and so *did* not count, but it need not behave like that, and indeed it should not do so any more. But there must have been something in the back of her mind which objected to its going on in that silly manner, like an opening and shutting gate.

CHAPTER VIII

A MONTH or so before Christmas music always began to make its definite mark in the social life of Lambton, just as bright objects, not too expensive and suitable for gifts, began to appear on the counters of the various departments at the Stores. Practically all the residents of light, leading, and leisure were enlisted (for the period of the festival) in the ranks of harmony, and, whether they had voices or not, supplemented the regular village choir in church, and sang in 'parts' all over the place, making the services very sonorous indeed. The first of these collective efforts in church was the Carol Service on Christmas Eve, which began at eleven in the evening and finished, after a short silence, at exactly midnight, when, after the church clock had struck, the Vicar ascended the pulpit, and wished everybody a Merry Christmas, and the congregation intoned 'And with thy spirit.' For this Carol Service, as we have seen, the Vicar rather unnecessarily had booked the date at the Entertainment Bureau some six months ago, but the Carols had been practised weeks before

the night of the performance, and for three or four nights previously had been sung about the streets in Lambton at a house-to-house visitation. A choir of ladies and gentlemen, impenetrably disguised, sang in front of each house of the principal residents, practically whatever the weather was like, and indeed it often happened that the occupiers of a house, such as Marion and Daisy (contralto and treble respectively), would sing outside their own house for the delectation of their servants, one of whom, at the conclusion of the music, would give a half-crown (as previously instructed) to the choir-boy who rang the bell, and wished them all the blessings of the season. There would be pleasant smiles and gigglings as the parlour-maid 'spotted' Miss Marion in her brigand-like hat, or Miss Daisy with snow-white locks of cotton-wool standing in the rain or the starlight, and the waits would move on across the green to Mrs. Andrew's, who joined in 'The First Noël' below her own windows.

Then, on Christmas Day, the whole of the augmented choir occupied seats near the organ, and some very intricate anthems and canticles were performed, with quite long solos in them, which Mrs. Vickary, who had a prodigious genius for music, conducted, facing the choir from the aisle, and, if a solo or duet showed signs of uncertainty, emitted piercing notes herself to pull everything together again.

This month, in fact, was Mrs. Vickary's month : she became, by virtue of her gift, the temporary tyrant of Lambton. She was not on quite so exalted a throne as that which her husband as Vicar, and Marion as literary genius, permanently occupied, for her calibre as creative artist could not be considered equal to Marion's, who not only ran serials in the local magazine, but had them published afterwards in book-form in London. No cantatas or operas by Mrs. Vickary, it is true, ever appeared in parts locally, or were produced complete at Queen's Hall or Covent Garden afterwards, but she could talk about dominants and diminished thirds with quite amazing fluency, was reputed to know 'every note' of Gounod's *Faust*, and, in practical spheres, conducted and trained her choir, and, whether trebles, altos, tenors, or basses lost their place, could, without interrupting her beat, correctly sing their part, or at any rate so unmistakably indicate it that they picked it up again at once.

It was not to be expected that Marion should so far interrupt her literary labours as to attend nearly all the practices necessary for the creditable performance of this bout of Christmas music, for she only hooted quietly among more efficient altos, and no amount of practices would ever have saved her from amalgamating with the tenors, when they made raids, so to speak, on ground naturally belonging to altos. Consequently, when Daisy set off next morn-

ing to the Vicarage, for the first practice of the year, Marion, in the throes of reproducing the glitter at lunch yesterday, only wiped the fountain of ink with which a refractory pen (no doubt called 'fountain' for that reason) had inundated her forefinger, and gruffly hoped that the next time Daisy was so good as to fill her pen for her she would screw the top on properly. But Daisy was chiefest of the sopranos, and sang in solos and duets and quartettes as well as leading the concerted trebles, and her attendance at all practices was necessary. She had, so Mrs. Vickary often said, some very pretty veiled notes, though not very many of them, and the rest of her compass was perhaps a shade wiry in tone. But she was the leading singer of the place, and so, after having apologized to Marion, and told her that she would find pumice-stone on her washing-stand, she hurried across the green, being already a little late, humming to herself as she went, in order to see if the veils were tidy, and had no holes in them through which the wires could come through.

Daisy always looked forward to this Vickary month of song, in which she took so prominent a part, for if Mrs. Vickary was organizer, she was chief executant, and the Christmas music would have had to be of a far simpler and less decorative character without her. She enjoyed immensely being the prima-donna of Lambton, and her annual terror of having to sing

the first verse of *Adeste Fideles*, all by herself in the hushed church at the opening of the service, was the pleasantest sort of agitation. There was always an allusion, in the account of the Christmas music in the Parish Magazine, to Miss Daisy Macdonald's exquisite voice pealing through the aisles which could not but be gratifying. She was accustomed to buy an extra copy of that January number of the Magazine, and cut those notices out. There were at least a dozen of them now, so long had she been the sweetest singer of Lambton (the swan of Lambton, as the Magazine had once called her, without intending to prophesy her immediate decease), and these Daisy pasted into a scrap-book which contained other records of her pre-eminence in croquet-tournaments and bridge-drives. The surplus receipts of these, after the purchase of suitable prizes for the winners had been made, were devoted to general Parish funds, while at Christmas, after the expenses of a choir-treat and the necessary copies of carols, canticles, and anthems had been paid, the rest of the half-crowns given to the waits, and the offertories collected at these musical services, were directly devoted to Mr. Vickary. Marion, when cynically disposed, had been known to remark that this accounted for the remarkable zeal shown by his wife to ensure attractive services.

The choir were all assembled when Daisy arrived, and though she had not intended to be late, it

rather pleased her to know that they could not start without her. Mr. Teddy was there, ready to sing any amount of bass, and he jocosely hailed her by saying, "And here's our Melba: now we can begin." Among the dozen trebles also was Rosemary, who at Teddy's request had come to lend what help she could.

"Oh, do you sing? That is delightful," said Daisy, with just a shade of patronising encouragement in her voice.

"Oh, only a little," said Rosemary, "and I'm dreadfully out of practice."

Daisy beamed: here they were being girls together again, and she herself was the show-girl.

"Come next me then, Miss Rosemary," she said, "and we'll help each other along."

After which Mrs. Vickary said:

"Now, please, 'The First Noël.' Are you all ready? One, two."

And she dabbed fiercely at the air with a rolled-up copy of a Magnificat.

Daisy had been accustomed to sail along at the top of all the trebles whom she led, but before the first verse of 'The First Noël' was over she was aware that she was doing so no longer. Neither her veiled notes nor her wiry ones had anything like the round full timbre of the voice of the girl next her. Even when they were all singing softly, it was Rosemary's voice, not hers, that interpenetrated the rest and

held them together, while in the last verse, when Mrs. Vickary hissed, "Now fortissimo, ladies, please," Rosemary's young delicious voice entirely swamped her own, so that, for all that her mouth was so extremely wide open, she might almost have been singing in dumb show. At the end Mrs. Vickary beamed on the girl as she collected copies, and said to Daisy, "Well, we have an accession to our voices, have we not, Miss Daisy? Thank you, Miss Paulton."

Good King Wenceslas then proceeded to look out. Here Daisy was accustomed to take the part of the Page, and remark on the coldness of the weather, while Mr. Joyce as King encouraged her to mark his footsteps. For twelve years now she had done that, and yet this morning, when it came to her turn to begin, she felt rather nervous. Usually at these practices she was content to sing such passages just with half her voice, for it was no use exerting herself over what she knew so well. But to-day she made up her mind to give them the best she had; she felt as if she was to be put on her trial. She had to start on an E, which she was quite capable of doing, but partly because she was nervous, partly because she wanted to show everybody at this early stage of the proceedings what she could do, her voice suddenly cracked on the first note, and she heard a slight titter from the irreverent choir-boys who stood behind. . . . And all the time during the part-singing she heard

the full effortless voice of Rosemary encompassing and drowning her own. Then followed the new anthem that was to be sung on Christmas morning, and Mrs. Vickary took it through once with all the voices together, while the village schoolmaster, also organist, played it with extreme vigour on the piano, so as to give everybody an idea of it. Daisy was a decent reader of music, but no more, and again from anxiety to pick this up as quickly as possible made quantities of mistakes, while she knew that next her Rosemary was singing far more correctly. At the close of this Mrs. Vickary gave a sort of executioner-smile, and said, "Well, we didn't make much of that, did we? Let us have the trebles first separately."

The trebles separately, but collectively, went through it again with frequent stoppages and repetitions. A couple of bars in particular gave a great deal of trouble, and at length Mrs. Vickary said :

"One by one then, please. Now, Miss Daisy, will you show us?"

Daisy took a long and despairing breath: the organist gave her the note, and she attempted to show them the way. It was but a pioneer performance over difficult country.

"Once more, please," said Mrs. Vickary, and again poor Daisy stumbled.

"Miss Paulton?" said Mrs. Vickary encourag-

ingly, and Rosemary sang the passage correctly and easily.

"Thank you, that's right," said Mrs. Vickary with a great smile. "Now, then, trebles all together please, and sing just what Miss Paulton sang."

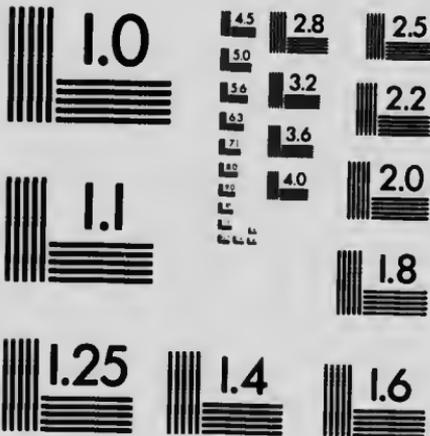
All through the practice Daisy felt her sovereignty slipping from her. She was only being tacitly deposed, for Mrs. Vickary continued to employ her as soloist, but she knew in her own heart that there had come to Lambton a more melodious swan than she. She told herself that she was out of voice this morning, but secretly she knew that she was singing as well as she was accustomed to sing: she sucked a lozenge which was supposed to give great mellowness to the vocal organs, but knew that all the lozenges in the chemist's shop would not endow her with half the tone of Rosemary's voice, nor, as by a miracle, procure for her that facility in reading that Rosemary clearly possessed. And not only did she know it, but she knew that everybody else must know it—Mrs. Vickary knew it, the organist knew it, the boys who had tittered at her cracked E knew it, and, worst of all, Mr. Teddy knew it. Then finally, just before the end of the practice, when there were a few bars of solo-part in the Magnificat, Mrs. Vickary said, "It is a shame to work you so hard, Miss Daisy. Perhaps Miss Paulton would just sing this little bit for us."



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Rosemary sang it quite delightfully, and to Daisy she seemed to be singing 'Ichabod, Ichabod!'

Teddy and Rosemary had come down to the practice on bicycles, and Daisy, who was detained for a moment by Mrs. Vickary, saw them flash off together side by side afterwards without having a word with either of them, and she walked home with none of the spring in her step with which she had gone so gaily to the parish-room an hour ago, feeling so safe on her melodious pedestal. Nominally she was there still, for Mrs. Vickary had said to her as they parted, "It will be a great help to you to have such a supporter as Miss Paulton. What a charming voice! How odd that none of us knew she sang so well." But she knew that her pedestal was reeling and tottering, and she wondered whether it would not be wiser to jump down than to cling to it. It was indeed ill-luck that no one had known that Rosemary sang so well, but social evenings had been so busy lately with the new and remarkable occupation of table-turning that positively there had been no music at all: hence the completeness of this terribly public discovery. And suddenly Daisy became aware that she would not have minded nearly so much if a musical genius had been discovered among the choir-boys. She would not have liked it, but she felt she could in imagination face the fact of the Parish Magazine's alluding to the exquisite voice of Master Jones pealing in the aisles. But it was not

tolerable to think of that same Magazine speaking of Miss Paulton's voice in those full terms. . . .

It was as if she had suddenly come round the corner and met herself. She had had no idea till that moment that this was the real root of her trouble. It was not only, nor indeed mainly that any other voice was better than hers, but that Rosemary's was. She could not endure that the girl should take her place either in the choir or in any other capacity. She had ridden gaily off with Teddy just now over the hard frozen road ; she went to and fro by the gate that together they had planned in the palings ; she stood for him in his studio when he worked, and in her face he realized his conception of Beatrice. Weeks ago when Lambton pleasantly conjectured that in Rosemary's mother Mr. Teddy would find the wife that he had been without so long, Daisy had thought that it was only she, a woman of her own age and older, whom she could not bear to be supplanted by ; that if Teddy wanted the freshness and the youth that she could not give him, she would quite acquiesce in his seeking it elsewhere. But now she found that it was not so with her ; it was just as intolerable that he should be attracted by this girl, with whom she had been so enjoyably 'girls together.' Supplanted? Yes, the idea of that had framed itself in her thought, and she endorsed it. For had not Mrs. Heaton told her, when she lay dying, that once Teddy had thought

—like that—of her? As from the cloud no bigger than a man's hand came forth the blackness that covered the heavens, so from this first choir-practice came that which overspread as with one stroke of a wing, the whole serene expectancy that an hour ago had been Daisy's.

She had come to her house-door, and even as her hand was on the latch she saw a glitter of reflected sun on the road out of the village, and clear-cut and shining against the dark hedges came the two bicycles she had seen leave the parish-room. The riders had evidently gone for a spin along the smooth frost-bound roads before returning home, and now, as they passed a hundred yards away, pedalling hard along the level to get a pace that should carry them well up the hill to their adjoining houses, Daisy heard the girl's voice calling back to her companion. "I bet you I beat you, Teddy," she said, and laughed. Upwards they swept with a whirr of wheels and a wink of sun on the spokes, and passed out of sight. And Daisy remembered that in all these years in which he and she had passed from youth to maturity together she had never called him Teddy. He had always been Mr. Teddy in her mouth, and in his she had been Miss Daisy. But after a few weeks only of acquaintanceship he was Teddy to the girl. Of course they were cousins in some distant fashion, but this careless 'tutoyer' struck her like a lash across the face

She let herself into the house, and even as she entered the little panelled hall all her hopes and desires, scarcely acknowledged even to herself, stood up and refused to allow her to acquiesce in her misgivings. What if Rosemary called him Teddy? What if Rosemary was 'establishing a relation with him'?—the phrase was Marion's and concerned a very daring situation in the book that she was now engaged on. Daisy felt that she could easily call him Teddy also (it must slip out by accident the first time, and be requested to show itself again), and as for establishing a relation, had not Mrs. Heaton told her that years ago that platform had already been laid? And had not that platform been cemented and reinforced in those marvellous ten days of intimate friendship which had followed his mother's death? He had not chosen Rosemary to be with him then in those rites of destruction and preservation; the companion in those tendernesses of regret and consolation had been herself. For her had been his need, and she knew well how excellently she had met it.

Instantly she revised and reversed her whole attitude. She was not even going to fight Rosemary: she was just going to be herself, very fully, very strenuously. She resolved to take to bicycling again, not because Rosemary bicycled, but because bicycling was a delightful exercise when roads were hard and smooth. She resolved to have a good

practice at her singing again this afternoon, not because Rosemary sang so efficiently, but because she herself had cracked on an E, and had got terribly confused over reading a not very difficult passage. It was not because Rosemary called a man Teddy that she determined to do it too, but because she was quite good friends enough with him to let it slip out. Probably he would be more than gratified. She had taken things too easily: she had not made the most of herself. Without fighting Rosemary, it was possible to pick up a hint or two from her. All her forces which had instinctively begun to mobilize themselves without generalship must be taken in hand. They must be taught not only to present a decent show on parade, but to be fit for the field. There was a certain terrain which her tactics must succeed in occupying. . . .

But—it was this that gave her pause—as far as she knew no opposing host desired to occupy it, for, if she probed down into her convictions, she found none that told her that Rosemary was contemplating its occupation. That she did not believe. But was the terrain in question desirous, by a plebiscite of its denizens, to cede itself to the adjoining kingdom? She divined that she had nobody to fight. There was no symptom of hostility from Rosemary's country. All she had to do was to take peaceful possession of the land she coveted. She was not

jealous of anybody. She firmly denied the imputation she had brought against herself.

Things had gone unusually well with Marion all morning: the glitter of the lunch-table the day before had been quite satisfactorily embodied in the second chapter of 'Bill' (Lord William Talbot-Howard); she had found the pumice-stone precisely where Daisy had prophesied she would, and she consulted her sister on various points of psychology as they sat at lunch.

"Sometimes I almost wish I had devoted more time to the actual experiences of life," she said. "I found myself strangely unable yesterday morning to invent the sort of light talk that you and Mr. Teddy and Miss Paulton indulge in without apparent effort. There's a glamour about it. You had the glamour tremendously yesterday, Daisy. I find it difficult to imagine it, though I have a good memory and can record it pretty well. I recorded this morning practically all you said at lunch yesterday."

Who would not be gratified? Daisy was.

"My dear, you devote your mind to much deeper things," she said. "You can imagine the most wonderful passion and renunciation, and doubts, and the faith that shines through them all."

Marion was accustomed to incense, and took it as a matter of course. She had finished her cutlet, but, lost in thought, still held her fork in the air, with her

elbows on the table, much as Daisy had sat yesterday. Then she scratched her head with the butt end of her fork, drawing it backwards and forwards in the short hair above her ear.

“ But there’s no doubt that a certain lightness and gaiety make the necessary contrast to passion and faith,” she said. “ In a book you cannot go on being passionate and faithful without any holidays. When you and Mr. Teddy—let us say—are together you are full of sparkle. Sometimes I wish, Daisy, that you would be more yourself when you and I are alone. Can’t you ? ”

Daisy recollected the innumerable occasions on which, for the sake of gaiety at home, she had attempted to babble, telling Marion of the little *facetiae* of a croquet-tournament, the adventures of a rubber at bridge, the farcical absurdities of Robin’s fireworks. But somehow these details seemed not to bear repetition, they were like a native wine that could not be transported and yet retain its original flavour, the act of travel ruined it. There were vintages—great topics—that could retain their quality if they were despatched to the Equator, but there were little wines that could not be drunk except on the spot. And Marion was an alien country : the light wines had to travel so far before they got to her, and they did not bear the subsequent uncorking.

“ Sometimes it’s difficult to tell you about little

things," said Daisy. "You yawn and snort, you know, if I talk to you about a tennis party."

She paused a moment.

"You get lost in your big thoughts," she said, "just as you are lost now, and are scratching your head with a fork. Really I wish you wouldn't."

Marion had been quite unconscious that she had been doing this, and very amiably laid down her fork at once.

"I do get absent-minded," she said. "But how is one to help it if one is thinking very deeply about something else? I wasn't aware I had a fork in my hand: it might have been a razor or a walking-stick for all I knew. Well, if you can't manage to sparkle to me, I suppose I must wait till I hear you and Mr. Teddy or you and Miss Rosemary talking together."

Marion had an apple-dumpling on her plate this time, but she appeared to think it was an egg, for she kept tapping it all over the top of its dome as if to crack it.

"Then there's another thing," she said. "Bill is going to get jealous, really very jealous of Robert Swanborough, and I've been puzzling over that. I haven't the slightest idea what it is like to be jealous. Do you think there's a sort of luxury in it? I want to get that right."

Daisy felt herself flushing under the touch of rouge.

"I'm sure I can't help you there," she said hastily. "And you've been absent-minded again, Marion. That's an apple-dumpling you're tapping."

Marion looked at it with suddenly awakened interest.

"So it is," she said, and adapted her behaviour to the discovery.

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CHAPTER IX

MRS. VICKARY was famous in Lambton not only for her musical gifts, but for her diplomatic qualities, which she considered she inherited from her maternal grandfather who had been British Minister in Berne, and was always represented by his granddaughter as having been a mixture of tact and intrigue never before or since equalled in the history of the foreign relations of the British Empire. The proof of this lay in the fact that all the time he was in charge at Berne (nine calendar months) there had not been the smallest break in England's pleasant relations with that very obstreperous country. Coming of so Bismarckian a stock, it was no wonder that Mrs. Vickary was a consummate diplomatist.

Her favourite methods, like those probably of her grandfather (who seems to have been so diplomatic that nobody was aware that he ever did anything at all), were round-about. If she wanted any friend in Lambton to act in a particular way, or to refrain from acting in another, she was not such a simpleton as to go straight to that friend and indi-

cate her wishes. Instead, she went to two or three other friends, and told them separately that each of them was the only person in Lambton who had the smallest influence with her designated prey. She then outlined what she wanted, and left it, under seal of the deepest secrecy, in each pair of capable hands. . . . If you have ever observed how a kitten will approach some bright object dangled for its delectation round the bars of a chair, you will get the correct idea of Mrs. Vickary's diplomacy. The animal will do anything sooner than approach the quarry directly ; it puts one paw round the bar and dabs at it ; it ambushes itself on the seat and peers over at it ; it serpentines at it from every quarter in preference to going straight up to it. Without implying that Mrs. Vickary was kittenish in other ways, her diplomacy was distinctly feline. It was also, as a rule, successful, and after a day or two she would find that she had attained the fulfilment of her just desires. But there were exceptions.

It was on an errand of this sort that she was engaged some four days after this choir-practice, and her first visit was to Marion. She had ambushed herself half an hour ago in the drawing-room window of Mrs. Andrew's house, which commanded the Miss Macc'ards', where she sat volubly conversing, and 'drinking in,' so she put it, this lovely winter sunshine. Even when a thick bank of clouds obscured this lovely winter sunshine she continued gazing

intently out, till her little black beady eyes observed Miss Daisy setting forth on her bicycle, for, as all Lambton knew, she had taken very enthusiastically to bicycling again. Upon which the lovely winter sunshine instantly tempted her out, and hastily saying good-bye to Mrs. Andrew, she went over the green with her little swift step like a thrush pattering across a lawn, and begged to see Miss Marion for a few minutes. She made it difficult for Miss Marion not to see her, since she followed on the heels of the parlour-maid into the novelist's study. Marion was not very much pleased at the intrusion, and made a confused noise which sounded like "Good gracious, goodness me."

"Ah, hard at work!" said Mrs. Vickary. "What a gift, dear Miss Marion. Fancy all those pages this morning! When shall we have the treat of knowing what it's all about? To think of that now!"

Marion shook hands.

"To think of what now?" she asked uncompromisingly.

"Dear Miss Marion! To think of you sitting here so quietly with your pen in your hand, writing what so many thousands will read with smiles and tears. Is it profane to be reminded of that psalm about your words going out to the ends of the earth? Am I naughty? And how is dear Miss Daisy? Is she in?"

Marion had had experience of Mrs. Vickary's

diplomacy before. At least her synthetic mind had registered the fact that if Mrs. Vickary came in in the middle of the morning for a chat, it implied that she was presumably going to be told that she had great influence with somebody. She suspected at this moment who it was with whom she had great influence.

"No, she's just gone out on her bicycle," she said. "I should have thought you must have seen her."

Mrs. Vickary threw up admiring hands.

"I'm sure when Miss Daisy is on her bicycle," she said, "she is almost invisible. She passes like a flash."

("It's about Daisy," thought Marion.)

Mrs. Vickary cleared her throat.

"I wonder if she is quite wise to rush about so much," she said. "We all know about the sword wearing out its scabbard, and I have noticed—I have had the privilege of seeing Miss Daisy several times lately—that she has often seemed very much fatigued. I know if you live with anybody, see them constantly all and every day, you notice change in them much less, but when you see a friend not so often, you see such change much more. And when I think of what Miss Daisy, dear Miss Daisy, was this time last year, I declare I am almost shocked at it. We can't have her knocking herself up and getting ill. Indeed we cannot. Lambton could not get on without her. No, indeed!"

Now Marion had already noticed a sort of spasm of indefatigable energy that had seized Daisy during these last days. She spent hours practising her singing, and the house resounded with carols and canticles. Marion was very fair-minded towards any form of artistic activity, and she would not have complained about that for anything, and cheerfully sat at her work with cotton-wool in her ears, when Daisy was at her loudest next door, and concentration, unless assisted in this way, became almost impossible. When the singing was done, she would career forth on her bicycle, and returning from a fifteen-mile ride would sit down and read Dante. Sounds of physical exercises, kickings and stampings, came from her bedroom, and, in response perhaps to Marion's request, she had loaded her conversation with sparkle. But this, apparently, was not the sort of change to which Mrs. Vickary was referring.

"Daisy seems to me particularly well and energetic," said Marion. "I see no sign of Lambton having to get on without her."

Mrs. Vickary sucked in her breath with a hissing noise, and turned her eyes to the ceiling.

"Ah, indeed, I trust not," she said. "But dear Miss Daisy must take care. She must indeed. You, who perhaps of all of us in Lambton have any real influence with her, must persuade her to spare herself. You know how little I am given to flattery, but you, Miss Marion, have got the most marvellous

tact that I have ever come across; you could manage it. I often say to myself, 'Tact! What a thing is tact! If we only had Miss Marion's tact.'"

She laid her hand on Marion's knee and pressed it. As there was no response whatever, she took it off again.

"You must persuade—no one else can—you must persuade Miss Daisy to spare herself. Look what she does! There is the Entertainment Bureau——"

Marion could not let that pass.

"Daisy told me this morning that there had been only one entry made in the last fortnight," she said. "It is really closed for the winter."

"Ah, but think what it has been! I am sure I should have broken down completely under the work she did last summer. Then there is our music for Christmas. Solo, duet, quartette, chorus, she sings in them all, and, as you tell me, she practises for hours a day. She ought not to do it. It is not fair on her. What we should do without her, goodness knows, but we should have to make shift somehow."

"Daisy has been practising her solo passages very diligently," said Marion. "She told me she had them all by heart now. Perhaps she might spare her exertions in the choruses."

Mrs. Vickary shook her head.

"It is not that which tires her," she said. "It

is the strain of the solo parts. And when I think how easily she took it all last year,—but you know a voice does not last for ever ; I would not venture to sing a solo myself nowadays. In the choruses we must have her. She is quite indispensable with her knowledge of music, and her power of keeping everybody together. Sometimes, if I am anxious as to how a chorus will go, I recollect we have Miss Daisy, and say to myself, ' It will be all right : Miss Daisy is with us. ' ”

Marion had begun to perceive what Mrs. Vickary wanted. It was perfectly clear that she wanted her to give up singing the solos, and continue singing in the choruses. But she knew quite well the pleasure Daisy took in her singing, and the care with which she cut out the eulogistic notices from the Parish Magazine, for she had a ' strong weakness ' for Press cuttings herself, while affecting to despise them. In fact there was an agreeable subterfuge about Press cuttings ; for it was Daisy who nominally insisted on taking them in (Marion paid for them), and left them lying about for her sister to read with surreptitious gusto. Daisy should not be sat upon by anybody, if she had any say in the matter.

“ I begin to see your drift, dear Mrs. Vickary,” she said with extreme dryness. “ You want somebody else to sing the solos instead of Daisy.”

Mrs. Vickary undulated in a deprecatory manner.

“ Oh, you mustn't put it like that,” she said, “ because, as I have told you, my real desire is to spare Miss Daisy. We all take too much advantage of her good-nature and allow her to work herself to death.”

Marion let this pass just for the moment.

“ And whom would you make shift with, if Daisy did not sing ? ” she asked.

“ Well, you know, Miss Paulton sings very charmingly, very charmingly indeed. An angelic voice really, powerful but very sweet. With a little coaching she would render the solos, which dear Miss Daisy is beginning to find so very trying, quite exquisitely. And we must remember, must we not, in Whose honour we make our Christmas services attractive.”

This was more than Marion felt herself capable of bearing. She got very red in the face, and rose wrathfully with wildly dishevelled hair.

“ I am so sorry to interrupt you,” she said, “ but there is one thing in this world which I cannot stand, and that is cant. No doubt it is very foolish of me, but it is a constitutional infirmity of mine. We have all this singing because we like singing, so pray let us leave these motives of honour and Whose out of the question. Now you have told me that your object in this interview is to get Daisy to spare herself. Well, I will help you with that, and I daresay that I shall be able to manage it by the use of my

tact, about which you have said such pretty things. Perhaps she is overdoing it, and I will persuade her to give up her bicycling for the present. Then she will be quite able to undertake those solos, and you need have no further apprehension about it, nor will you have to make shift with anybody. How pleasant to find that we are so much at one."

Mrs. Vickary was so much taken aback by this, that she had no wits left to consider what her grandfather would have done under similar circumstances. Nor could she collect herself while Marion stood firmly in front of her smiling with pleasure at their being so much at one. Under the circumstances, the best thing to do was to call on somebody else. So, again remarking on the lovely winter sun, she took a hasty departure.

Marion walked up and down the room once or twice after her visitor's retreat, saying "Pish!" and "Posh!" in an awful voice. She was often rude and cross and disagreeable to Daisy herself, but she had not the slightest intention of allowing anybody else to spoil Daisy's pleasure. Having had previous experience of Mrs. Vickary's methods, she guessed that she would pay another call to see if she could not get a more satisfactory confederate, and so, ceasing from her exclamations, she stepped swiftly to behind the window-curtains to see in which direction Mrs. Vickary went next. There she was skinning along across the green, and immediately afterwards took

the turn up the steep hill towards the quarter where Teddy and Mrs. Paulton lived.

Marion, when brought into contact with practical life, seldom stopped to think what to do in an emergency, but went and did something. The plan has great advantages, since by pursuing it you get something done, whereas other more cogitative beings often do nothing till it is quite too late to do anything. But to do the wrong thing is probably better than doing nothing at all. On this occasion Marion marched straight to the telephone, though she detested and distrusted that uncanny apparatus, and rang up Teddy. She did not know what she was going to say to him, but no doubt, as Mrs. Vickary would have said, that would be Given her. There would be a Leading. At present there was a Call.

Teddy's cheerful voice answered the Call. He rather liked being rung up when he was at work, as he was now, for it gave the promise of pleasant little engagements when he had finished. . . . "Yes, yes," he said with expectation. "Oh, Miss Marion, is it? Well, that's jolly."

Marion had been right to trust the Leading, for she experienced no difficulty in stating her business.

"There's a plot, a Vickary-plot," she said, "to prevent Daisy from singing Christmas solos. Yes: Christmas Solos. Vickary has just been to see me, and has tried to get me to help her——"

" Vickary ? Mr. Vickary ? " asked Teddy.

" No, Mrs. You know her way."

" Yes, yes," said Teddy soothingly.

" Well, Daisy loves singing the Christmas solos, and it's all nonsense. She's as strong as a horse. Vickary wants to get Miss Rosemary to sing them instead."

There was a pause, and Teddy scratched his head in some perplexity. It certainly would be delightful to hear Rosemary sing, but if Daisy wanted to—

" Can you hear ? " asked Marion.

" Yes, perfectly. Pray go on."

" I think Vickary is very likely coming up to see you. She has gone up your hill. I want you to give her a good snub. Daisy is looking forward to singing, and sing she must. Don't you agree ? "

Teddy had no hesitation now.

" Yes, my dear Miss Marion," he said. " If Miss Daisy wants to sing, and she does, are you sure of that ? "

" Certain."

" Well then, if Mrs. Vickary tries to persuade me to induce her not to, I won't. Bless me, you're right. I can see Mrs. Vickary coming up the drive."

" Say you're in. Snub her well," said the inexorable voice.

Marion put the receiver on its hook, and instantly had another Leading. She rang up Rosemary, and begged for five minutes' conversation in

five minutes' time. This being granted, he put on her deer-stalker cap, and strode up the hill.

"Shan't keep you two minutes," she said. "It's about the Christmas solos. I want Daisy to sing them. So does Mr. Teddy. It's her right: she's done it for the last fifty years."

Rosemary looked at her in blank childish surprise.

"But why not? Who says not?" she asked.

"Vickary, Mrs. Vickary. She wants you to. Please don't say you will, and cut Daisy out. I daresay you can sing much better, but that doesn't matter, does it? Daisy wants to."

Rosemary laughed.

"But I shouldn't dream of it," she said. "Of course I shall refuse, that is, if Mrs. Vickary asks me."

Marion's eye wandered to the window, and got fixed there. Mrs. Vickary's swift feet (apparently she didn't know of the gate in the paling) were twinkling up the drive, after her call on Teddy.

"Lord! Here's the woman herself," said Marion. "The back door, please."

Three minutes later she let herself into her house.

"I may not have a grandfather who was a diplomatist," she said to herself, "but my grandfather had a granddaughter who was. And if Vickary makes any more fuss, I'll put it all straight into 'Bill.'"

While all the Chanceries in Lambton were thus in active correspondence, Daisy was no less active, though without collusion except on the part of her bicycle, as she skimmed along northwards past the station, and joined the main London road. There was a little wind against her, and in her new resolve of vigour and self-expression, she liked, on the physical plane, the press of this kindly, bracing antagonist, this sense of having something to fight, which in the energetic always arouses their latent force. She welcomed the frosty stream of opposing air and the upward trend of the road which made her progress a constant effort, for it was congruous with the combative attitude to life which she had so strenuously adopted this autumn. She had to work all the way: to relax her efforts meant that she and her machine would at once come to a stop. And neither in this ride, nor in the conduct of her life generally, had she the smallest intention of coming to a stop. . . .

Certainly her morning and the opening vista of the mourning road were conducive to endeavour. On the hornbeams in the hedge the russet leaves were still tight on their stems, but the hawthorns and the hazels were bare, and to their twigs and branches outlined against the pale blue clung the inimitable heraldry of the frost. Soon the hedges ceased altogether, and the grassy rides at the sides of the road swelled out into broad commons of gorse, the

estuaries of the sea of Ashdown forest, to the edges of which she had come. To right and left opened up the huge sweep of the untamed country, with here and there a clump of fir-trees standing ruddy-stemmed in the sunshine, like steep island-sides in a smooth rolling sea of heather and gorse, all covered with the silver mantle of the unmelted frost. In front of her, now not a mile distant along the cue-straight road, was the top of the ridge, and Daisy resolved that nothing should stay her till she got to the very summit of all. That was her task for the moment, the effort she had set herself.

There was a convenient heap of hammer-broken stones there, and she dismounted and sat on it, feeling the pulses beating in her temples. Certainly it had been a trying ascent, and with a sudden pang of memory that had slept till now, she remembered bicycling here some five or six years ago with Teddy, and sitting on a heap of stones that must have occupied almost this identical spot. She knew she had not felt so much exhausted on that occasion. But she was in better bicycle practice then. Did that completely account for it, or was it that she was younger then?

She rejected this disabling suggestion. She intended to be just arriving at the prime of youthful vigour, the moment when the freshness of youth joins hands with the acquired stamina of maturity. She set herself to incorporate that delectable zenith.

And the moment that, with all the zeal of which she was capable, she set herself to do it, she knew that if it had been really hers now, to-day, it would have needed no effort to realize it. It would have been there : instead, she had to imagine it, to pull it towards her, to suck it from the wild effortless vigour of the winter day, the immortal youth of the sun and the frost and the tawny-stemmed pines. It was not hers : she was stealing it, or, at the best, borrowing it, and with but clumsy efforts and unreal success was trying to assimilate it, so that it appeared in her works and days as if it came from within. But she knew that it did not : it was no more a product of her own natural vitality than was the becoming colour in her cheek the flower of her blood, or the bronze tint that just hinted itself in her hair the secretion of what the advertisement scientifically termed 'the pigment-cells.' For, all this last month up till this very morning, she had been imitating the symptoms of youth, its energies, its colours, and now as she rested, breathing quickly and frostily on this heap of stones, after the long ascent, she wondered for the first time whether it was all worth while. Yet she felt young, she was accustomed to being young ; only there was this constant effort to keep appearances up. Till this last autumn, it had been easier, for she had been the youngest woman in her immediate circle, and the youngest woman is naturally looked on as the girl ;

but now that there was a real girl among them, with whom she had played the pleasant rôle of being girls together, she was beginning to see how far her rendering of it strayed from the original. But she felt (and to no one is that feeling a pleasant one) that she was being cut out. There was no intention on Rosemary's part of doing that (Daisy did not even acquit her of it, since she did not put her on trial for it); she could not help being young, any more than Daisy herself could help the inexorably advancing fact of middle-age. But she hated the little surrender which she knew she ought to make. Perhaps there was a big surrender to come as well. She had, it is true, never owned that which she would have to give up, but she might have owned it. Years ago there was a chance of its being hers.

Daisy deliberately turned her back on this: there was no use in thinking about it, since it was a contingency that did not depend on her. But she wished Mrs. Heaton had never told her what she had told her, for she had never reconsidered for a second the possibility of letting Teddy know what that communication had been, and all it had done for her was to give her this sense of secret bitterness when she allowed herself to think of it. Well, she could still avoid thinking of it.

Daisy took herself smartly in hand: there was this little surrender that might be made, instead of

hanging her scare-crow face over the battlements which she could really no longer defend. There was, for instance, that terribly shoddy fortress in which she had entrenched herself, over which she flew the flag of her inalienable right to sing the solos in the Christmas music. Really she must haul that flag down : it was ludicrous. Ludicrous, too, and half-hearted for all their industry, had been her hour-long practices in the room next that where Marion worked. The more she practised, the more surely she knew how childish-minded would be any exhibition in which she, as principal soprano, stood up and looked for Mrs. Vickary's beat, and then proceeded to squawk, while next her sat and listened (and no doubt would smile and encourage and congratulate) Rosemary with the honey of her smooth throat stored within it. Greatly would Daisy have liked to sing again, conscious of her prima-donnaship ; greatly would she have liked to add to the twelve notices in the Parish Magazines that recorded her triumphs, a thirteenth. But the farce of the situation struck her now : whether she was still clinging to youth or not (and undoubtedly she was), it would be absurd to hold on to this antique and crumbling position. It would cost too much in the loss of valuable self-respect. Besides, if she clung now, she would have the same problem presented in an acuter form a year later. Better have a tooth out now than put it off for an aching week.

Then another horrifying possibility, not looked firmly in the face before, protruded itself. Supposing Mrs. Vickary asked her to abdicate, or supposing Mrs. Vickary, following her established diplomatic custom, asked somebody else to ask her? Several times already she had made disconcerting remarks about the beauty of Rosemary's voice, and had no less disconcertingly spared Daisy from going through her solos at choir practice. It would be awful, quite awful, to be tactfully approached in some way. . . . And next moment Daisy's mind was made up, and getting to her feet from this Bethel of her self-communings, she turned her bicycle's head homewards, and with oscillating skirts coasted down the hill, making her plan, arranging to march out of her fortress with all her flags flying and her bands playing.

Marion, somewhat to her surprise, was out, but Daisy wasted no time in vain conjecture, but went to her writing-table. She meant to do it handsomely, and wrote :

"MY DEAR MRS. VICKARY—I want you to do me a great favour, which is"—she paused, wishing she had Marion's style—"which is to find somebody else to take the solo parts in our Christmas music. Miss Paulton can do it twice as well as I, and I shall go to her, as soon as I have finished this note, and try to persuade her to undertake it. It would be a thousand pities, when at last we have such a beautiful voice in the choir, not to let the congregation have the treat of

hearing it. I need hardly say how delighted I shall be to help in the choruses, if you would care for me to do so. I hope to be at the practice to-morrow, and find this is all settled.—Ever yours sincerely,

“DAISY MACDONALD.”

“*P.S.*—I know I ought to have suggested this days ago. I am so sorry I did not.”

Daisy did not even trouble to read this through, for the sense of being too late haunted her, and without giving her bicycle time to cool, she was off again to the Vicarage (she directed the envelope to ‘The Vickary-age,’ to show how capable she was of light-heartedness). That done, she went along the upper road to Mrs. Paulton’s. Had she gone the other way she would assuredly have first met Marion, after her escape through the back-door, and, ever so shortly afterwards, Mrs. Vickary. For the interview between that lady and Rosemary had been of the shortest possible duration, and profoundly unsatisfactory.

Arriving there, she was told that Rosemary had just gone out. The friendly footman (who sang a remarkable tenor in the choir) thought she must have gone to Mr. Teddy’s, for she was dressed up. There was a gate cut in the palings which would save Miss Daisy from going round.

Daisy hesitated. She wanted to see Rosemary as soon as possible, but the mention of the girl being ‘dressed up,’ implying she was sitting to Teddy,

and the mention of the gate cut in the palings, demanded a call on her fortitude. Neither fact in itself was new to her, but both suddenly broke ground in some intimate place. They hurt her. . . .

And then that craving of jealousy to be hurt took her. Because she would dislike it so much, for that reason she wanted to see them together, to go through that short-cut made by the gate in the palings, which, when visits were so frequent was worth its carpentering. She would not trouble the man to go with her, for it was straight up the gravel-path to the right, was it not? and then round the little shrubbery and across the tennis-lawn.

She wheeled her bicycle up the path, for it was not worth while to mount again, and there was no difficulty in finding the route after that, for in front of her across the grass were the prints of shoes in the yet unmelted hoar-frost. Across the tennis-lawn they went, with long intervals between them, showing that the girl had run, and beyond was the gate, left open. They crossed, still running, the croquet-lawn next door, where Teddy had bewailed to her that he doubted whether it was worth while for him to practise industry with regard to his painting. If he had doubted then, he had not doubted since. But since then he had got a model, an exquisite one, for his Beatrice. And just before Daisy came within sight of the studio-window that looked out across the garden, she stopped, unable for the

moment to face that which her jealousy forbade her to shirk. He would be painting, poring on her face, noting its charm, its beauty, trying with all his skill to convey it to his canvas. Or he would be following the lines of her slim boyish figure, or, still worse, he would not be painting at all, but just talking to her. . . . Yet what was the use of refusing to face what she must get accustomed to ?

The sitting had not begun when she was shown into the studio, and probably she would not have gone in at all if she had known how, when her name and her request for a couple of minutes was announced, Teddy had said, "Good Lord, we shall never get started. I wonder what it is now." But she could not have guessed that from the cordiality of his welcome.

"Ah! Miss Daisy!" he said. "Why, this is capital! Been for a bicycle ride? Jolly morning for it. Now you want to speak to Rosemary, don't you? I'll clear out, shall I?"

"Rosemary!" He said "Rosemary" just as naturally as she said "Teddy." And there indeed was Rosemary, in a white dress of simple antique cut, with a cloak of blue brocade fastened low round her neck, and thrown back over her shoulders, leaving an arm bare at the elbow. Just so might Beatrice have walked with her *coiffe* of gold and bright beads on a sunny morning by Arno-side, and yet it was Rosemary, more completely Rosemary than Daisy

had ever seen her. Her lovely costume did not draw the eye away from her to itself; it but showed in so exquisite a setting the jewel-girl which it clad. Her face was a little flushed—for had she not run across the lawns from her own house just now?—but far brighter than her beauty or the splendour of her gleaming Italian cloak was the sweet kindness with which she greeted Daisy, and the affectionate sincerity of her smile. And there was more than a hint of 'girls together' in her speech.

"Yes: 'let's send Teddy away,'" she said, "and that will make him wild to know what we have been talking about. Of course we shan't tell him. Mayn't I send him away?"

This was done amid protestations from Teddy that he knew the communication had something to do with dress. He had noticed that when young ladies wanted to have private conversations together, some very smart hats were the result. . . . And though Rosemary struck the 'girls-together' note, and Teddy referred to them as young ladies, Daisy felt awfully and undeniably old. On the canvas beside them Robin and Rosemary met in the meadow by the Arno.

"It's to ask a great favour of you," said Daisy. "I—I find I really cannot manage those solos in the Christmas music, and I wondered if you would take them instead of me. It would be such a kindness to me, not to mention the kindness it would

be to Lambton. For indeed my voice isn't up to it."

Rosemary had one moment of swift thought. She had no idea whether 'Vickary's' machinations had reached Daisy. If so, she was firm in her promise to Marion. On the other hand, it was possible that it had struck Daisy independently that she was not up to the singing (and frankly it seemed very odd to Rosemary that it had not struck her long ago). She steered an uncompromising course.

"Oh, but you sing them so charmingly," she said. "I hope you won't think of giving it up."

Daisy shook her head.

"I shan't sing them in any case," she said. "It occurred to me this morning when I was out riding my bicycle that I really wasn't up to it. As soon as I got home I wrote to Mrs. Vickary, asking her to get somebody else, and saying I would try to persuade you to take my place. I should not feel that I was leaving her in the lurch then."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of this: it was clear that Daisy had made up her mind independently of the poking finger of Mrs. Vickary. She wanted to cede her place of her own accord.

"But I can't propose this to Mrs. Vickary," said Rosemary.

"Then may I telephone to her and say you will?"

asked Daisy. "It would be so kind of you. Yes? Thank you so very much."

She did not wait and postpone the sitting further, but went off home at once. And it was as if between her and the studio there span itself some lengthening telephone-wire, that kept her continually in communication with the fact that there were those two together, artist and sitter, and, she made no doubt, adorer and adored. She thought it very odd that that sweet woman, Rosemary's mother, permitted these unchaperoned sittings.

Marion ascertained by a few adroit questions that no hint of Vickary's diplomacy had reached Daisy, and that her renunciation had been quite voluntary. But she could not help being annoyed that Vickary had got her way, although not one atom of the credit of that could be ascribed to her meddlesome canting schemes. In consequence she had to make some rather severe comments on the laziness and indolence of her sister, and hoped that she would not develop into a hypochondriac. The bitterest thing of all to contemplate was that Vickary would undoubtedly consider that in some far-fetched way her diplomacy had brought about the desired result. It hadn't, it hadn't, and she could scarcely bear the thought that Vickary would believe it had. . . .

A brilliant idea struck her, and she invented on the spot a new character, who should appear once and no more at a luncheon-party in the pages of 'Bill.'

This was a canting busybody with a beady eye like a bird, who was always scheming and never arrived at anything except by accident. A couple of scarifying sentences completed this vitriolic little sketch, and Marion felt better.

CHAPTER X

ROBIN was seated on the floor in front of the fire in Teddy's studio with the black cloak that indicated Dante round him, while on chairs to the left and right were the artist and Rosemary, in her Italian dress. All three were slightly weak through laughing, for that morning the December number of the Parish Magazine had arrived, and the sitting had been interrupted while Robin read the new instalment of Lady Clementine. She was distinctly on the mend after her dreadful lapse into Atheism and the burning of the annotated commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and at the end of the new chapter she had gone into a book-shop, and in a low voice (for an atheistic companion, Sir Desmond Tweeddale, was with her) ordered a cheap copy of the complete Bible to be sent her. The quick ears of Sir Desmond had caught that dangerous word, and on his remonstrating with her, she said, "Make yourself easy. I am only going to read the history of the Jews from a strictly historical standpoint." But the atheist had lain awake that night, torturing himself

(for he loved her) with the agonizing thought that she was going to relapse into superstitious beliefs again. (He had cause for fear, for she did so in the very next number.)

Robin wiped his eyes on a corner of the Dante-cloak, for his handkerchief was in his coat, which he had taken off in order to let the cloak mould itself more faithfully to his big shoulders. About a foot of stocking appeared below it, but Teddy was not painting that part.

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" he said. "Why is unconscious humour so much funnier than conscious? Miss Marion couldn't be as funny as that if she tried. All the really funny things are meant to be serious. Do you know the story—oh, I can't tell you that: I forgot Rosemary was here!"

"That was extremely rude of you, then, as you've been gazing into my eyes for the last half-hour."

"I know. But it's not a polite story, and so it can't be rude of me not to tell you."

"It's rude of you to mention it if you're not going to. Do."

"Can't," said Robin. "It's a wee bit medical. But I can tell Teddy, and he could tell Miss Daisy, I should think, and then she could tell you. It's that sort of story."

"If Teddy could tell Miss Daisy, you could tell me," said Rosemary.

"No. I don't think I've known you long enough. But I'll tell Teddy and see what he thinks."

"If you whisper, I shall scream," said Rosemary. "Heavens, what a service we're going to have on Christmas Day. I'm going to scream all the time."

"That will be very delightful," said Robin with measured accents, as if he was weighing his words well.

"You couldn't say less," said Rosemary.

"I suppose you mean that I couldn't say more," said the boy.

"I daresay I do. But I certainly mean that I wish you would move a little over there, and then I might get some of the fire."

Robin considered this.

"But I should be farther from you," he said after thought.

"How pretty! How awfully pretty! That took a lot of thinking."

"Yes, but I got it. You must allow that I got it. And if you say it wasn't worth it, I shan't move an inch."

Teddy, taking no part in this abject conversation (indeed he had no opportunity, for it flew from one to the other like a tossed ball), felt some sense not of their deficient intelligence, but of some inexplicable defect of his own. He could have delightful chats with Rosemary about nothing in particular in veins quite as nonsensical as this, and he had no difficulty in doing the same with Robin. He could feel and

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talk coevally and equally with either of them, but not with both. There was some affinity between the two, stronger than the affinity he had with either of them. And their talk was all about nothing at all: its only merit seemed to be that they both enjoyed

with the natural joy of singing birds and trees waving in the wind. He was just a shade out of it when they were together, not by their fault but by his own in imagining he was out of it. He made up his mind to plunge into this twinkling chaos of speech, and told, quite humorously, how, standing in front of the fire the other day, a couple of loose matches in his trousers-pocket had ignited and shrewdly burned him. They both laughed quite cordially.

"Poor Teddy," said Rosemary. "How beastly for you!"

"Perfectly beastly," echoed Robin. "I say—Rosemary, do for heaven's sake say it was worth while my making that pretty compliment about farther from the fire and farther from you. Else I shan't move, and I'm getting too hot."

"It was worth while," shouted Rosemary on the four chief notes of a major scale.

"Lord, the singing's begun," said Robin. "Sing again, won't you? It didn't sound as if you meant it that time. You've got to mean it."

Rosemary turned to Teddy.

"Oh, do take that pig away," she said. "Take him by the hair."

Robin held up his large shirt-sleeved arm, getting it from under his cloak.

"If you rag Dante," he said pompously, "he'll put you into the lowest round of the Vomitorio. He'll get Miss Marion to put you into a book. He'll—goodness knows what he won't do. O—oh, don't pull my hair, Teddy. I won't put you into the Vomitorio, I swear I won't. I'll put you into the highest round of the Parachutiso. I shan't have a spare lock to give to Miss Marion. I shan't have a lock to give Rosemary, and she asked me for one down the telephone. I said I wasn't sure. It all depended on how many Miss Marion wanted."

"Oh, liar!" said Rosemary.

"I am, but don't let's rag. Let's be dignified. Let's remember how old we are; let's do anything, but don't cry, said Humpty Dumpty."

"It wasn't," said Rosemary.

"No more it was. Oh, give over, Teddy. My nurse used to say 'Give over,' and it's stuck to me. You might give me over a cigarette, too, as you are up."

Teddy looked at his watch.

"Do you know this rest was going to last ten minutes?" he said. "And it's after twelve already."

Robin began to whistle 'Oh, rest in the Lord' between his front teeth. Rosemary told him not to be profane and began singing it. Then she showed

how Vickary (Mrs.) would sing it, beating time with one of Robin's pumps which had come off. . . . They were quite deplorably foolish, but they didn't behave like that on purpose. It just happened because they were boy and girl, and their ages added together precisely equalled Teddy's.

He got them mounted again on the platform soon, and applied himself to the picture in which the magic, which he had so vainly tried to conjure up along the high-road of mere industry, was now weaving its instinctive spell of romance and youth. When these two delightful children remembered they were posing to him, and looked at each other with that consciousness in their minds, they became dolls and wooden-faced. But now and then they forgot that, and the salute of youth, that flash of natural lightning, which has no thunder to answer it with threatening gongs, and is like nothing else in the whole world, passed between them. It had been lambent on their laughing faces as they had sparred with each other just now in front of the fire, and it was for that, signified by an added hairbreadth of tremulous curve in the mouth, by a speck of infinitesimal light in the eye, by a twitch of a tiny cheek-muscle, which Teddy was now in ambush, so that by a stroke, a dot of paint he should reproduce it in the picture which had so surprisingly climbed up into the romance of sunlight from the twilit lands of uninspired industry. He had made, with patient Robin talking to him, an

admirable presentment of the boy's handsome eager face : he had seized, with Rosemary standing there, all that there was for him, Teddy, to see in her habitual beauty. But when they stood there together, and when they forgot that they were models for him, the salute of youth passed between them, like the signaling of flags far away, but intelligible to each. His affection had held his brush when he painted Robin, his dawning love had put firm fingers there when he was painting Rosemary, but when they faced each other, they showed from time to time what they had never singly shown him. It was the salute of youth to youth : there was, indeed, no more than that in it at present. The handsome boy, the beautiful girl certainly liked each other. It would have been an unnaturalness, an inanity if they had not, and that lovely liking of youth full of warmth from which the fire may any time be kindled, lay upon them like sunlight. This morning, more than ever before in the two or three sittings they had given him together, the salute passed to and fro. Deep was not calling unto deep, but just youth to youth, and it was that, to-day so generously exhibited to him, that Teddy knew his picture needed. To-day, too, it was he who tired first. Before, one or other, sometimes both in droning chorus, had said, " Oh, mayn't we get down ? " To-day it was he who first laid aside his palette.

" I've finished for the present," he said. " It is

good of you to be so patient. You're darlings, both of you."

"Aren't we?" said Rosemary, looking at Robin once more.

They stepped down together, and stood for a moment together in front of the canvas, one on each side of him.

"Oh, Teddy, but how well it's got on this morning," said Rosemary. "Why, that is Robin!"

Robin looked at the girl, then at the picture, and gave a great pompous bow.

"Do you know Miss Rosemary Paulton?" he said. "I do this morning. Rosemary, he's got you. Oh, what a clever Teddy! And it'll go to the Academy, and we'll stand in front of it all day with a tin mug for halfpennies on behalf of the sitters, whom the artist never paid at all. Sweating, I call it."

And he whisked off the Dante robe and smothered Teddy's head in it, and after a little clearing up they all went into lunch arm in arm, with Teddy in the middle as it might have been with some sort of benevolent uncle. But it was just that which the benevolent uncle did not wholly grasp, for if Daisy was being 'girls together' with Rosemary, he was undoubtedly guilty of being 'boys together' with Robin. To the outward observer he made quite a decent job of it, so too he did to himself and even Robin when they were alone together. But this

morning when there were three of them he began to wonder. . . .

The clear cold weather held on its wintry course, and was behaving precisely as if Charles Dickens had been promoted to the post of chief clerk. There were a couple of days of heavy snow, and on the top of that set in a determined black frost, which speedily covered with ever-thickening ice the big lake down by the river. It was but natural that a place so given over to athletic activities as Lambton should have a skating-club, of which, quite as naturally, Teddy was organizing secretary and chief executant. This skating-club in the ordinary tropical English winter lay dormant, warmly hibernating, but as soon as a good frost set in, its members briskly paid up their five-shilling subscriptions, and hired a good piece of ice, which was roped off from the rest of the lake and formed their club-rink, where those who had passed a certain easy test to the satisfaction of Teddy and Mrs. Joyce could practise unimpeded by the merely progressive crowd who joined hands. One glad morning came the word that the lake was safe for skaters, and Teddy, starving for the rare sport, hurried off before Robin had so much as appeared at breakfast, to see that the sacred place was duly roped off, and to practise the figures at which he was so pre-eminent. He could do a three on either foot, he could make complete circles of outside edge

forwards and backwards, and could lay down a serpentine line of outside and inside edge alternately with the help of waving of the unemployed leg, which was considered to be the nearest approach to perpetual motion ever beheld, for he could go on serpentineing away round and round the lake till mere fatigue terminated his progress. Otherwise it seemed that he would never stop. Also there was an amazing manœuvre called a rocker, which Teddy and Mrs. Joyce considered to be far the most difficult feat that could reasonably be supposed to be within the reach of themselves or other members of the club. It entailed starting on an outside edge, and then by a sudden and simultaneous release of arms and the other leg turning on to the outside edge backwards. Only Teddy and Mrs. Joyce could do it at all (and they not much), but when it was seen that either of them was doing rockers, other skaters stopped and with eager eyes beheld the realization of their wildest dreams. Another treat was to see Mr. Teddy and Mrs. Joyce skate a combined figure together with an orange for a centre. They changed edges and turned threes simultaneously in obedience to Teddy's calls, and certainly made a very great deal out of slender materials.

Teddy found a wonderful sheet of black ice, and being the first arrival had the opportunity to steady himself on his edges before others came. Modest as he was, he could not but enjoy so unequalled a

pre-eminence as he held in this delightful sport, and he had soon laid down a quantity of threes on each foot and an almost endless serpentine line. By degrees the surface of the club-rink began to be dotted with members, and, on the unreserved part outside, he saw Marion, who enjoyed skating very much, and even left her work for it, but could not be considered very proficient. She gave a great scoop on to the ice with one foot, and then putting both feet together let this impulse exhaust itself, while she glided with fixed and truculent eyes at anybody who came too near her. When she stopped, she scooped again, and again slid forward. But what most of all she liked was to get some proficient friend to skate with her. Then her forbidding countenance became wreathed in smiles, and clutching her victim's arm with talons of iron she was trundled round the pond without the need of scooping at all. She said that to get Mr. Teddy to perform this office for her was to enjoy the sensation of flying. She was not sufficiently at ease to talk while this was going on, but she smiled incessantly, and occasionally, leaning more on her escort, lifted one of her feet from the ice and immediately replaced it, lurching heavily.

Teddy's feet were tingling for his rockers, but he continued to give Miss Marion the sensation of flying until she told him that she had flown enough for the present and would enjoy the sensation of sitting

down. So leaving her, he skated down to the end of the lake where was the club-rink, with his head thrown back, and his hands clasped negligently behind him (just as if he was doing nothing at all), entirely on the outside edge, first one foot and then the other. Then, still cursorily, he cut a three on the right foot, and took up a back edge, and varied his performance by executing a piece of the famous serpentine line. It was impossible to acquit him of gusto in the studied nonchalance of his progress: here was he doing, as he sauntered along, all the feats to attain which others spent hours of persevering practice.

Teddy had not seen either Robin or Rosemary yet, and went swinging along, skating backwards, rather hoping in the deepest recesses of his mind that they had come down and were observing, like the rest of Lambton, his easy and majestic progress. The ice was of that satiny texture that is so flattering to the edges, and he really surprised himself by the firmness with which he went this way and that in bold half-circles at least three yards long each.

He was now close up to the rope that separated the holy place from the rest of the ice, when close behind him he heard the sharp clatter of some one evidently running on skates within the sacred enclosure, a thing that was quite contrary to all custom in that classical spot. Turning round he saw with

some little annoyance that Rosemary was tearing round the edge of the enclosure, just running on her skates, while close behind her followed Robin, doing the same. This would not do at all, for, in the first place, neither of them had passed the test which admitted them inside, and, in the second, running like that on your skates was the sort of hooligan proceeding which was only worthy of the unenclosed area where the vulgar populace joined hands and waved sticks. As they raced by him, he could not but notice how much at home they seemed on their blades, and he himself would not have cared to go such a pace. Then as they receded up the edge of the enclosure, he heard Robin shout out, "What is it this time, Rosemary?" and she screamed back at him, "Outside rocker." Teddy frowned to himself at this unseemliness, and then suddenly his pleasant face cleared again. No doubt Daisy, who was watching them, had let slip the fact that both he and Mrs. Joyce could do rockers, and they, having observed his approach, were chaffing him, and, not knowing at all what a rocker was, were chasing each other round the ice, and calling their performance by that hallowed name.

Then suddenly Rosemary ceased running on her skates, and at top-speed sailed out, with skirts blown close to her, to the centre of the ice, where Mrs. Joyce had already put the orange that was the focus of the combined figure. She was moving at a really

tremendous pace, on the outside forward edge, upright in carriage, and leaning a little back. Just as she got to the orange, she seemed to Teddy to give an infinitesimal flick with her lithe loose shoulders, and she was sailing away towards the circumference of the enclosure again on an indubitable outside back edge. Certainly she appeared to have performed a rocker, but how had it happened, for nobody, as far as Teddy knew, could do a rocker except slowly and with a large kick? The next moment a wild scream went up, and Robin, no doubt with the same exalted intention, took the most imperial of falls, with arms and legs wildly flying, and his agonized scream terminating in a great shout of laughter.

Rosemary had caught sight of Teddy, and drew up with a whiff of scraped ice within a yard of him.

"Oh, Teddy, there you are," she said. "I never dreamed there would be skating till Miss Daisy rang me up. And you're a frightful swell, I hear. Come and do some big turns! Oh, look at Robin! Did you ever see such a gorgeous toss? Oh, and will you and Mrs. Joyce see if we can qualify for the skating-club? What have we got to do?"

Teddy's face assumed a reverential expression.

"Rosemary, was that really a rocker you did?" he asked.

"Yes, it was meant for one. But rather wobbly,

Isn't it? Come and show me. Oh, look, there's Robin having another shot."

Robin cantered round the edge and launched himself into the middle of the ice. He, like Rosemary, stood quiet and upright till he came near the centre, then he gave that same little flick of his shoulders and away he sped on the back edge, in a huge smooth curve that brought him up to where the other two were standing.

"Lord, I thought I should never find my skates," he said. "I haven't worn them since I was in Switzerland two winters ago. Teddy, you beast, why didn't you tell me that there was a chance of skating last night? I'd have had them ready. Let's have a combined. They say you're absolutely top-hole. Will you call? Don't make it too hard. Oh, I forgot: Rosemary and I have got to pass our test first, haven't we?"

Teddy thought this would be the best plan, and pulling himself together, though with an odd sinking of the heart, he went off to find Mrs. Joyce to assist him in the work of judging the competitors. She was at the far end of the enclosure, and he progressed there on the famous serpentine line. Robin and Rosemary remained behind, and they looked at each other.

"But what's that?" said Rosemary in a whisper.

"Dunno. Lambton figure. What are we to do? I said I heard he was top-hole."

"So did I. Look, he's doing a three. Oh, Robin! What a three! He hasn't the vaguest notion."

Robin pulled his mouth into gravity.

"I bet you he won't mind a bit," he said. "Look at his skates, too: those things with snaps to them or a key or something. The sort that come off."

Teddy took just as long 'not to mind a bit' as it took him and Mrs. Joyce to pass the two candidates. But it did take him that amount of time, for here was he, the acknowledged champion of Lambton, who an hour ago had come regally down into his frozen kingdom and two minutes ago had been hoping that Robin and Rosemary had arrived and were watching his back-edges, suddenly relegated not into the second rank, but into no rank at all. He had been accustomed when candidates came before him to see whether they were up to the standard, to relieve them by kindly encouragement from their natural nervousness, and to skate a three for them to show them to what heights they might rise if they persevered. These threes were at least two yards long both before and after the cusp, and were considered miracles of dashing performance. But now when Rosemary was asked to skate a three, she clattered with her feet on the ice to get up speed, and sailed from end to end of the enclosure, and when Robin was asked to change his edge, instead of

kicking in the air with his other foot, in the orthodox Teddy-manner, he appeared merely to look to the left instead of the right, and, lo, his curve to the right slid into a curve to the left. Then when this farce—for so Teddy felt it to be—of judging two candidates who were out of sight, in point of proficiency, of their judges, was over, they discreetly retired while Mrs. Joyce and Teddy considered the merits of their performance.

“ I’m not sure that I altogether approve of their style,” said Mrs. Joyce. “ Do you, Mr. Teddy ? It’s so hard to tell what they are doing. Now when you change your edge it’s easy to see what you are about. I daresay if you showed them once or twice how you do it——”

Teddy laughed.

“ My dear lady,” he said, “ that I entirely refuse to do. We must take it joyfully: they can skate and we can’t. That’s where we are. But I’m going to learn, if I break every bone in my body.”

“ Well, if you insist on passing them——” she said.

“ For my part, I really do. Dear me, the idea of a skater like me standing gravely by, to see if Miss Rosemary can do a three on each foot ! ”

Mrs. Joyce was disposed still to cling to her disdain.

“ I expect they’ll be very unsteady when they skate combined figures with us,” she said.

Teddy had an exceedingly trying hour after this. He placed himself straight away under the tuition of Rosemary, who, after putting her late judge through his paces, broke to him the fact that he must begin again from the very beginning, and forget all that he had thought he could do. Teddy, whose rockers had been watched by the skating-club with an admiration in which envy had really no place, so far were they removed from the attainable ambitions, found that not only must he learn rockers again, but long before he arrived at that point he must learn how to skate edges, and before he learned to skate edges, must learn how to strike. It was better, so he unerringly inferred, to know nothing than to know what he knew, and, with set face and determination gleaming in his kindly eyes, he, the champion of winter sports, became a tyro, and in the eyes of Mrs. Vickary, who came down to look on, not only a tyro but a charlatan. She found a seat next Daisy, and proceeded to poison the frosty air.

"Well, I'm sure I am very much surprised at all this," she said. "To think that all these years we have thought that dear Mr. Teddy was such a wonderful skater, and now to find out that he can't skate at all. Look at him trying to imitate Mr. Robin! Is it not quite laughable? And poor Mrs. Joyce, too! Upon my word this is a come-down for them. What a pity that people give out that they can do

things of which they have no idea. It is like Mr. Winkle over again, is it not ? ”

Depreciation of other people was Mrs. Vickary's method of ingratiating herself, and her acid remarks were really meant to show how much she appreciated Daisy's having retired from her post of solo-singer. She had been ousted (Mrs. Vickary had begun to think that her own diplomacy had been somehow and inexplicably responsible for this), and she would probably like to find that others had been ousted too.

“ Or is it naughty of me to compare our dear Mr. Teddy to Mr. Winkle ? ” she went on. “ But do you not remember the scene where Mr. Winkle said he could skate ? Ah ! Mr. Teddy has fallen down ! I do hope he has not hurt himself. Dear me, what a good thing Miss Marion is not here ! I am sure she would say some dreadfully unkind, sarcastic thing. But she is not permitted to come into this sacred enclosure, is she ? She does not rise to dear Mr. Teddy's standard of what skating should be. But we shall have to alter all our ideas now ! ”

Out of the corner of her eye Daisy perceived that Marion was stealthily sliding towards them, catching hold of seats by the edge of the ice or of anybody who happened to be handy. By rule, she was not allowed on this part of the ice at all, as Mrs. Vickary had said, but then Marion always did exactly as she chose. Daisy waited till she was quite close up to

them, simmering with indignation. Then she turned sharply round.

"Oh, there you are, Marion!" she said. "We were talking of you and of this skating revolution. Mrs. Vickary said you would be sure to be very unkind and sarcastic about it."

Marion anchored herself quite firmly between Daisy and a chair, clutching hold of each of them. Then she gave a grim nod to Mrs. Vickary.

"Skating revolution?" she said. "What's happened?"

"Only that we have all found that Miss Rosemary and Mr. Robin skate a million times better than anybody else. And so Mr. Teddy is beginning to learn it all from the beginning. There he is!"

"I call that sporting," answered Marion. "That's my idea of being sporting."

Mrs. Vickary gave a little titter.

"There! Did I not say she would be sarcastic?" she said.

"Then you are most uncommonly mistaken," said Marion.

After which awful speech, the chair she was holding on to slid away, and she fell on her back. But even as she lay on the ice she repeated: "Thoroughly sportsmanlike. Pull me up, Daisy. How I adore skating."

When she got to her feet, Mrs. Vickary was titupping away in her thrush-like manner.

“ Vickary ! ” said Marion, in a voice of withering scorn, without further comment.

Just as in the matter of the solo-singing, then, so in these skating matters, the banner of youth was suddenly hoisted over the mediaeval and familiar fortresses. In itself it was a wholly trivial affair whether Daisy sang solos or her place was taken by Rosemary, even as it was trivial whether Teddy was the champion of the skating world or was relegated to the position of humblest learner. But what lay below the surface was the ‘ Dämmerung ’ of the older generation, the heedless, inevitable supplanting of it by the new. In themselves such things mattered no more than the actual fall of the barometer-needle ; it was what they stood for, what they indicated and prophesied, that should be of concern. And yet the analogy hardly holds, for these rain-clouds coming up were such brilliant sunlit spires, sky-children of breezy weather. There they floated, rejoicing in the upper air, bringing with them gladness wherever they moved as well as the shadows that they inevitably cast, which, in a manner of speaking, were wholly independent of them. By their very nature, the nature of their age, they cast shadow, and by the same nature diffused light. There was no stopping or staying them anyhow ; it was for the inhabitants of the plain below but to observe them, to wonder what they were going to do. Dazzled by the brightness, Teddy looked at one of them ; it was as

if he was putting up a ladder into the sky, and walking up it rung by rung.

"I want ; I want," he said, and still mounted.

But he began to wonder what the clouds were saying to each other.

CHAPTER XI

ROBIN was standing at the door of Mrs. Paulton's house in the blaze of the January moon. He was dressed in sweater and knickerbockers, and round one of his thickly gloved hands was the string of a toboggan that sat on the hard frozen snow. On the doorstep with the handle in her hand was Rosemary.

"No, I won't come in," said Robin. "I'm all of a muck to begin with."

"So am I."

"Yes, but I haven't seen Teddy since breakfast. I think I'd better go home."

"And won't you come to dine? He, too, of course."

"I'll ask him," said Robin, "but if he doesn't want to—he's got an awful cold—then I think I'll stop with him. It's my last night, you see."

Rosemary nodded.

"I see," she said. "But make him come if you can. Oh, I say, I wish you weren't off to Cambridge to-morrow. It will be so dull."

"No, it won't, 'cept for me. Well, I'll come to dine if I can. You understand?"

"Rather. Come across to say good-bye tomorrow anyhow."

She opened the door, and an oblong of light streamed out on to Robin's figure.

"Of course," he said. "Good-night, then, in case. It's been a ripping time."

"Oh, hasn't it? Good-night, Robin! Oh, and give love and sympathy to Teddy."

Robin waited till the door was shut, and then dragged his toboggan up the path to the gate cut in the paling. He had no sort of regret (except that Teddy had such a cold) at being unable probably to go back and dine at the Paultons', for it was so obviously his part, on the last night of his vacation, to stop at home with him. Teddy hadn't been reasonably cautious for an elderly man, thought Robin, and he wouldn't go and change his soaking clothes after a morning's tobogganing, but came to lunch, like him and Rosemary, in his wet things. It was not for want of warning that he had been so rash, for both Rosemary and he had begged him to be more prudent. But their advice seemed to have had the effect of merely confirming him in his obstinacy. Consequently he had caught the most awful cold. Robin was genuinely sorry, and not even in his mind said 'I told you so.' But he thought it was very foolish of Teddy at the time.

Teddy had been in the studio all afternoon, keeping the fire and the stove heaped high with fuel. The room was intensely hot, and smelt strongly of eucalyptus, though he himself was incapable of smelling it. No one had come near him, not even the telephone had sounded with the promise of something cheerful in a day or two, he had not set eyes on Robin since breakfast, and he had stewed himself into a mood of solid discontent, and felt older and uglier and duller and more querulously minded than he would have conceived possible. He was thoroughly tired from the excessive energy of these weeks of Robin's vacation, and not only was he suffering from a severe cold, but from the reaction of having finished a piece of work into which he had put his whole heart. There on his easel stood the completed picture, but though he knew it to be good, the contemplation of it to-day gave him no sort of pleasure. Robin and Rosemary looked at each other with the first joyful salutes of youth to youth, and as he stewed himself in this solitude, it was from that more than from his cold or his reaction that he suffered.

He had no shadow of reason to suppose that any word or thought of love had passed between them. They but played and rampaged together as two boys might have done, and always welcomed companions to join them. Once or twice, feeling a little ashamed of himself for so doing, he had prompted Robin to state his opinion of the girl, and Robin had enthusi-

astically replied that she was a ripper. Rosemary, under similar encouragement, had openly announced that Robin was a darling, which she would hardly have done if she literally meant it. But how easily she might mean it; how extremely natural if she was on the edge of meaning it. He wished with all his stupid cold-beridden head that this arrangement of Robin's spending his vacations here had never been arrived at.

As the short winter day closed in, Teddy felt that everything else was closing in. He had painted a picture, it is true, in which he knew he had expressed himself (which, given a sufficiency of technical skill, is the most any artist can hope to do), but except for that and his portrait of his mother, what trace hitherto had he left of his passage through the world that once had seemed so gaily enchanted a garden? He had failed, so he told himself, thinking bitterly of that diary he had burned, in doing anything like what he could have done for his mother—the rest of his life had been passed in playing foolish games, and priding himself on his supposed excellences in them. That had been his life, his sphere of interest, and now, the moment that two active young folk had come among them, the exposure of his extreme second-rateness was popping up on all sides. And he was getting too old to learn, he could no more recapture the quickness of clicked muscles, the swift sureness of eye, than he could recapture that

lambency and lightness of youth which was the inimitable possession of those who were young. He could produce, so he believed, some faint copy of it, and he thought that neither Robin nor Rosemary found him a heavy companion, but, oh, the difference between a manner that he knew was partly an effort and a manner that was no more an effort than the dew that lies on flowers at dawn. Even as, physically, he got stiff and caught colds, so too his mind and soul were growing rheumatic and catarrhed. Once, he supposed, he must have also been possessed of that electric radiance in some measure, but he had lit nothing with it: he had let it burn itself out, light-heartedly planning achievement or merely frivolling away the sunny days. He had still the desires of youth, he longed for swiftness and joy, and in his heart he knew the flame of love was lit. But over the desires were being heaped the disabilities, physical and moral, of age. He was accustomed to feel at least ten years younger than his age; to-day, after this month's spectacle of Robin and Rosemary, he felt quite that number of years older.

He heard Robin's cheerful whistle in the hall, which he always answered by a counter-call if he was in. But this evening he really had not the heart to reply, and found himself hoping that Robin would go upstairs without looking in. But next moment the studio door was thrown open.

"Hullo, Teddy!" said the boy. "There you are. How's the cold? My Lord, what a fug you've got up!"

Teddy felt thoroughly ill-used; he had been left alone all day, he had been the prey of depressing reflections.

"If it is too hot for you, you will find it cooler in the drawing-room," he said.

"Bless you, I don't mind," said Robin. "And did you think I should go and sit there leaving you here?"

"Why not? Pray do not bother to stop here, if it is too hot for you. I have been alone all day."

Robin was beginning gently to steam.

"I know: it's rotten of me. I meant to come back hours ago, but the tobogganing was too ripping. How's the cold?"

"About the same," said Teddy. "Thank you."

"What a bore! I hoped it would be better."

Teddy gave a great sniff. He knew he was behaving like a sulky child, and imagined he was only being very polite.

"Will you be dining here to-night?" he asked.

"Or have you got another engagement?"

"No; of course I'm dining here. Oh, by the way, Rosemary sent you love and sympathy."

"That is very kind of her," said Teddy. "Thank you for telling me."

Robin looked at him with bright affectionate eyes, quite unclouded with any touch of resentment.

"Dear old Teddy," he said. "It is a bore for you having such a cold. We wanted you awfully to-day."

Teddy was silent a moment. Old as he might feel himself, his heart still went forth to youth, and suddenly all his good-nature and love blew away the mists of his peevishness. He jumped out of his chair, and linked his arm into Robin's dripping sweater.

"I'm a cross old bear," he said. "That's what's the matter with me. And on your last night, too, Robin. I ought to be kicked: a firm hard kick would do me a world of good. But I'll be all right now. Now will you promise to answer me a question truthfully?"

Robin just pressed the crook of his elbow into Teddy's hand, which was sufficient acceptance of his apology.

"Rather," he said, smiling down on him.

"Well, it's this. Wouldn't you sooner go across and dine with the Paultons? I'm no company for anybody. Didn't Rosemary ask you? I expect she did."

"Well, she did. Of course I said I shouldn't leave you alone. I said if your cold was better, and you felt inclined to come, we'd both go."

Teddy peered out from behind the studio curtains.

"It seems a clear night," he said. "Perhaps, if I wrapped up, it wouldn't hurt me."

" Oh, but of course I'm completely happy dining here," said Robin. " What do you take me for ? "

" I take you for an ass if you'd rather dine alone with me than have a jolly little party next door," said Teddy, taking the receiver off the telephone.

There was a wonderful evening with charades. Teddy's cold was much worse next day, but he regarded the penalty as small compared to so much pleasure. It may be doubted therefore if he had travelled quite as far from youth as he feared.

Lambton generally, and Daisy in particular, was a good deal exhausted by the activities consequent on the long frost, which had been followed by a heavy fall of snow ; for the moment skating became impossible, tobogganing began, and as in duty bound, she had been spending the day in dragging her little sledge up steep hills, and getting tumbled out in the snow as she slid down them. She was not therefore at all displeased when, a day or two after Robin's departure, she woke to the sound of pattering rain, and saw her windows streaming under the irrigation of a warm south-west wind. Marion also had been infected by this demon of athleticism, and she came down in the best of spirits to breakfast that morning, feeling that the change in the weather had exorcised it.

" I suppose we ought to condole with each other," she said, " on the stopping of all our winter sports,

but I never was more delighted in my life. I shall write all morning, and doze all the afternoon, and not stir out."

Daisy felt bound to dissent.

"Oh, Marion, how can you?" she said. "An end to all our delicious tobogganing, which you enjoyed so."

"I didn't," said Marion. "I hated it, but for some reason I felt I had to do it. I thought I liked it, but I know I didn't. I'm much too old for that sort of thing, and so are you."

"My dear, what's made you so cross this morning?" asked Daisy.

"Cross? You know I'm as pleased as Punch. But what has made you dishonest?"

"Dishonest?" asked Daisy.

"Yes: you're not getting deaf yet, are you? I know quite well that you want a rest, and you know it too. You were delighted to see the rain on your windows, only you won't say so. This last month has been infernal, you know, though I mustn't abuse it, as it's given me an idea for another book. I shall call it *The Wand of Youth!* Those two children have been waving the wand of youth over us. It's a dreadful spell: it doesn't restore youth in the least, it only produces impotent desires which make one behave as if one was young. Thank goodness, Robin has gone. I was never so glad to say good-bye to anybody. Fancy my having danced to their

pipings! I'm really ashamed of myself. But one of them has gone and the weather has changed, so perhaps we shall be more comfortable. We can wave our wands over Rosemary, now she's alone, and hope to make her middle-aged: give me that cushion, please. I want more support in the small of my back. Not that it's so small."

Marion settled herself comfortably down in front of the fire, and tucked up her skirts.

"There!" she said. "I shall sit here and toast for half an hour and then get to my work. And poor Mr. Teddy will get some rest, too, instead of flying about with that rampagious boy. He gave the best imitation of us all of being young, but I saw him getting more peaked and haggard every day till he caught that cold! Holidays indeed! Thank God the holidays are over, and we can rest ourselves again instead of working so hard."

"There's Rosemary left," said Daisy.

Marion gave her sister a quick glance.

"You mean that Mr. Teddy will be flying about after her."

"You are rather coarse, dear," said Daisy.

"Stuff! It would be worse if Rosemary flew about after him, perhaps. Dear me, to think that we all chose Mrs. Paulton to be his wife last autumn. Vickary started that, and we were all fools enough to believe it."

Daisy had hastily picked up the daily paper when

this new topic began, and was staring at it upside down. She wanted not to say anything more, but found she could not hold her tongue.

"Do you really think that Mr. Teddy is—you know?"

"Well, he doesn't look at me as he looks at Rosemary," said Marion sturdily.

Daisy got up.

"I must be going out," she said. "I have odds and ends to do in the town. And—and I daresay we are quite as wrong about Mr. Teddy and Rosemary as we were about him and Mrs. Paulton. They have been here six months now. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, dear, except leave me perfectly uninterrupted till lunch-time. What a jolly morning!"

The thaw had come in no half-hearted fashion, and when a quarter of an hour later Daisy, in mackintosh and goloshes, stepped out into the warm rain-sheeted morning, it had already progressed far in its work of sweeping the winter away. The hard bright surface of the snow was changed to a texture as of sodden wool, rivulets of melted water ran down the edges of the paths, and lay in puddles, staining the whiteness with mud and gravel, and the drippings from the denuded trees had penetrated in black pock-markings to the bare ground beneath. Twig and sticks and the debris of autumn showed through

the winter coverlet, and though it was yet but mid-January, a foretaste of the languors of spring that herald the revivification of the world was in the air. Nature had not awoke yet, nor yet was conscious of the storage of life within her, but like a sleeper, drowsy and laden, just stirred in her dreams, and no more, as the first faint streak of day glimmered through her closed eyelids. The air was relaxed and dispirited: it was as when dawn shows through the curtains of a deserted ball-room.

Daisy splashed disconsolately about her errands, languidly discussed the rise in butter with Mrs. Joyce, avoided Mrs. Vickary, and ran into the arms of Rosemary, who, in a black mackintosh and sou'wester hat, dispensed with an umbrella altogether. Even Rosemary seemed in eclipse this morning.

"Isn't it all infamous?" said the girl, with a comprehensive sweep of her arm. "What did the snow come for, if it was going to behave like this?"

"Well, it had to go sometime," said Daisy. "You would not have had it here all the summer."

"Yes, I should. You could sweep a tennis-court. Think how nice it would be to have snow on a hot day. Flowers would look pretty too, coming out of the snow. Why shouldn't I have it here all the summer?"

Daisy looked sympathetically at the face which all its depression could not despoil of its radiance.

"Well, it would be rather pretty," she said. "It does seem a good plan."

This would not do at all apparently for Rosemary.

"Ah, what nonsense you talk," she said.

"I didn't begin: you suggested it."

"I know, but you agreed with me. When I'm cross, as I am now, I want people to disagree with me. Then that gives me an excuse for being cross. What are you doing?"

"Just shopping: a few little jobs."

"May I come with you?" asked the girl. "I want to get through the morning somehow."

"By all means. I shall like to have a companion. I must go to the grocer's now."

"I hope it's a long way off. Oh, I've stepped in a puddle. I wish I was a man, and then I should swear."

"Dear me, do all men swear?" asked Daisy. "I never heard Mr. Teddy swear."

"Dear old Teddy. He isn't a man, is he? Oh, I suppose he is. But I always think of him as a perfectly delightful maiden-aunt. Aunt Teddy! I think I shall call him Aunt Teddy."

Somehow this secretly pleased Daisy. She liked to know that the girl thought of him as an aunt. Rosemary proceeded to develop this impression.

"What a horrid temper I'm in," she said. "Teddy's only like an aunt because he's got that sort of sympathy and understanding that men so seldom have. But I don't want to be understood this morning: I'm beastly inside."

"But what's the matter, dear Miss Rosemary?" asked Daisy.

Rosemary stepped in another puddle, and quite distinctly behaved like a man below her breath.

"I don't know. It's the thaw. And would you mind not calling me Miss Rosemary? You only say 'Miss' to barmaids."

"Well then, Rosemary."

"That's better. But what am I to do to-day? Or to-morrow? Or ever? It was bad enough when Robin went."

Again Daisy felt pleased.

"Yes, he did brighten things up, didn't he?" she said.

Rosemary shrugged her shoulders.

"There was some one to play with," she said. "Look, there's Mrs. Vickary. She's like a bird, and I should like to wring her neck. But with Robin gone and the frost gone, what am I to do? What happens all February?"

Daisy tried to remember what happened all February.

"There are the gardens," she said. "Gardening begins to be interesting in February, doesn't it?"

"Oh, is gardening ever interesting? Flowers are, but not gardening. Just as food is interesting, when you're hungry, but that doesn't mean you want to be a cook. And where are you going now?"

"Would it bore you to come as far as the Stores?"

"Yes," said the girl. "But it would bore me more not to. Do you mind my being so cross? I'll go away if you do. Please be disagreeable also: I want to work myself up to be fearfully unpleasant to my mother."

"Indeed? Is that a good plan?"

"It's the only plan I can think of. You see she thought of going up to town until Easter, and she won't make up her mind. So my plan was to be so disagreeable that she would simply long to get out of the place. Of course, I should go with her, but people don't stop to consider that: they only want to go away."

For the third time Daisy felt the world was brightening. She entirely liked the idea of the girl going away till Easter, and at Easter there would be Robin here again. She tried not to know why the thought smiled on her, failed, and turned hypocrite.

"Oh, but what shocking news," she said. "Fancy your deserting us like that. But if you do go I hope you'll have a lovely time in town. They say amusing things are always going on in town."

"I shall try what being cross will do. The worst

of it is that mother may guess what I'm playing for, and refuse to budge until I recover my temper again. Then I shall have wasted both time and temper. However, I seem to have plenty of temper to waste, don't I? But I hate wasting time. What's the good of having it, unless you turn it into happiness somehow? You can turn it into happiness for other people, as that angel Aunt Teddy did for his very awful mother——"

"My dear Miss—I mean Rosemary!" said Daisy.

"Well, she was awful. Why shouldn't I say so, especially since she has ceased being awful. Or are you shocked at my calling Teddy an angel? It is equally true. And what makes him twice as angelic is that he hasn't any idea what an angel he was to her. But you must turn time into happiness. And here am I being cross to you and planning to be worse to my mother, and not even enjoying it. That's waste."

They came out of the Stores together, after settling the question of a fish-kettle, and by a swift flanking movement avoided Mrs. Vickary again.

"And where next?" demanded the girl.

"I think those are all my jobs," said Daisy. "It's time for me to be getting home. It's one o'clock, I see."

Rosemary sighed.

"Thank goodness the silly morning's over," she

said. "But there's the silly afternoon. What will you do with that?"

"I dare say I shan't go out again. Marion may want a little copying done for her, or she may read me what she has been writing."

"And to-morrow?" she asked. "More little household jobs and more readings and copyings?"

"Oh yes, and a walk, I've no doubt, if the snow goes away and the weather clears."

The girl regarded her in silence a moment.

"Do you know that you're an angel too?" she asked.

"Indeed, I don't. I——"

"Don't contradict me. You are. What I mean by being angelic is the habit of going on doing the ordinary things cheerfully, like you. However, I'll be angelic too, if I can only get mother to go to London. I'll go to theatres and shows and dinners and all the ordinary things quite, quite cheerfully."

"And when will you be going?" asked Daisy.

"Oh, next week if it comes off. When does Easter happen? It always happens when one doesn't expect it, but the idea was to be three months in town. But now I must hurry up home, and not waste my good bad-temper any more on you."

It may be supposed then that Rosemary's temper had its designed and desired effect, for within a

couple of days it was matter of common knowledge that the Paultons were going up to town almost immediately, and would be away for three months. This seemed a very strange thing to do, for Lambton could not help remembering that they had arrived here only at the end of last September, and could hardly have been expected to settle down yet. It was odd to gad about like that, and not be satisfied with your home, and probably they would find that a week or two of London would be sufficient to send them back again. For London to the Lambton mind was rather in the nature of some homoeopathic drug, which, if taken at all (and then under doctors' or dentists' orders), should be administered in exceedingly small quantities. Indeed, to contemplate a stay of three months in London would be equivalent to a sudden announcement on Mrs. Joyce's part that she proposed to eat several pounds of pure arsenic. No one had ever heard of such a thing. Mrs. Vickary went further: she believed that Lent was very slackly observed in London, and that theatres and entertainments went on much as usual, and she would not wonder if Mrs. Paulton proposed to make an orgy over that sacred season. She had kept very quiet here: indeed, nobody had seen anything of her at all, and it was but reasonable to suppose that she had been 'saving up' in order to enjoy this Lenten debauch. Her husband would not admit that, and reminded her that there were not only

debauches to be had in London but an unrivalled succession of Lenten services, while Mrs. Andrew's mind was simply and solely concerned with the question of what servants she would leave behind and how much she would pay them for board-wages. Yet another theory was that, in pursuance of autumn imaginings, Mrs. Paulton was making a Scythian retreat in order to cause Mr. Teddy to follow. But the answer to all these conflicting theories remained unsolved: even Mrs. Andrew, who twice sent her maid up with a note and orders to be very talkative in the kitchen while it received a wholly unnecessary answer, could get no information as to the particular point that so much interested her, and she regretfully conjectured that the servants must have been bribed to say nothing. All that was known was that on a wet afternoon at the end of January, Mrs. Paulton's motor went to the station four times before the starting of the fast afternoon train to town. Even that did not pass without dispute, for Mrs. Vickary said that it had gone there five times. When this was reported to Marion she said in an awful voice, "Then Vickary drinks: she saw double one of those times."

It was strange how, on the moment of the departure of the fast afternoon train, all the fizz and effervescence also departed from Lambton life. A week's rest after the exhaustion and fatigue of the

winter frosts had brought its inhabitants up to their normal level, and in ordinary years their gentle gaieties would have got into stride again. But now they did not : instead of striding, they halted and went lamely. Somehow the presence of real youth had produced a species of spontaneous liveliness which failed when youth was withdrawn. First Robin, then Rosemary, had migrated to other haunts, and the more elderly company, though not exactly shaking its ' few sad last grey hairs,' suffered under the loss of a nameless exhilaration. Their remarkable activities, which had blossomed in a manner unknown before, sank back into a condition that almost resembled lethargy. It was as if they had been gazing into a looking-glass and seeing young faces instead of their own : now, with the withdrawal of youth, they perceived themselves. Of them all Teddy was far the acutest sufferer, and of them all, one not only did not suffer in the least, but felt immensely rejuvenated. To Daisy had come back her proper rôle of *jeune première*, and so far from profiting by her self-communings on the stone-heap, she threw them from her like unsubstantial dreams. They were no longer to her sober reflections based on actualities : they were the morbid imaginings of an under-vitalized mood. Spring with its everlasting promises stirred in her again, and with the push of the snowdrops she climbed with them from their sleep below the winter-hardened beds. Never had

she so consistently sparkled to her admiring sister, who embodied many of these gems in the last and most brilliant chapter of 'Bill.' But it is idle to deny that these rays shone out most purely serene when Teddy was of the party.

CHAPTER XII

ON a certain warm windy morning at the end of March, Teddy was standing in front of his picture with poised brush and half-closed eyes. He stood there perhaps for a minute, directing his glance keenly and critically from point to point in it. Then he nodded at it, pressed some vermilion out of a tube, and signed his name in the bottom left-hand corner. It was done, and mingled with the ecstatic delight of achievement there was also a sense that he had parted with something, said good-bye to it, as he signed his name there: he had signed something away.

But this entrancing morning beckoned him out of doors, and now at last he was at liberty to respond to its summons and salute the spring, and promising himself a tremendous treat, thought that in a minute now he would go out and embrace, with the welcome of a free man, the joy of the young year. All this last week some intimate desire that came from far deeper down in him than the mere physical longing to feel the wind and the warmth, to answer to the

allure of white clouds and budding trees, had been tugging at him, but instead of yielding to it, abandoning himself to the sheer joy of the season, he had bridled and used his instinct, storing it up, consciously and deliberately, in order to put it on to his canvas. Instead of bathing himself in it, he had dipped his brush in it, and his foreground, the meadow by the Arno, had absorbed it. He had entirely scraped off his first version of that, which had been a mere catalogue, a mere enumeration (skilfully counted) of the grasses and flowering herbs with which one actual meadow might be supposed to be gay. Now, instead, in more symbolical fashion he had loaded it, irrespective of the normal possibilities of any meadow, with all the lovely tokens of springtime riotously displayed, to make a worthy theatre for those two incarnations of romance and youth who walked there. In his first version he had been careful to adorn it only with such flowers as might have been in blossom together ; now, abandoning that, he had given it all that symbolizes springtime. Along the brink of the river, like the foam of its blue waters, there frothed forget-me-nots : on the left was a thicket of wild-rose, on which had lit a goldfinch, scattering the petals. Behind it a laburnum hung its tassels of pale flame, and on the grass below, as if a piece of the infinite depth of azure had fallen from the sky, a bed of bluebells, with primroses scattered among them like specks of sunlight filtering down

through leaves, stretched away till they met the lighter blue of the forget-me-nots. Deep in the sunny grass grew fritillaries and cowslips, deeper yet violets and daisies were mingled in stars of white and hidden purple, and through the tufts there pierced the heads of narcissi and tawny irises. Larks, with down-beating strokes of their wings, aspired above the heads of the two who met there, and in the grass at young Dante's feet there sprawled a tortoise that had come forth from its hibernation. It too, the aged horny thing, felt the sunlight penetrate its antique carapace, and its stumpy mailed legs rocked it along among the flowers. Whether larks and laburnums and tortoises and tulips and forget-me-nots and irises could ever have found themselves together in this favoured meadow, Teddy cared not at all. The spirit of spring had to be there in any lovely manifestation that his brain could conceive and his brush depict. Nor did he care whether, historically, Beatrice and Dante could have been boy and girl together. He chose that it should be so; the poet in the glory of his youth met the maiden with whom in Paradise he looked on the pageant of the mystical Rose, and knew the Love which moved the sun and the other stars. He did not mind what Marion thought about it when she came to see it a few weeks ago, or how reasonable was her contention that Dante must have been at least forty—as old as Teddy, in fact—when he met Beatrice, and merely

drew for her in mockery a pen-and-ink sketch of the picture in which he himself, odiously caricatured, took Robin's place, and asked her if she liked that any better.

"Besides," he said, "I am in the picture already. As you probably know, artists of the Italian school often put portraits of themselves among the crowd of worshippers or what not. Well, I've done that already. Look carefully and see if you can find me."

Marion had been in a sardonic mood that day, for 'Bill' was finished, and she felt flat.

"I suppose you mean you are a goldfinch or a skylark," she said. "Hail to thee, blithe spirit."

"Look again," he said, "and you'll see a tortoise in the grass. It's a hundred years old, but even it feels the spring. That's me."

Marion noted the tortoise, and nodded to Teddy with psychological acumen.

"Ha! That means you don't feel old," she said. "People who feel young always say they feel old, in order to convince themselves that they don't."

That certainly, whatever the truth of its general application might be, had been a wonderfully correct divination on Marion's part, in this particular instance. Whatever the merits of Teddy's picture might be, or whatever its faults, the execution of it had certainly had the tremendous merit from his point of view of recapturing youth for him. All that first month after Rosemary's departure, he had felt

himself a monument of stale and unprofitable elderliness : never had life been to him so flat and so lonely. Then, at first in a sort of despair, but with a gradual quickening of the spirit, he had forced himself to work, and very soon he no longer forced himself but his work forced him. Between him and it, the creator and the created, there grew that mystic mutual spell, that was whispered back from one to the other till it grew to singing, and, for all his forty seasons, he found he was not yet deaf to the lyrical voice. His own conception seemed to inspire him, and all through this lovely March month, with day after day of moist languorous spring weather, that fashioned the showered foam of blossom on the early-flowering shrubs, he lived in this clear sunshine of creation, not dissipating in the mere physical delight of living the sap that ran tingling through him, but putting it into his picture. There was the great merit of the finished thing as it faced him now on his canvas : it brimmed with conviction. Now it was done ; he had put himself into the flowering meadow, and since it was done, the flower of his brain would no longer feed him. Hitherto he had so mingled himself with it that it gave back to him what he gave it ; now, with the last stroke of his brush and the signing of his name, it was parted from him, and the virtue that had gone out of him had its channel sealed behind it, and would no longer ebb and flow from him to it and back again. The

high romantic bliss of the creator had been his ; now the creation was severed from him, and on the moment he began to feel that sense of reaction that must always follow any achievement that has been sincere.

But the ichor still boiled in him, and letting himself out into the garden, he bathed himself in the inspiration that he need no longer save for use, but might enjoy. The warm wind streamed from the south-west, and over the arch of blue there passed a scattered company of white-bosomed clouds that chased each other northwards. Along the highlands of the forest they floated with their shadows bowling along beneath them, and as overhead they passed across the face of the sun their edges were liquefied into linings of molten crystal. Round the tennis-court the almond trees were in flower, in the grass beyond clusters of daffodils swayed and nodded in the wind, and suddenly in a bush close at hand a thrush poured out its throatful of repeated song. Leaves were bursting from the red buds of the limes, and the hawthorn hedge was covered with squibs of crisp foliage and cracklings of green flame. Just beyond the paling which separated him from the garden next door stood a clump of birches : they were not in leaf yet, but round them there hung that purple flush of spring which shows that the sap has reached the end of the twigs and needs but an hour or two more of sunshine, or one more pronouncement

of the spell of the fruitful spring night, to set the bark on fire with the twinkle of leaves.

Teddy saw and heard the jubilation and symphony of the springtime; he recounted to himself the manifestations of its joyfulness, and then with staggering distinctness became aware that it was all outside him, that it did not penetrate below the vision-sheet of his eye or the sounding-board of his ear; he was in the middle of it, but as if in a diving-bell. The glass walls of his own personality cut him off from it; it was all exterior to him and sundered from him. All those weeks, as he revelled in his rendering of spring, his very bones had burned with the reality of it: now, when no longer he was dealing with the mere paint that expressed at second-hand in a translated material his conception of it, but with the thing itself, in the singing thrush and the flowering almond tree, instead of its becoming amazingly more real to him, he found that it had lost its quality of reality altogether, and was but a painted thing. He was not part of it, nor it of him, even as in his studio his picture had passed out of his blood and slid away from him.

Teddy was not a great hand in matters of psychology, but this consciousness of his was so defined a phenomenon that he could not help staring and wondering at it. The impression was one of isolation and insensitiveness just when he had thought that the vernal mood would swallow him up in its crowd

of exulting citizens. But immediately a plausible and a comforting explanation suggested itself. For the last month, in the fervour and heat of his work, he had lived almost completely alone, for he wanted no other companions than the bright creatures of his imagination. Once Marion had come up to see the progress of his work, and two or three times perhaps he had been over to see her and her sister, but otherwise he had passed the days in the hermitage of art. Now, with the finishing of his work, the normal human spirit within him, starved so long, cried out for human companionship. Without some one with whom to share the glory of the springtime, its glories were necessarily veiled and sundered from him ; he could neither see nor feel unless some other of his race saw and felt with him. Even in the work of his picture the analogy held, for who could paint a thousand flowers and all the glad presence of that meadow unless these were but a setting for those who walked therein ? It had not been for the sake of blossoms alone that he had painted their growing and their fallen petals, but for the sake of the two figures, Dante and Beatrice (or, if you will, Robin and Rosemary), who were the human incarnations of the spring that rioted round them. They had been his companions then, it was their joy that had enveloped him as he wove the blossomed floor on which they trod.

Instantly he turned about and went back into the

house again. Those two, Robin and Rosemary, were not accessible here and now to his human need, but he must have companionship. He was by no means of that rare class of artist, supreme in one sense, self-centred in another, for whom his art supplies all the needs of human life. He had as little claim to supremacy as he had to self-centredness, and though in a spell of inspiration he had sufficed to himself all this month, his need now for a friend, a playfellow, was as clamant and imperative as a pang of hunger. But unless he was much mistaken the telephone would soon satisfy that ; and he demanded instant communication with Daisy, and when that was established announced the completion of the work, and proposed himself for lunch and a bicycle ride afterwards. In his present mood, if his proposal had not proved acceptable there, he would even have suggested a visit to Mrs. Vickary. By virtue of his long fast from sociabilities any human provender appeared delightful, even as to the starved man the entrancingness of the prospect of victuals is independent of their quality. His spirit as a gregarious animal wanted something to eat, and he cared very little what it was.

Half an hour remained to him before he must set out, and he spent it in furbishing himself up, as it were, to put in an appearance on the Lambton arena again, amazed to find how completely he had shut himself off from it. He knew really nothing of what

had been going on, apart from the few flotsam bits of news which had drifted into his studio. 'Bill' certainly was finished, for Marion had announced that fact on the day, now several weeks ago, when she had suggested his identity with a goldfinch or a skylark. She had been amazingly truculent that day, and he remembered wondering whether she was well, for not only had her severity been of the order of a snappishness dictated by physical discomfort, but he had thought her face looked haggard and old. But that impression perhaps had been due to his own constant companionship with the two radiant youths in the meadow by the Arno, or perhaps, as seemed probable now in the light of this morning's experience, she was only suffering from the reaction that follows completed achievement. But in half an hour now he would see the eminent authoress again, and probably find the fierce light of creation streaming from her as she hewed her way, in the fashion of Michael Angelo, into the next novel. He knew, too, that Daisy was a mass of multifarious activities, but beyond that he was as ignorant of Lambton news as if he had spent a month abroad. Even his drawing-room, in which he had hardly set foot, seemed strange to him, strange and certainly lonely, for it wore that uninhabitable look which rooms out of use so soon acquire. It seemed to call for denizens to impart life to it again : it was desolatingly tidy and unlived in. He must

arrange a cheerful evening or two to restore it, and no less him, to their normal levels.

His bicycle was in the outhouse beyond the studio, and as he passed through the room he looked again at the canvas which for the last month had been his life. Even in this hour it had moved vastly farther away from him : he could look on it and judge it as a thing exterior to himself, and he saw with a thrill of pleasure how truly it expressed his conception. Whether it was good or bad he hardly cared : all that mattered was that it expressed what he meant. The salute of youth passed between those two figures, and the flowering meadow rejoiced in their meeting. And had there crept into their eager faces something more than that ? Was there a deeper wonder latent in their eyes ? With a sudden unpremeditated movement he whisked the easel round, so that his picture stood with its face to the wall. And next moment, with the big wind of spring at his back, he drifted without effort along the drive past the tennis-court and croquet lawn and the gate in the palings which had been shut so long.

Daisy welcomed him with cordial congratulations on his accomplished work.

"Well, that was great news," she said. "And how nice of you to tell us at once. I long to see it."

"But of course you shall. When ? Will you

and Miss Marion come and have a cup of tea when we get back from our ride ? ”

For a second a shadow passed across Daisy's face, dimming the welcome of her smile.

“ Ah, that would be nice,” she said, “ though I can't answer for Marion. She's deep in a new book already, and is working very hard—too hard I think sometimes.”

Teddy noticed this withdrawal of light from Daisy's face. But the shadow lingered there only momentarily.

“ Ah, there's an example for lazy folk like me,” he said. “ As soon as one piece of work is off her hands, she's buried in the next. And to think that I have been meaning to take a long holiday. I have been planning as I rode down here how completely lazy I should be.”

The sonorous gong, brought from China, sounded at this moment, filling the horse with bronze vibrations and making talking impossible till its echoes had died away.

“ Marion wants us not to wait for her,” said Daisy. “ She's coming when she has finished her chapter. Shall we go in ? And what other news have you for me ? It's really ages since we've had a talk.”

“ News ? News ? ” said Teddy, beaming. “ Why, it's you who have got to give me news. I've seen nobody, heard nothing, and done nothing but my painting.”

"Mr. Robin?" suggested Daisy.

"Robin's the worst correspondent in the world," said Teddy. "He writes a post-card now and then with two lines on it. But I expect him back the week after next."

Daisy was determined not to ask after Rosemary. Why, she hardly knew, but she felt that she would ask woodenly if she asked at all. But she wanted to know, and next minute her reticence was rewarded.

"The Paultons too," said Teddy, "I suppose they'll be back before long. Rosemary is little better than Robin, but she did send me a catalogue of exhibitions and theatres and dinners the other day. She's another of the indefatigables like Miss Marion. What a time we had at Christmas: on the go from morning till night. Jolly though, wasn't it? Ah, here's your sister. How are you, Miss Marion?"

The moment Teddy saw her, he felt that there was something wrong. The wrinkles had gathered round her eyes, and slashed their way down her cheeks. Thin and spare she had always been, but here, in her fallen face, was the wasting of something eaten away. And he felt that he knew why the shadow had fallen on Daisy's face.

But her manner showed no abatement of its firmness.

"Well, finished your work, have you, Mr.

Teddy ? " she said. " Going to have a holiday now, I suppose. Gracious me, how I hate holidays ! Daisy, don't give me nine slices of mutton. I'm not a navvy. No, I think I won't have any at all. Just some gravy and a potato."

Daisy looked appealingly at her sister.

" Not just one little slice, dear ? " she said. " You had hardly any breakfast."

" No, not just one little slice. Gravy."

" I am hoping you would come up and see my picture this afternoon," said Teddy. " Not that there's much to see, but at tea-time, do you think ? "

Marion shook her head.

" Can't spare time to-day," she said. " Got to break the back of my new book first. Think it's breaking, though."

She took a mouthful of potato, and left the rest on her plate. Then suddenly she bit her lip, as if in some spasm of pain, and Teddy saw her hand that crumbled her bread tremble. But whatever it was, she mastered it at once. Then she saw that Teddy had observed her.

" Touch of indigestion," she said. " Who cares ? I don't. But when one's working there's nothing like shutting yourself up and sticking to it. That's the way to get on. Not very lively for Daisy, though. Glad you're going to take her out for a ride. Where'll you go ? Jerusalem and Madagascar would make a nice round. And when is Mr. Robin

coming back? Good gracious, how he took the shine out of you all at skating!"

Teddy laughed.

"And Rosemary made mince-meat of the rest," he said.

"Good fun though," said Marion. "But I was glad when it was over. I expect you were too. Daisy was, though she wouldn't own up to it. The fact is we're all getting old, and we don't like to say so!"

"You seem fit for a day's work yet," said Teddy.

"Yes, but I'm a hundred and one," said Marion.

"Now, if we've all finished looking at dirty plates, let us go on to the next thing, which is bicycling for you two, and chapter five for me."

She paused at the door of her study as they crossed the hall.

"I'll get back to work at once," she said, shaking hands with Teddy. "Come again as soon as you please, and as often: it's company for Daisy. I'm no good when I'm in the collar. See your picture some day."

This was all sufficiently robust, and since, as they drank their coffee before starting, Daisy made no allusion to Marion's health, Teddy let the rather uncomfortable impression that her appearance and that sudden touch of indigestion had made on him fade in his mind. But for the time, it had given him an uneasy sense of there being something secret

in the house, something that retreated before observation, and hid itself behind the corners of vigorous or characteristic conversation.

At Daisy's choice they had started up the long hill which led to the ridge of the forest, where she had gone on a frosty day in November, and at once that wonderful solvent of human companionship, by means of which we can assimilate the aspects of nature so that they become part of us, began to exercise its due effect on Teddy. All that had been meaningless to him this morning was brimful of meaning now. What had been the colourless prose of the changing season became lyrical to him, even as the picture which had been so difficult to tackle had soon begun to sing to him. He had wanted just that, the interpretership of a companion, who, though she said little on their upward ascent, reserving her breath for the exigencies of the climb, was there with him, and by her familiar presence brought him out of the glass diving-bell which before had cut him off from the world. The sense of spring-time penetrated him again, warmly suffusing him and giving him that consciousness of youth with which his picture had supplied him while he was engaged on it, and of which, when finished, it had robbed him. The sky was blue inside him, and through him the clouds trailed their shadows: his skin prickled in sympathy with the budding beeches and fizzed with the hawthorn squibs. From external

objects the spell of companionship rebounded on to itself and irradiated his companion with the light of human fellowship.

On the last half-mile of ascent they met the wind full in their faces, and he saw that Daisy, flushed yet determined, was pursuing a wavering course that threatened every moment to terminate. Instantly he dismounted.

"Well done!" he said. "But you've beaten me. I must get off. I can't compete with such a hill-climber. Give me your bicycle to wheel: two are no more trouble than one. Upon my word, this is a good breather you are giving me."

He had pitched his key correctly, and Daisy, much gratified at his surrender, and even more gratified on her own account, dismounted also.

"The last time I came up here, I rode the whole way," she said.

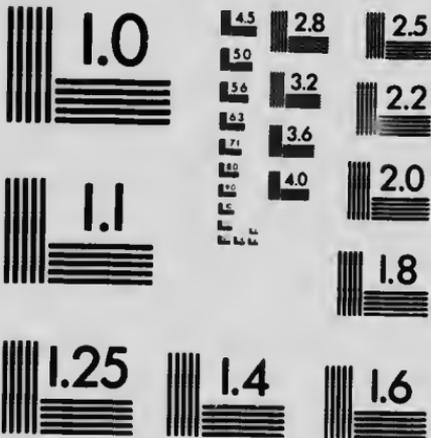
"I know, but then you must have pity on the frailty of us mere men," he said. "You and Miss Marion! I never saw such a pair. You put us all to shame. Upon my word, I believe you grow younger every year. You'll be in short frocks soon."

He turned gaily to her as he took her bicycle-handle from her, and saw with his revived senses how easily and strongly she walked beside him, how becomingly the blood flushed her cheeks. (If there was a touch of rouge there, it was admirable rouge, and quite came up to its advertized qualities.)



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Once, he remembered, he had focused her and Rosemary together, and had seen with a shock some truculent difference in elbows and neck, but now there was none there with whom to make comparisons, and he saw a comely face, enhanced to him by years of quiet affection, that was not out of tune with the springtime. He had been starved of human presences and of the presence of friends, and even had Mrs. Vickary been tittuping beside him, he would have found something attractive in her nimble motions.

Daisy laughed and smoothed down her skirt.

"I am in short frocks already," she said, "if I am to believe Mrs. Joyce."

"What has Mrs. Joyce been saying?" asked Teddy with intensest interest.

"Simply that. But Marion supported me. She was a dear. She said, 'And what's the use of having your frock chawed up by the chain? Perhaps you'd prefer to see Daisy come home in rags?' Chawed up, you know! That's just it. Marion finds such wonderful expressions. They give such force, do they not, to her conversation."

"And Mrs. Joyce?" asked the revelling Teddy.

"Well, when Marion speaks like that, there is nothing more to be said. You 'cave in' as Mr. Robin used to say. Mrs. Joyce caved in at once. I was almost afraid Marion had been too severe."

The steepness of the hill eased off here, and they

mounted again to ride up to the top of the ridge where the heap of stones had afforded Daisy a seat last November. Already they had fulfilled their destiny, and had become part again of the solid earth from which they had been quarried. The bicycles hummed a little more lightly over that last hundred yards of road, where the fragments of hewn and hammered rock had been pressed back into the enormous bosom of the world. Soon, perhaps, in rivulets of muddy water they would flow into the gutters that drained the road, and spread fresh nourishment for the roots of the wayside grasses. Nothing was in one stay: the fossil of a million years ago became grass or gorse. It 'caved in' and consented to turn into blossom. There was no waste, but there was no permanence. . . .

Teddy took up her last phrase.

"But I refuse to cave in," he said. "I'm caving out, if there is such a thing. I burst outwards on a day like this, when I have a friend with me."

Daisy remembered just where that heap of stones had been. It was visible still, the site of it, in a bareness of the grassy margin of the road. Its disappearance somehow encouraged her. She drew no gloomy impression from its evanescence. It had gone to mend the road and feed the wayside herbage.

"Oh, don't let us 'cave in,'" she said. "I hope there are many sunny days coming. I cling to things—don't you?—I want quantities of more

days just like the old ones. They have been jolly. I will be so thankful if I can have more of them."

There was some ring of anxiety in her voice that had got there by accident against the intention of her will. She had put on the throne of her consciousness this renewal of life and of her intimacy with her companion. As regards that, she had spoken with actual falsity, for indeed she wanted then far more than past days had given her. But even as she spoke, an anxiety, couched in the dark of her mind, had toppled over the throne of her conscious desires, and raised a rebellious voice for itself.

Teddy could not but notice this.

"Indeed they have been jolly," he said, "and I hope we shall have many more of them. But am I right? Did you speak then as if you were afraid that something was going to cloud them? If it was so, Miss Daisy, I claim the right of an old friend to share your trouble."

They had got to the very summit of the ridge which they had agreed on as the goal of their expedition and she dismounted. The genuineness of Teddy's friendliness warmed her heart: she liked to give him the rights he claimed.

"Tell me then what you thought of Marion," she said. "How do you think she was looking?"

Teddy gave her the sincerity she wanted, without blurring its edges.

"I thought she looked very far from well," he said. "Tell me all about it, Miss Daisy, won't you?"

"Well, you saw how she looked, and yet she won't go to see Dr. Stables. She knows she should, but she insists on finishing her book first. Why it was only begun three weeks ago! She has attacks of pain too, and says it's indigestion. How can that be when she doesn't eat anything?"

"Dear me, that's very foolish of her," said Teddy, looking the picture of serene health. "I always go to the doctor if I think there's anything wrong. Usually he tells one there isn't, so it's well worth while."

Daisy shook her head.

"Marion's not afraid of being told there's nothing wrong," she said. "She's afraid of just the opposite. But what can I do? If I say anything about her health she snaps my head off. And I'm getting anxious about her. I tell myself that she's only overtired, and that when her book is done she will eat and get well again, but underneath I'm afraid there is something more than that."

"Yes, yes. Now what can I do?"

"Nothing. You might as well argue with the wild-cat in the Zoo as argue with Marion when she's set on anything. I got Dr. Stables to come once, but Marion made the most awful face at him: she put out her tongue and said, 'If that's what you've come to see, there it is. Now kindly go away.' I

was really ashamed of her. And she gave me such a scolding afterwards."

"Dear me, that does make it difficult," said Teddy.

"It makes it impossible. But I did want to tell you. An anxiety doesn't hurt so much if a friend knows it. The worst thing the world holds is loneliness."

"Surely. But I wish I could think of some plan." Daisy smiled at him, drying her eyes very carefully.

"Tell me if you do," she said. "Now I feel better already. I know that a friend is thinking of me. Ah, what an afternoon! Indeed it was worth while making that long ascent. The larks, listen to the larks! What a jubilation they are having. And now shall we turn? Are you really going to be so kind as to give me a cup of tea and show me your picture? That will be a treat, and then I must get home again."

The wind had died away, and in the warm dusk that evening, after Daisy had left him, Teddy wandered up and down the paths of his garden between the flowering shrubs and across the rough grass of the plot below the croquet-lawn, in which the sunny day had brought to blossom a hundred more daffodils. That morning the sounds and scents had knocked vainly at the door of his soul, now it was thrown open, and the spirit of the fruitful spring

night poured through him flooding him with the eager expectancy of the burgeoning world. By themselves, they had had no message for him ; their arrow had to be feathered with human companionship before it could pierce him. That hour spent with his old friend had winged the dart, but . . . but was that all ? Could it not be so feathered that it would fly straighter yet and pierce more deeply ? Surely, as Daisy had said, there was nothing in the world so terrible as loneliness, that acid that bleaches the colour out of all the rainbows in heaven. But there were degrees also in companionship, and he longed already for that which should set his blood not tingling merely, as it tingled now with the sense of spring and friendship, but should make it ring with that sweet tumult of which he had already heard the rumour.

He had come to the fence in which hung the gate that had so long stood shut, and suddenly with a leap of the blood he knew that he wanted to see Rosemary. True, she would be back here in ten days now, but why need he wait for that when the fast afternoon trains took one so easily to London ? Certainly also a little gaiety, a little mild dissipation, the sense of crowds was really owing to him after his long retirement ; that formed a plausible excuse in itself, for when spring was bursting in him the idea of solitary evenings, such as he had spent so contentedly while he was at work, was immensely

distasteful to him. To-day was Saturday : Monday evening should see him lodged for a day or two in the centre of things. . . .

The darkness had deepened, and from the west a little breeze rustled among the young leaves, dying away again. There was a touch of chilliness in it, and he walked briskly back to his house. . . . It seemed a warning : there was possibly a hint of treachery, a vestige of winter left for all the caressing warmth of the evening. And unbidden there came into his mind the thought of Marion. There was a wintry touch about her thin wrinkled face as he had seen it to-day, her spasm of pain, her refusal to consult any expert opinion. And yet he could not see what he could do to assist the situation. There was no use in having her put out her tongue at him, if she condescended so far. But there, at any rate, also in Marion, was a counterblast to the wintry touch. She refused to shiver, nothing would make her shiver, and, after all, her particular attitude was the best possible combat to the woeful heritage of the flesh. Whatever he suffered, great or little, she chose to despise it, and went sternly on with her book. . . . As he let himself into his house Teddy pictured to himself so vividly the discomfited withdrawal of that impressive physician, Dr. Stables, that an inward necessity made him outline an admirable caricature of him and his patient, her, with her tongue prodigiously protruded, looking

over her shoulder from a table piled high with manuscript. He would send it to Daisy next morning, or take it himself to her after church with news of his departure to London. Perhaps even Marion might have heard that he had been confidentially admitted to that really classical interview, for Marion grimly delighted in these representations of her travestied self. He had done a whole series of her, now in possession of the model, that showed her prowess on the frozen lake, and subsequently in strange trussed attitudes on the tobogganing slopes. "Draw me again, Mr. Teddy," she had always said, and gave weird cackles of delight as he entangled her and Robin together.

He finished his caricature and looking round his studio saw that he missed something. Yes, that was it, for this morning he had turned his finished picture to the wall. Something had made him dislike the sight of it, and what it was, he, in this ebullience of spring that had effervesced in him since then, could not in the least remember. He only remembered wheeling it round. But the moment he saw it again, he remembered. There was that in the faces of the two that was something more than the mere salute of youth to youth. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

TEDDY was seated in a comfortable smoking compartment in the fast afternoon express on Monday with a wealth of parcels and small impedimenta scattered over the seats, like the rocks on a moraine. These did not belong to him but to Marion, who was opposite him, and who always, on the rare occasions that she travelled at all, subdivided her belongings into homoeopathic pieces. The principle underlying this disposal of her property was that if you put a trunk into the van and lost it, all was lost. But if you had some dozen bits of luggage, it was highly improbable, if you kept your eye on them, that they should all go astray. And at the end of a journey some luggage was surely better than none at all.

This unlooked-for situation had occurred in an unlooked-for manner. Teddy had walked back from church with Daisy after the morning service on Sunday, and had been easily induced to saunter with her for half an hour in the garden. Marion had joined them, and since she knew that Teddy had

become acquainted with her interview with Dr. Stables, he had produced his caricature. Marion had pored over it with occasional explosions of laughter like a gun, and had said :

"That bucks me up. The book has stuck, and I want bucking up."

This gave Teddy an opportunity.

"I'm going up to town to-morrow for a day or two," he said gallantly. "Come with me, Miss Marion. Let's elope. That'll give you a new experience! Or have you eloped before?"

Marion hardly paused.

"I'm on," she said. "I'll elope. Afternoon train I suppose. I'll stay at my club: you can't. You stay at yours, and fetch me next morning, for the marriage service. Ha! I want a jaunt. You might take me to the theatre that evening. We'll be married next morning, and I'll come back here that afternoon. No wedding ring, and Vickary will cut me. Let's look at me and Dr. Stables again."

She turned to Daisy.

"You don't mind, do you?" she said. "I'm only for one night. Back next day."

"But . . . but mayn't I come too?" asked Daisy.

"No, dear. You aren't on in this. It's Teddy and me. I wonder if there's a pantomime still going."

This amazing plan—a bolt from the blue—was

duly carried out. It was not precisely what Teddy had intended, for he had distinctly meant to see if the Paultons were disengaged that night and propose some kind of festival. But when Marion made up her mind to a thing, that thing got done, and he found himself at an early hour that evening as Marion's guest at the Ritz Hotel, after which, to the score of his hospitality, they were to proceed to the theatre together. The papers had informed them that there was no pantomime to entertain them, and instead Marion decreed that they should proceed to a roaring knock-about farce of which she had seen a stimulating account. At dinner a sense of the humour of the situation constantly overcame her, and she enjoyed herself enormously.

"Poor Daisy, left all alone," she said, "but I felt like this. Sometimes you want to get away from your relations, and after all, she'll have a pleasanter evening than most she's had of late. I've been as cross as two sticks. Her fault partly, because she watched me, and if you aren't feeling very well, you hate being watched."

"I'm sorry you haven't been well," said Teddy.

"So am I. But don't think that's going to stand in the way of my work or my pleasure. My work had stuck, as I think I told you, so what was the use of moping and grouching down at Lambton? Far better to have a beano."

She looked round the brilliance of the room that

was rapidly filling up with diners. Satins glistened, jewels glittered, silver gleamed on the tables. The decoration of life, like the dazzle of sunlight on the water, made it impossible to look below, to peer into the depths or the shallows that lay beneath the surface. Just now, for reasons of her own, Marion wanted exactly that. Any of these gay diners might have some secret tragedy of her own, but that was gallantly shuffled out of sight, tucked away perhaps only just below the tablecloth, or left in the cloak-room, but in any case forbidden to mar the evening's festivity. And this brave show was in no way forced or unreal: it was the expression of the human need of joy, the instinct for light and beauty.

Teddy was not slow to associate himself with his companion's mood. Marion had dressed herself in a manner suitable to the festive and metropolitan side of life, and her red satin and her garnets were altogether remarkable. And her mood was as genuine as her garnets; she identified herself with the splendour of pleasure.

"Certainly it was an exceedingly good idea of yours," he said. "What fun it all is! If I had stopped at Lambton I should have been yawning over my lonely dinner and wishing it was time to go to bed."

"Are you lonely? You yourself?" asked Marion suddenly, as if she had some private idea in connection with this.

" Yes, sometimes."

" Get a wife."

Teddy did not want to discuss this seriously, and so was flippant.

" Am I not going to have one to-morrow morning ? " he asked.

" Ha ! Do a picture of me in orange-blossom, will you ? But don't be lonely. You oughtn't to be with your work. I'm not lonely. But after all, now and then one feels one's work doesn't matter, neither your pictures nor my books, nor anybody's books or pictures. Life's the thing, after all, isn't it ? That's why we come up to town and go to a play."

All evening Marion continued to overflow with enjoyment that was almost greedy in the way it snatched at diversion. Her hoarse baritone peals of laughter resounded through the theatre, her eyes streamed with the tears of amusement, she rejoiced in the thick-woven tissue of absurdities that was called a play. All the material of elementary humour was there, a mother-in-law, pyjamas, tipsiness, sitting down where no chair was, mistakes as to bedrooms, wrong numbers on telephones, a baby unexplained till the last act. Teddy had quite an average share in appreciation of the merely ludicrous, but he felt himself a creature of faded and blasé senility compared with his companion. Finally he left her at the door of her ladies' club accessible only

to women who had achieved distinction in the arts, and his last glimpse of her through the glass panels of the door showed him her face still wreathed in smiles as the hall-boy helped her off with her satin cloak richly trimmed with feathers.

He had made known to Rosemary his presence in London, and was to lunch with her and her mother next day. The morning was a divinely radiant exposition of spring weather, and rather than spend it indoors, he went to pass an hour at the Zoological Gardens. That sense of spring had penetrated into the hearts of the caged fur and feather, and here was a tiger lying in the sun relaxed with the languors of the season, here a wolf differently affected by the same influence, was rubbing the tufts of winter hair from his flanks, and smartening himself up, as a young buck should at the approach of mating-time. Teddy's sympathies appeared to be with the wolf rather than with the tiger, and he presented the most dapper appearance with cloth-topped boots, a new tie, a gold-tipped malacca-cane. Brisk and smiling he went from one pen to another with the fun of the evening before, no less than the pleasures that were coming, simmering in his mind. Marion had been a positive revelation : he could not but feel at ease about her again, for surely no one who was not in stable health could display so spontaneously exuberant a spirit. She revelled in life : life, like some advertized ointment, ' touched the spot ' for her.

All she had wanted, probably, was to get away from her work and the sense of being watched, which she had spoken of, and give rein to her instinct for gaiety and unreflectiveness. She certainly had looked very unwell a day or two before, but the cure of the body often began in the mind, and she would go back to Lambton a different woman after this brief tonic of town.

He had time to spare before his appointment in Davies Street, and walked back through the Regent's Park. Spring was there too, but after the country days, it seemed to him to break its wings against the bars of the city that surrounded it ; it was not wild and shy, but, like the jolly prisoners in the Zoological Gardens, it was tamed and civilized and made to dwell with men. The flowers, in orderly rows down the beds, had the suggestion of the greenhouse about them : they had been taught to bloom, so it seemed to Teddy, somewhat as a child learns the piano, as a polite accomplishment. But the town version of spring was pleasant enough, and he continued in the Park till he came opposite the north end of Harley Street.

That interminable thoroughfare stretched southwards into a fair-weather haze of bluish mist, and as he went down it Teddy wondered at the multitude of physicians who made their abode there : London, it seemed to him, must surely enjoy very poor health if it needed so much medical attendance.

But the street was empty of passengers, and perhaps the supply of doctors exceeded the demand. Then he hung on his step, for across the pavement from one of those decorous houses there came a woman, going to a taxi that was waiting in the street. She turned her head as he paused within a yard of her and he saw that it was Marion.

She saluted him brusquely.

"Hullo!" she said. "Did you think I had jilted you? So I had. I shan't marry you to-day after all. But I thought as I was in town I might as well see a doctor."

"Very wise of you," said Teddy. "I hope he was reassuring."

She looked at him a moment, and he wondered why her eyes looked as if they saw nothing. But she answered quite cheerfully.

"Yes, he quite relieved my mind," she said. "I never see a doctor, which is seldom enough, without being afraid that he's going to cut me open like the pigs you see hanging at the butchers. So undignified! Funny meeting you here. I shall go back to Lambton this afternoon. What a good laugh we had last night, didn't we?"

She got into her taxi, and Teddy, as he closed the door, saw that again her eyes expressed nothingness.

"And where do you want to go?" he asked, for she had given no direction to the driver.

" Oh, to my club, 14 Portsmouth Street. Thanks. See you back again I suppose in a day or two."

Teddy gave not more than a moment's thought to this meeting. Marion had definitely told him that her mind had been relieved, and that was the main point. But in spite of the normalness of her manner and her assuring speech her eyes looked as if she had been stunned. Then he fell back on her assertion again and thought no more of it. For in a house not half a dozen streets away there was expecting him she who of all others signified spring-time to him.

Rosemary gave him the most cordial of welcomes, and news that he felt he did not enjoy in the light-hearted manner that was fitting.

" Oh, it is jolly to see you ! " she said, giving him both her hands. " And whom else do you think you are going to see ? "

" A friend ? " asked Teddy.

" A particularly close one. Robin of all people. He telegraphed this morning : his term is over and he's going to spend a couple of days with us before going down to Lambton. Isn't that lovely ? "

" Dear me, that is a surprise ! " said Teddy.

" I know. We'll all three play the fool together as we did when we were at Lambton at Christmas. What fun we had till you caught that dreadful cold. But after all Robin went back to Cambridge a couple of days afterwards, so the fun was really over.

London has been adorable, too, and we're going to have this to finish up with. But I shall love to be at Lambton again. Now how long are you up here for?"

"Oh, just a day or two," said Teddy. "And where's Robin?"

"Gone to get tickets for all three of us for some matinée. You will come, won't you? I told him to try for 'Feathers' if he can get seats."

"Why, I saw that last night," said Teddy. "Miss Marion and I went together."

Rosemary went into peals of laughter.

"How perfectly darling of you!" she said. "Was she very stern about it?"

"Just the opposite. She laughed herself crooked. She cried."

"And you don't mind going again?" she asked.

Robin arrived at this moment, caught Teddy in his immense arms, and waltzed him all round the room. Rosemary flew to a gramophone, which struck up a hoarse bellowing dance-tune, and Robin left Teddy and danced with her. As they revolved wildly round him he felt suddenly and awfully old.

"Now I'll break the bad news," said Robin when the gramophone raved its voice into mere scratching noises. "I've got three seats, but I won't deceive you, and they're not together. Two are, but the third is only together with itself. Teddy, I'll fight you for sitting with this flapper."

Arbitration seemed the juster plan, and they set out after lunch with the agreed treaty that Robin should sit by Rosemary for the first act, Teddy for the second, and so forth. From his solitary seat a few rows behind them he could hear the ring of their laughter, and when the first act was over, it was strikingly clear that they had completely forgotten about him. Topics even more absorbing than the stage adventures held their heads close together, and when the darkness for the second act fell over the theatre, he could see against the footlights that their own affairs concerned them more than the play, for they still whispered together behind a programme. And he could not but look at them instead of the stage, where the jokes and absurdities that had so diverted Marion and himself last night seemed now extraordinarily flat, for in their concern with each other there was something that concerned him more vitally than any farce could, or for that matter any tragedy. But as a sensible and decent middle-aged man ought he to see in it all only a kindly natural comedy? Youth went to youth: it was they who enacted the loves of the world. The rest were wall-flowers, which, after all, were given a homely fragrance of their own. Faintly that aspect began to flicker on his horizon.

Robin, looking round as he leaned toward Rosemary at the end of the second act, saw him, seemed to remember something, and next moment picked

his large-limbed way out of the row where he sat. He beckoned to Teddy from the gangway, gesticulating him into the seat he had just vacated, and Teddy, mindful of the rights of the treaty, sidled out also past indignant knees.

"I bang forgot," said Robin. "Why didn't you howl at me? Your turn with the flapper."

The flapper—that odious expression—gave him a welcome as genial as Robin's renunciation of her; but he had but a faint heart for her, and she, when the curtain went up again, an even fainter interest in the remarkable adventures of the stage. And she had no use for her programme now as a screen for conversation: it only served to smother her yawns. Then at the end of that act Robin passed a note over to her in which was written: 'Isn't it rather piffle? Shall we go? What does Teddy think?'

There was no dissentient voice over the abandonment of a performance which had proved so exhilarating the night before, and with Robin as an immense bodkin between the others, they drove to a notable tea-shop. Instantly the spirit of laughter woke again, instantly also the spirit of being odd-man-out seized Teddy. It was not that the other two were anything but affectionate and pleasant to him: it was only that they instinctively kept forgetting about him, for their eyes and ears were for each other. They kept remembering about him

also, said it was the greatest luck that he should be in town, asked him a question about Lambton, and did not know whether he had replied or not, or what his reply was, for their attention wandered again to each other. That remembering about him was the worst part of it, for it was so conscious and affectionate an effort. And when they had finished tea and drifted out into the street again, Rosemary made him faithfully promise to come round next morning and make another delicious plan for the day. But she said nothing about this evening, and she and Robin took a taxi together, as he was not going in their direction.

Indeed, there was no reason, so Teddy reminded himself, why she should have said anything about this evening. He had lunched with them, he had gone to the theatre with them, and if there was any other hospitality going forward, it was he who should have offered it. He had vaguely planned a dinner and a music-hall, but that was before he had known that Robin would necessarily be of the party. He loved the boy; none knew that better than he, but he had not cared to ask the two of them to be his guests, nor had the idea of a *partie carrée* with Mrs. Paulton as the fourth crossed his mind, to make allurements. With all the respect due to that sweet woman, he did not want to talk to her, while Robin and Rosemary looked at each other. And he made no doubt that that would have been the general scope of

the evening. It was better to dine alone at the club than suffer that.

Teddy had no heart that night for public entertainments: he had enough locked up in his own mind to serve him for an evening, and sitting in one of the big chairs in the smoking-room, with an evening paper as a pretext, he looked matters, for the first time, squarely in the face. Long ago—it seemed years ago—he had seen the salute of youth pass between them even as he had embodied it in his picture. He had encouraged himself with a vain thought, that their fitful battery of vivid glances was no more than that, that they were not seeing each other as he had begun to see Rosemary. So often had he noticed, denying the import of it, how Robin's eyes, looking now right, now left, as he stood for his portrait, would look straight just once and see the girl in front of him: how hers would pursue the same meaningless course that yet had so much meaning, for before long they would get entangled instantaneously (and instantaneously disentangle themselves again) with his. Rosemary never talked to Teddy like that: when she talked to him she looked straight at him and met his glance without embarrassment. But when she talked to Robin, her eyes fluttered like moths at twilight: she spoke and looked and looked away, masking the attack that was only the answer to his more male steadiness. She, womanlike, avoided just that which she sought

when the intimate play of the eyes was in question. She was sure that when she returned to him again he would still be pointed at her. Then, on that return, his handsome face glowed, and his eye brightened like the eye of a young horse, and she knew it.

Teddy ordered a large whisky and soda and a cigar. Thinking, at this juncture in his affairs, was a most uncomfortable process, but he had better make it as comfortable as it could be made. He did not strive or cry; he had not at his age that lilt of the blood that makes the 'twenties' so wretched and so desirable a decade, and he did not want as passionately as a young man wants. Had he thought he was possessed of an outside chance with Rosemary, he would have staked his soul on that chance, and the very fact that he recognized he had no such chance gives the exact measure of his temperament and age: a younger man would not have known it. Nor would a younger man have been capable of the common sense that came to his aid as he sipped his whisky and soda, and was aware that his cigar was up to the quality that he was right in expecting, considering the price he had paid for it. And this common sense presently crystallized into the determination to make no more plans for the morrow with Robin and Rosemary, as he had been invited to do, but to go back to Lambton and have no more torturings with the thought of what was not in his reach. He saw his position, and he made up his

mind to adjust himself to it, for his *beaux jours*, his April and his May, just dawning on the renewed world, were over. Fifteen years ago he might have risen to the ecstatic level, and have found some girl to tread those precipiced heights with him. It was possible that there was such in the world, but Rosemary was not she, and the quest or the waiting for another would not be for him the roaming through the enchanted garden which gives its native divinity to such pilgrimages. A feather from the noble bird of young romance had fallen on him, and he still held it in his hand, but he knew it had fallen out of the sky of youth, where such birds mated. He had no wings to bear him there, and sustain him in the swift exultant flights in which a boy looks for a girl, and the image occurred to him of himself flapping his arms and standing on tiptoe, which was a ludicrous parody of flight. Flight was not for him, nor should the parody of it any more make him a contortionist. He would rub the slate clean, he would put the idea of wings out of his mind as an absurdity, the very longing for which made him ridiculous. And having quite determined on that, he lay awake half the night fancying himself in the land of enchantment. In intervals of dozing he heard his blind tap against the frame of his open window, and fancied that Rosemary was somehow fitfully present.

Marion had followed out her programme, and had

arrived at Lambton, with all her multitude of small parcels quite safe, and numerically increased by one, for before leaving town she had bought a very novel Parisian blouse for Daisy. She found her sister just returned from a bicycling ride, and saw she had not overestimated the pleasure the gift gave her. A gratuitous bit of finery like this was irresistible.

"And you enjoyed yourself, dear?" asked Daisy, when this smart piece had been sufficiently admired.

"Immensely! Mr. Teddy and I went to the most amusing play I have ever seen, last night. I have never laughed so much. It did me a tremendous lot of good. Oh, and we had dinner at the Ritz first; that was my contribution to the evening's entertainment."

"A good dinner?"

"Quite excellent. There was a macedoine with ice that I really must try. It seemed quite a simple dish."

"And this morning?" asked Daisy.

They had finished tea, and Marion, as she lit her cigarette, wheeled her chair so that her back was to the light. She felt that she could command her voice perfectly, but she wanted to be a voice and no more for the next few minutes. There was no use in trying to break to her sister what she had to say, and there was no object to be served in delaying it.

"I will tell you about this morning," she said. "I went to Dr. Sandford in Harley Street."

" Ah, my dear, how wise of you," said Daisy.
" He is one of the most eminent of all, is he not ? "

" I believe so. I made the appointment with him yesterday before I left here. And now there is bad news coming and good news. Daisy, I have an incurable disease. There is the bad news. And it is impossible to operate. I can't tell you what a relief that is to me. I should hate to be cut up. I'm an awful coward about that sort of thing. So that's the good news."

There was a long silence, while Daisy sat, with the smart Parisian blouse in her hands, quite motionless. Then with her habit of method and neatness, she laid it tidily down on the table and came and knelt by her sister's chair.

" Oh, Marion, Marion," she said, " I can't bear it."

Marion answered with all her usual force and directness. She had quite made up her mind that this was the best line to take, the only respectable way, in fact, of behaving.

" No, you haven't got to," she said. " That's my job: lucky, isn't it, because I can do it quite well. Now, my dear, I'm going to say nothing more at all to you for two minutes by my watch. One can get used to anything in two minutes. Two minutes is an eternity when you look at a watch. After that you'll give me a kiss, to show you have got hold of it, and then I'll tell you all that is in my mind. I've

had half the day to think it over and pull myself together, and I've got all my papers in order now, so to speak. So fix in your mind what I have told you : get it close to you : look it in the face."

So for two minutes Marion kept her eye on her watch, and at the end she said 'Time's up.' Then Daisy gave her a wet cheek, and Marion wiped her face and returned the kiss with a cheerful smack.

"There!" she said. "Wasn't that two minutes an eternity? And now listen to me, Daisy. The first thing I've got to say is this, and please never forget it. I'm used to it already. How that has happened so soon I don't know. But there it is : I don't like it, I think it's detestable, but it seems natural. I don't like muggy weather for that matter. I expect that the truth is that when you've got to bear a thing, there's something that comes along with it like—like the meat in a sandwich. Vickary would call it the needful strength, and I daresay she's right, only I hate that sort of way of putting it. But it comes, and I'm sure it's only a fair arrangement. Perhaps if I had been told that I had to be cut up like a pig, something corresponding would come along and call it sausages."

Marion delivered this remarkable discourse with the profoundest and most decisive sort of conviction. She paused a minute to light another cigarette, and went on with the same vigour and breeziness.

"I suppose you'll want to know some of the details," she said, "but really I can't tell you much about them, because I don't know myself, and I don't want to. They don't matter. When Dr. Sandford had examined me, I saw that something was very wrong, and I simply made him tell me. I did indeed, just by sheer force of will. I stood there, my dear, and I said, 'I am going to know: nothing frightens me except not knowing.' I have a very powerful will, and I just chose to exert it. The upshot was that he told me I had a thing with a very ugly name, and he couldn't advise an operation. I shan't get better: I shall get worse. Eventually I shall be rid of it all, because it will have got rid of me. It won't be very long about it either, he thinks, which is a blessing. And that's all, all that we are ever going to say about that particular part of it. At least, I hope so. But if you've got any question to ask, ask it now and for ever hold your peace."

That common and heroic thing called pluck had its splendid grip on both of them.

"No, I've nothing to ask," said Daisy after a moment.

"I'm glad; we'll leave it like that. He's going to write to Dr. Stables and give him full information, and I'm going to do what Dr. Stables tells me. So we've finished with the ugly medical side of it. But now there are plenty of more important things. I'm going to make the best of what now remains.

That's far more important than making the worst of what doesn't. There's going to be no sadness about this house, at least if there is, it will be your fault and not mine. And it mustn't be yours. You must go on leading your ordinary life, quite simply and naturally, not dropping anything, nor being less interested in general affairs. I'm going to finish my book : I told Dr. Sandford how swiftly I write when I'm in the mood, and he thought there was every chance of a person of my temperament—was not that grand?—being able to do it. Probably I shall have a good deal of pain, but then Dr. Stables will be told about that, and,—is it not lucky?—Algernon O'Callaghan is going to take to morphia, so I shall be able to describe it first-hand. Perhaps I shall not have much pain, and then, if so, all the better for me. Somebody scores."

She knitted her brow for a moment.

"I believe I've had six cigarettes to-day," she said, "but I'm going to have another. That's only for a treat ; I shan't make a habit of it. So there I am, not sad, and very busy. Before dinner, I may tell you, I shall get in a good hour's work. But before that, there's something more I want to say. It's this, Daisy. I should hate to think I was going to leave you lonely. I wish you would marry. I want you to marry before that. I can't say that I'll be bridesmaid, but I shall be able to see the path coming down from the church. I shall be able to

wave something at the window, a sheet of scribbling-paper probably."

"Oh, don't, don't," said Daisy.

"But I will. And I want to ask you something that now has really become my business. Will you tell me what Mr. Teddy's mother said to you the night she died? Or, did it concern you and him and what might have been?"

Daisy shrank back a little. That which had been said then was her exclusive property: she had never shared it with any one. But now when Marion asked for a part in it, she did not even wish to deny it her.

"Yes, it concerned that," she said. "But, my dear, how did you guess?"

Marion gave a proud kind of snort.

"After all I have written about human motives and desires and regrets," she said, "it would be singular if I could not guess a simple thing like that. Now I want your permission to tell Mr. Teddy that. It might make a difference. What he needs is a fresh reason for asking you to marry him. This is an admirable one."

Daisy attempted to fence.

"But you are assuming that I wish——" she began.

"Of course I am. It doesn't require much assumption. Tailor-made gown, bicycle, and, if you don't mind, rouge and hair-dye, and oh, my dear,

such friskings. Did you really think I didn't notice all that? Why do you label me with such a first prize for the fool-class?"

"You saw?" faltered Daisy.

"Of course. How could I help it? I thought you were quite right. You wanted him, and naturally tried to attract him. You wouldn't be a female otherwise. Don't be ashamed of your sex; that's silly."

Daisy buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, how awful it sounds," she said.

Marion giggled hoarsely, much as she had giggled at *Feathers* last night.

"Awful? Why awful? Nothing's awful except cant. Vickary's awful; you're not. Now I want to tell Mr. Teddy about what his mother said, and you haven't told me your feelings about it."

Daisy recovered her sense of self-respect.

"My dear, you must promise me never to do anything of the kind," she said. "I can't explain, except by saying that if—if he ever did tell me he wanted me, and I thought that his knowing what his mother had said had anything to do with it, I couldn't possibly marry him. It would utterly spoil it."

A certain fixed look, common with her when she was unravelling psychological problems, came into Marion's eye.

"That's interesting," she said. "Explain precisely why."

" Because — because he must want me for myself, and not for anything else at all," said Daisy.

" But if he's been on the brink once, why not lead him there again, as you were trying to do with—with all your paraphernalia, and then tip him over ? " asked Marion.

Had Marion asked Daisy for anything else in the world, she would have given it her. But not that. She told her in a few words the outline of the interview. " And I must really ask you to promise never to hint at it to him," she said earnestly.

Marion sighed. It seemed to her, from the standpoint of her completely celibate nature, so simple and promising a plan, and mentally she considered Daisy a very scrupulous sentimentalist. It was so clearly an excellent thing that Daisy and Teddy should marry, that any scheme of this sort, involving, as it did, only the frank statement of so respectable an incentive as a mother's wishes, was not only innocent, but really laudable. Accustomed as she was in her writing, to construct human hearts by the score, and fit them up, like an industrious and imaginative carpenter, with the most convenient pigeon-holes for the reception of emotions, neatly drawn up like prescriptions, she could decipher but could scarcely sympathize with this document that Daisy had said was so inviolably sacred. It did not seem at all a useful prescription : it did not help the symptoms . . .

Besides, in 'Bill'—— She determined to make one more attempt.

"But, my dear, in 'Bill,'" she said, "there is almost precisely the same situation, and when I read it you were good enough to say that it struck you as extremely powerful. It is Lady Caroline's father who has expressed a wish that Caroline should marry him."

Daisy shook her head.

"I know: I remember," she said. "But I can't be like Lady Caroline. I expect I am not powerful, dear. I only know it would spoil it all if Mr. Teddy knew. Should—should he want me without that, then I will tell him."

"Ha! That's rather a fine situation," said Marion professionally.

Daisy looked at her still dim-eyed.

"I'm so glad," she said, "I could do that."

Marion threw away the end of her seventh cigarette.

"Well, we've had a good talk," she said, "and now we can avoid odious subjects, and only enjoy interesting ones. Good heavens, it's half-past six! I shall not have more than time for an hour's work before dinner. Afterwards, I should like to read you what I have written, Daisy. There is a whole chapter which you have not heard yet. Is my stylograph and writing-pad there? Thank you. Let's see: page two hundred and twelve."

In a couple of minutes Marion's hand had begun to move swiftly over the scribbling-paper. She gave little snorts and grunts as she wrote, which was always a good sign, for it showed that she was absorbed. But as Daisy rose to leave the room her sister looked up from her work.

"Oh, there's one thing you might do," she said. "You might let what I have told you be known in Lambton, and just say that I'm not going to talk about it, or pull long faces. Also that I'm very busy. Tell Vickary. That'll save you the bother of telling everybody else."

With which Marionism she plunged back into her work again.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR a week past Teddy had been expecting at intervals of a day or two the heralded and postponed arrival of Robin. Originally, he was to have spent a couple of days in town with Rosemary and her mother, but at the close of these two days a telegram had arrived with prepaid reply from him, saying, 'Shall stop in town till Friday, if perfectly convenient,' to which it was impossible to reply that there was any imperfection in the convenience. Then on the day that Robin should have fulfilled this arrangement, another telegram had come (again with prepaid reply, for the two seemed almost ironically considerate in little matters), this time from Rosemary, saying, 'May we keep Robin till Monday, so that we shall all come back together?' To this Teddy had answered with a certain asperity, 'Shall expect Robin when I see him.' A couple of hours afterwards a weary and indignant telegraph-boy (for telegrams were not very common in Lambton) brought a further rejoinder from Rosemary. 'You're an angel. But surely when you

see him you can't expect him.' That seemed on reflection to be the case, and Teddy duly grinned. To-day he was waiting in his studio for Robin's arrival.

A determination made without reserve by any one who has a sane and adequate control of his mind, is somewhat like a dose of medicine. If you once take it, swallow it, that is to say, completely, closing the door of the throat on it, it proceeds to act; the process goes on internally, and the due results appear. It had been so during this last week with Teddy, for on that last night in London he had taken his dose of middle-age, and all that which in this instance was implied by it, had swallowed it down, and found that by now it was strongly affecting his system. He had seen in a manner that perfectly convinced him, that those imaginings which had made the last winter and autumn so tremulous a time to him, and had resulted in the building of his fairy palace, had no existence outside his own brain and his own desires, and were shared by nobody else. His spires and foam-built domes had toppled and fallen, and already through the dispersing mists of their debris the familiar aspect of the site where he had builded was beginning to appear again. As far as fairy palaces were concerned, his only part in such was the contemplation of the enchanted architecture which rose so swiftly under the joint hands of Robin and Rosemary.

They indeed were the builders and openers of the 'magic casements': spire and dome and minaret shot up into the sky: the merest morsels and trifles of everyday incident and conviction were material sufficient for the construction of their rainbowed arcades, and employed thereon they had to descend to earth in order to become aware of the presence of such terrestrial objects as himself. He knew well in how high an esteem and affection both held him, but to them just now nothing really counted but the fact of each other. The high wall of that selfish selflessness which love builds round its votaries shuts them off from all the rest of the world. They were impregnably fortified there, and never for an instant, so he felt now, had Rosemary contemplated the possibility of there being built such a wall round himself and her. And such building as he had done on his own account now lay in ruins about him.

All these last days since he had left London he had contemplated these ruins, getting in a manner used to them, and completely assured that no other hand than his had been employed in their erection. What rather surprised him now when he beheld their tumbled fragments, was the comparative ease with which they had been demolished. Indeed, they had been built more with the imagination than with the solid constructive power of the head or even the heart: he had more contemplated

the wonder of the fairy-palace than made his home in it. He had more seen how lovely it would all be than had known how lovely it was. He had painted a picture of it, even as in more material manner he had recorded it in the flowery meadow that blossomed in homage where Beatrice walked, and where, so it struck him now, he had allowed her Dante to walk too. There stood his picture, which, on the very morning on which he had completed it, had become exterior to himself. Now after the dose of middle-age which he had forced himself to take on his last evening in town, the spirit that had informed it stood exterior to him too.

Meantime, through the clearing dust and mist of the debris of the fairy-palace the features of his normal life here were taking outline again. Already, as was usual at this time of the year, the sketching-parties had begun, and only yesterday he and Mrs. Vickary and Mrs. Joyce and Miss Daisy had spent a very pleasant afternoon recording in water colours their impressions of the picnic meadow by the Lock, with its wood of milky-green beech-trees that were so difficult to paint, except by a plentiful use of body-colour from which Teddy always discouraged his pupils. A new Boots-cash-chemist-diary had been procured for the use of the Entertainment Bureau, and though it was scarcely mid-April yet, Mrs. Andrew, greatly daring, had booked a date early next week for a tennis-party

on her *en-tout-cas* court, which she had induced her husband to have laid down at great expense. Mrs. Vickary had taken another afternoon for a croquet-party ("W.P., or if it doesn't, perhaps the ice will bear" had been her humorous entry), and presently, no doubt, especially if this delightful weather continued, there would be a positive rush on the Bureau's office. They were all a year older than when last the flood of summer engagements began to pour forth, but nobody was really old yet. And next year in April, precisely the same situation would present itself, and the April after that.

This induced a train of reflection which Teddy had no intention whatever of encouraging, and with a pang of shame for having admitted it into his consciousness, he whisked his despondent mind round, and bade it look at the shining example of Marion and her sister. There were a couple of vital and vivid persons whose courage it was a privilege to behold! All that Marion had to look forward to was a period of waiting for death, with the knowledge that the shorter that period was, the more merciful would be her manner of release. But she seemed neither to think about her release nor the waiting for it: she was completely and happily absorbed in her new book, with which, so Daisy reported, she was making amazing progress. Never had she worked so fast, or so delightedly or so successfully, and in her opinion, no less than in

that of Daisy, to whom every evening the results of the day's travail were read, she had never yet touched so high a mark. Already the end was in sight, and she had made up her mind to let Algernon O'Callaghan get the better of his morphia-habit and become a monument of piety instead of a morphomaniac. That alone gave the indication of how near the end of the book was, for, as Marion freely allowed, she found there was very little to say about wicked people when once they reformed their ways, though when good people went to the bad, or Christians became atheists, her pen scoured over the paper like Atalanta over the plains. Algernon's reformation therefore being in sight implied that the last page was in sight also.

Teddy had seen much of the two sisters during those last days, and Marion herself had told him of the gratifying news about Algernon. She had encouraged Teddy to suggest himself for lunch or tea, whenever he felt disposed, saying that it must be lonely for him without Robin or his neighbours. In particular, she appeared to have appointed him as a sort of trainer in physical culture to her sister, reminding him, if after lunch he seemed disposed to linger, that neither he nor Daisy must waste this lovely afternoon indoors. The implication was that they were to go for a walk or a bicycle ride together, and like most of Marion's plans, this usually took shape.

"Good of you to look after Daisy," she said on one of these occasions when Daisy had obediently gone to put on the bicycle skirt that would not "be chewed up." "Daisy is never well unless she gets plenty of fresh air, and if I let her have her way she would sit with me all the afternoon. Wouldn't suit her or me. Take her a good round. Don't let me see either of you again till tea-time."

"You shan't see me then unless you wish," said Teddy. "We can finish up at my house and have tea there."

"Do. Then I shall get three clear hours to myself without being bothered by anybody. The story's getting on well. I shall finish it in heaps of time. End of April should see it done, and I expect to carry on much longer than that. There's Daisy: I can hear her clumping about the hall. Good-bye for the present."

Certainly Marion's attitude towards life was of the most robust and characteristic sort. All these years she had had two great interests, namely, that of writing, and that of giving her sister the benefit of her firm guardianship, and the fact that these were both so soon to come to an end for her enhanced rather than decreased her devotion to them. She had, as far as Teddy or even as Daisy could judge, no touch of pity for herself. Not a word of it, in any case, escaped her lips, and not a hint of it appeared in her manner. Sometimes she had

bad bouts of pain ; when it became very severe, she sent for Dr. Stables and his morphia, and made valuable notes to be used in the sad case of Algernon O'Callaghan. Already he was beginning to break himself of his deleterious habit, and Marion with secret glee, and an array of adjectives that beggared the dictionary, recorded her longings when the pain was bad for the sound of the front-door bell, which showed that her doctor had arrived. Algernon had not to wait for that, he had but to go to his cupboard and dose himself ; but Algernon's longings were hers, and even as she waited for the doctor to come, faint with a grinding ache, she turned the agony of her nerves into material for her book. Then again, she would have good days, and restful nights, and so, as she had said, scored again, for she made more substantial progress with her writing.

But though she had no pity for herself, it was clear that beneath the customary brusqueness of her manner to her sister, which was not a shade less peremptory than usual, there shone a huge tenderness, that administered the brusqueness exactly as it would have administered a tonic. Daisy's strength, her fortitude, her endurance to meet the inevitable must be sustained and strengthened, and Marion rightly considered that far the best means of accomplishing that was to appear even more severely grim than usual, for this was being most entirely herself. They had had their talk : there

was nothing more to say on 'odious subjects,' and for Daisy, as for herself, there was not so excellent a palliative as work and activity. Before long, Daisy must face the loss of the companion of her life, but to bewail that and to allow her to be shadowed by it would not help her to meet it when it came.

"Occupation of the mind for me," said Marion to herself as she watched the two bicycles flash along the road in and out of the shadows of the budding elm-trees, "and plenty of exercise and companionship for Daisy. That's the ticket. Now I've got three good hours to myself, and she three good hours with Mr. Teddy. Wish I hadn't promised not to say anything about his mother's talk to Daisy."

This manly attitude—there was a good deal in it that was like to the qualities of the sterner sex—was shown in Marion's behaviour to Teddy and Daisy, and in the busy occupation of her own days there was certainly a stimulus to one who, like Teddy, at this moment was inclined to make moan over the fruitless passing of the years, and to look with despondency into the mists of the end of life which as yet for him, as far as could be conjectured, lay so far off. For they lay immediately in front of Marion—indeed they were already beginning to wrap her round; and with nothing in front of her but weeks of increasing suffering, she had, for her

part, nothing but welcome for the days to which she was almost too busy to wave a salutation as they passed. It was impossible to feel pathetic or pitiful for so stout-hearted a pilgrim: pathos and pity were swallowed up in mere homage to her indomitable courage. And as long as that was there to sustain Daisy, it was difficult to pity her either, Marion's will and Marion's splendour evidently lifted her out of herself. She had commanded that there was to be no sadness about the house, and indeed there was not. The stimulus of not giving in, of keeping the flag flying, supplied an ample antidote to faint-heartedness. Marion's wish had always been law, loyally obeyed, to her sister, and Marion had said there was to be no sadness. But what when the lawgiver was no longer there, when the house was silent, and the activity of Marion's pen no longer the standard to encourage the weary-footed? It would not be possible for her to maintain that almost unnatural fortitude when there was no daily, no hourly need for doing so. Teddy had known something of loneliness himself, in those weeks after his mother had died, when Daisy had been so excellent a comrade to him, but he knew that his loss could not be on the same scale at all as hers. For him, too, there had not only been Robin, who made so delightful a companion, but for him there had been that dream which, unsubstantial as it had now proved, had coaxed him back

into love with life again. But he could not picture the loneliness which must inevitably be hers. Her whole life had been entwined with Marion's: he could not think of one without the other. For the present, it is true, he hardly pitied Daisy, for she was walking with Marion in that high bracing air of courageous living. But he could not imagine her continuing to walk there among the mists and ice-summits and the rarefied air of a lonely fortitude.

Suddenly he heard his own name shouted from outside, and next moment Robin, scorning to use such things as doors, vaulted in through the open window.

"Teddy!" he cried. "Here am I at last! Just arrived from town. I drove down with Rosemary, and came straight across here, through the gate in the palings. Wonderful good thing that gate. Saved me going round."

Teddy jumped up.

"My dear Robin," he said. "It is charming to see you at last. Yes, I must say 'at last' just once. Anyhow you are here now."

The boy beamed on him with laughing handsome face.

"Indeed I am," he said. "And I've behaved rottenly putting off my arrival like this. But there came up first one thing and then another, and you told me to be economical, you know, and by stopping till to-day I came down without paying for a railway

ticket. I sat on the box and gave the chauffeur quantities of wrong directions about his road."

"That was kind. That was thoughtful," said Teddy.

"Wasn't it? And here I am in your jolly studio again—and, oh, the picture's finished. What a meadow for Rosemary and me to walk in! Lord, look at the goldfinches in the bush. And what's that tortoise doing there? You must have painted all the meadow over again, haven't you? I never saw anything so ripping! Has Rosemary seen it yet?"

He went and stood in front of the jubilant canvas.

"Daffodils, forget-me-nots, bluebells, cowslips, violets," he said. "I must say you've done us handsomely. Are all those flowers out at the same time? I remember at one time you were rather particular about being correct over that. But now you've mixed everything up together."

"Yes, I changed my mind," said Teddy; "I thought I would put everything there that suggests spring and youth."

"Well, you've made it a jolly place. But why the tortoise, to go on with my catechism?"

"Oh, because though he's quite old he may be supposed to enjoy the spring too. Don't grudge the old tortoise his share in it."

Robin looked round at Teddy quickly, as if wondering whether there was something more in his

words than the mere surface-meaning of them. But Teddy's face was placid and beaming and altogether like himself.

"I see," he said. "Sort of symbolic, is it? Well, I hope no one will grudge me my pleasure in the spring when I'm a tortoise. Oh, and Rosemary—Beatrice I mean. Why, it is Rosemary! What have you done to it? It's an inspiration. That's just how she looks! I've seen her look like that a thousand times."

"I'm glad of that: I'm awfully glad of that," said Teddy, speaking from the point of view of the artist only. He knew his heart ought to be glad of it too, but hearts are not always obedient to their duty. Yes, Robin had often seen Rosemary look something (anyhow) like that. So had Teddy, when she was looking at Robin.

"And Florence behind," continued Robin artlessly; "Florence must be a jolly place. I wonder if we could find such a meadow. Rosemary would want to pick all the flowers though: she stopped the car half a dozen times to gather primroses on the way down."

He looked at the picture a moment more in silence, bright-eyed and eager-mouthed. But, so Teddy noticed, he looked at nothing but Rosemary's face.

"And what else have you done?" he said, casting a vaguer glance round the studio. "I don't believe

you've done anything else. There's Miss Daisy, and the other Miss Daisy, yes: I know all these. By Jove, what fun it is to be down here again! Rosemary wondered if she might come across in—in about half an hour. I said I'd telephone if she mightn't. I thought that would probably save a penny. Economical again, you see. Now tell me what the Lambton news is. How's Mrs. Vickary? And—oh—has Miss Marion got another story in the Parish Magazine?"

Tea had come in, and Teddy was pouring it out as Robin roamed about the big room.

"Ah, my dear Robin," he said, "we mustn't laugh at Miss Marion's stories any more."

"Why? Aren't they funny any more?"

"Well, she's writing one now, writing as hard as she can go, bravely and cheerfully and as interested in it as ever. But she's writing it under the shadow of death."

Robin stopped abruptly.

"Death?" he asked. "Miss Marion?"

"Yes: she has only a few weeks probably to live. They can't tell, but they hope it will not be very long. It's quite incurable."

Robin sat down, quite sobered for the moment.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said. "I'm awfully sorry. And I call that plucky. Do you see her?"

"Yes, constantly for the present. She'll certainly insist on seeing you too."

"But what am I to do? What am I to say?" asked Robin, with the natural and healthy dislike of the young for illness and suffering.

"Say nothing whatever about it. Behave exactly as you always behave. Make jokes: cut capers. That's what she likes."

"But I'm awfully sorry," said Robin again, burying his big white teeth in a bun.

"We all are. And all we can do to help is to behave quite naturally. After all, that is the only behaviour that is ever any good. Go on being young, go on being happy. And let the tortoise walk about slowly among the flowers."

He had said that in jest, but he instantly perceived, as soon as it was said, that Robin found something to think about in it.

"But I am sorry for Miss Marion," he said as if parenthetically, and was silent again.

"I know you are," said Teddy, when it appeared that Robin had no more to say. "I hope you'll go to see her, and talk to her exactly as if she was perfectly well. That's her plan: she wants that done."

"Of course I will," said Robin. Then he paused. "But the tortoise now: you went back to the tortoise."

"It was egoistic then," said Teddy. "It only meant that I felt rather tortoise-like when I was painting the meadow. No: I don't think that's

quite it. I felt rather tortois-like when I looked at the meadow I had painted."

Robin looked up at him with those candid blue eyes that had the truthfulness "of boys and wine" in them.

"You are remarkably unlike a tortoise," he said. "You haven't got a shell. That's almost the best thing about you, Teddy. There's never any shell. And how's Miss Daisy?"

"As gloriously ordinary as her sister," said Teddy with emphasis.

"Gloriously ordinary?" and he frowned with soft creases in his forehead. "Oh, I see. Just carrying on and being splendid. Is that it?"

"Just that. We've all got to carry on."

Robin left his chair and came to sit by Teddy on the sofa. There was not really sufficient room for him there, and by way of getting a piece of him otherwise accommodated he laid his arm along the sofa back, so that Teddy's head brushed against the crook of his elbow.

"Is there anything wrong, Teddy?" he asked.

Teddy thrilled, somehow, to this affectionate unconscious trust. There was in it all that is connoted by 'youth.' It mattered not whether it was a boy or a girl who thus was close and intimate with him, and the arm of Robin's homespun coat was as good for the purposes of the moment (and these were extraordinarily significant to him) as

would have been the bare elbow of a beautiful girl, thus gently brushing his neck. It was youth, of the quality of which he held so much himself, but which now, so he guessed, had passed the age of prize-winning. That quality was not cold in him, indeed it had never burned more ardently, but it had not any longer the gift of enkindling. Rosemary or Robin, it mattered not which, would have given him that thrill of touch, but in neither of them would a corresponding thrill have been awakened. An affectionate arm would have been carelessly put round him: they would each of them have been stroking some active tortoise of the shell-less variety. But that moment summed up for Teddy all the growing convictions of the past week.

He took the hand belonging to the arm that went past his neck in his.

"No, nothing whatever is wrong, my dearest boy," he said. "I'm just tremendously pleased to see you. And very soon, you said, we shall see Rosemary too, shan't we? That'll be splendid."

"Yes," said Robin shortly, and relapsed into silence again.

"Cigarette?" asked Teddy, by way of breaking the pause.

"No, thanks."

Again Robin had nothing to say.

"Well, I must repeat your question," said Teddy. "Is there anything wrong with you?"

Before he looked round he thought he felt Robin's smile.

"Nothing whatever," said the boy. "It's only that it's all—it's all so awfully right."

He leaned his arm a little more closely on Teddy's neck, and bent his face towards him.

"It's too wonderfully right," he said. "There was never anything so right. I said I would tell you before she came. She shirked it: aren't girls mean? I asked her last night, and she promised me. . . . She's going to. Oh, Lord!"

Robin suddenly crushed his arm round Teddy's neck, and, with that in chancery, raised him to his feet and led him to the picture.

"That's just how she looked," he said. "Just like that. And she looked at me when she looked like that, instead of at that fellow in the black cloak. You're a wizard, Teddy: you'd have been burned at the stake a hundred years ago. How did you guess it? Lord! Here she is! I've only told you just in time; I don't believe it's half an hour since she said she'd be here in half an hour. Rosemary! Hi! Rosemary! What's the use of ringing the bell? Come in through the window, just as I did. You're not so fat as me! I'll pull you through. That sounds as if you were ill and I was a doctor. Oh, come on! Now jump!"

A moment ago Teddy had thought that it mattered not whose arm was laid round his neck, provided

only that youth treated him like that, saluted him affectionately, instinctively, unconsciously. But much had happened since then, and for one second, as both of Rosemary's hands were clasped in his, their touch hurt, as if at the very contact of them he was torn leagues away from her. Into that moment was concentrated all the ruin of his dreams, a! the pang of complete awakening. But there was no pause before his answer to her silent greeting. As he gave it he felt as old as the hills, and as young as Robin.

"Welcome, welcome," he said. "And whether Robin likes it or not, I'm going to ask you to give me a kiss in token of his news. And if he objects," he added, "I'm blowed—yes, I'm blowed if I don't give you another. And if he objects to that, why, he can kiss you himself."

"Teddy, you dear!" said Rosemary, and apparently Robin did not object, for he stood slightly apart and beamed like an enormous angel who had just won some celestial sculling-match.

"Rosemary's a coward," said this seraph. "She made me tell you. What's there to be shy about?"

Rosemary turned to Teddy.

"Was he shy?" she asked. "Did he tell you at once?"

"Don't give me away, Teddy," said Robin in a hoarse whisper. "I'm your pal: I trust you not to."

"I shall. He only told me a minute ago. I believe he saw you coming before he told me."

"Oh, liar!" said Robin.

Rosemary stepped to Robin's side: it seemed to Teddy that she drifted there like some steel-tipped thing to the magnet.

"Is he really a liar?" she asked.

"No. I was shy. I talked about everything else first. I couldn't just clear my throat and say, 'About half-past nine last night, or it might have been a quarter to ten'—could I?"

"Why not? What was there to be shy about? It was only Teddy," said she.

"Well, you knew that, and yet you sent me on ahead. Oh, look at our pictures. Look at our meadow. What a meadow! Isn't it ripping?"

"Oh, it's only Teddy," remarked Teddy.

Rosemary took his arm.

"Yes, but what a Teddy!" she said. "Why, you've got in all the loveliness of spring. I call that generous. Surely you painted the meadow over again. And Robin! Oh, Robin."

Teddy felt that it was too much to expect of him that he should be subjected to all this over again.

"Now don't begin again about Robin," he said. "Robin's said it all once about you. It's tedious. That's Robin, that's you, and that's me, the tortoise there. I've come out to enjoy the spring also."

Dear me, who would have thought I should have taken to allegories like that ? ”

“ You say it as if you had taken to drink,” remarked Rosemary. “ But really you’ve got Robin’s expression——”

“ If you go on about Robin’s expression I shall take to drink. Now what are the plans ? Lord ! How often we used to say that ! Whenever we met we used to say to each other, ‘ What are the plans ? ’ ”

Rosemary led him to the sofa.

“ There was one beauty,” she said. “ That you should tell Miss Marion and Miss Daisy about us. Don’t you think that’s a good one ? ”

“ Why, yes, I’ll do that,” said Teddy. “ They’ll be thrilled. I don’t suppose anybody whom we know has been engaged in Lambton for fifty years. I don’t know what they won’t do to celebrate the event. There’ll be dozens of parties in your honour. You’ll have to stand together on a platform like two white elephants. . . . ”

Rosemary pointed to Robin.

“ There’s one elephant,” she said. “ It’s a red one.”

“ All the rarer,” said Teddy.

“ All the redder, you mean. Robin’s blushing at the thought. Oh, do you think Miss Marion will put us into her new book ? What’s her latest, by the way ? Where’s the Parish Magazine ? Mayn’t we read the Parish Magazine ? ”

Once again Teddy had to give the news of Marion, and for all the sincerity of her pity, it was but a shadow on a sunny day that passed over the girl's face. That selfless selfish wall of love was built high round her and her young lover. Neither could look over the edge of it for more than a moment, but must needs drop back into their secret enchanted place, where none could penetrate. They could just smile at Teddy over the wall, they could cast grave eyes of sympathy at Marion, but their joy was for each other. In the full beauty of their youth and vigour they had found each other, and nothing but that amazing discovery could hold their real attention.

It was not long before the two left Teddy alone in his studio. Some brightly flowering shrub on the lawn outside had attracted Rosemary's attention and she had gone out to give it a closer inspection. After a moment Robin had said, "What is she doing?"—she had really not had time yet to do anything—"come out and see, Teddy." But he had followed her without looking back to see if Teddy was coming, and without waiting for his answer, and Teddy, who had got as far as the studio door, with intention to join them, saw that Robin had already run across the lawn to where Rosemary stood, and was standing with his arm in hers. And then they strolled a little farther, and a little farther, and vanished round the corner. It

was perfectly clear (it was also perfectly natural) that they had entirely forgotten about him. His share in their affairs was to tell Lambton about them. . . .

He sat down on his sofa again : the awakening from what had been his own private dream, that had begun little more than a week ago in London, had now completely come. He was broad awake, sitting up in bed, so to speak, with his head quite off his pillow, looking out into the grey morning which had succeeded those bright visions. Even now they had begun to fade : he had imagined a thing of which he was no longer capable. Not only could he not be to Rosemary what Robin was, but Rosemary could not be to him what she was to Robin. The completeness (part of which was the jubilant lightness) of boyish passion was not within his power any more. He had the power of loving which belonged to his age, and though it might not be either less tender or less strong than that of a youthful lover, it was a passion utterly different in kind. To some extent the excitement of its dawning on his imagination had given him the illusion of youth again, just as on the physical plane an active set at lawn-tennis made him feel that he was still a young man, but neither physically nor in matters of the heart was he young as Robin was young. There had been for him a St. Martin's summer, and he had mistaken it, even as Daisy had done, for

the months that follow on the heels of April and slowly, slowly develop into the full-blown glory of true summer. But when the days of St. Martin's summer wane, they pass into wintry weather, kindly it may be, with succession of brisk and pleasant hours for those who will make a friend of it. But to sit under a tree on damp grass is not to make a friend of November : it is only to make an enemy of rheumatism.

Well, it was done : Teddy was awake, and for a while he blankly contemplated the grey day. The dose that he had taken a week ago had done its work, and he fully knew it had been efficacious. To-day the presence of Rosemary and Robin together, which last autumn had touched him with a sense of being out of it, had shown him finally and convincingly how complete his severance was : they were out of sight, out of hearing, for to each of them nothing was visible or audible but the other. In his human treasure-house of desire and experience there was left for him just so much as had been there before Rosemary had gone through him like the swift passage of a flame. So swift had that passage been that indeed he was scarcely burned : it was light rather than fire that had showed its ray there and moved off again. But when her ray had passed it was dark again, dark and cold. The same thing had happened to his picture, for the inspiration under which he had painted it had drained away

from him. He could no longer recapture the sense of that which had tingled out of his finger-tips to the end of his brushes and had gilded the canvas as with morning sun. It had gone: the sun shone elsewhere.

Then with a rush his kindness and his courage came back to him. This was no manner of behaviour at all. Was he to love those two delicious young folk the less because they were young and because they loved each other? Life, the mere passage of the years, had surely taken all grace of youth away from him if he could find no graciousness of age, some attitude that should become his years better than this sour and frosty outlook. "Upon my word," said he, "I ought to be ashamed of myself."

He jumped up from the sofa that had been so despondent a slough, and looked round for something to do, something that should occupy him less despicably than thoughts like these. And as his eye fell on his picture again, an idea struck him. Both of them had been so pleased with his presentation of the other. . . .

In a moment he had it on the ground, and with a sharp knife and a tee-square he had cut out the two heads, leaving gaps in the canvas. Then a further notion whimsically entered his head, for his picture, for which he had no longer any use, was spoiled already, and he whipped the tortoise, with

a few inches of flowery meadow round it, out from the canvas.

“Robin for Rosemary,” he said, “and Rosemary for Robin, and the tortoise for me. I’ll go down now and order their frames.”

CHAPTER XV

TEDDY was seated alone next day in the dining-room at the Miss Macdonalds' with a small portion of omelette on his plate. He had come down there in obedience to a telephone message from Marion, commanding his presence at lunch. "Daisy won't be here," she had hoarsely said, "I've sent her to town for the day. You'll have to talk to me. Half-past one, then." And he heard, before he had time to reply, to thank or to regret, that she had replaced the ear-piece of her instrument, for which apparently she had no use at all.

He had arrived, consequently, punctual to the half-hour, and found a message from his hostess that he was to begin without her. He had raised objection to this, saying that he would wait for her, but Parkinson, who had the aspect of an elderly guardsman and the moustache of a young one, had repeated in a military tone the order that 'the mistress' wished him to begin, and his omelette was put down in front of him like an ultimatum. Hence he sat alone and ate his first dish.

He had finished this, and the shutter into the kitchen passage had already yawned to admit his second dish, when he heard a door shut somewhere outside the dining-room, steps across the hall, and the more resonant closing of the front-door. He had begun the dissection of a duck that Parkinson placed before him when Marion entered. She nodded at him and sat down before he had time to disentangle the carving-knife from the sinews of the bird and get up.

"Sorry not to have been ready," she said. "Couldn't help it. Stables was with me. Such a lot of talk. I'm sick of doctors. What's the use of them anyhow to people like me? I do what they tell me if I feel inclined, and of course if they give me silly directions, I don't."

"I'm afraid you're not a good patient," said Teddy.

"Naturally not. Why should I be? That's all I want, Parkinson. Don't wait. We'll ring when we're ready for pudding."

"Shan't I give you some duck?" asked Teddy.

"Certainly not, Mr. Teddy. You don't want me to be sick, do you? I'll wait till you've finished, and then have some pudding. And while you're eating, I shall talk. Hope you don't mind."

"I object very much," said Teddy, "because I want to say something myself first. I was asked to give you a bit of news."

Marion was drawing hard lines on the tablecloth with her spoon, as if wanting to occupy herself. But at this she stopped.

"Out with it," she said. "Hope it's interesting."

"It is. Robin and Rosemary arrived yesterday evening——"

"That all?" asked Marion, interrupting. "I know that—saw them go by this morning."

"No, it's not all. They're engaged to be married."

Marion made an awful gesture in the air, expressive of despair and impatience.

"That's a bit of bad luck for me," she said. "Only last week I was writing about a young couple who had just been engaged, described how they behaved. It's done; it's gone to be typewritten; and now I could have described it first-hand."

"Write it over again, if you find you can get hints from them," said Teddy.

"Not sure if I'll have time," said Marion bluntly. "I'll finish the book up first, anyhow. Then we'll see. But perhaps I've got it right after all. Had to invent it, you know. There hasn't been an engaged couple among our friends here since Mrs. Joyce, which is twenty years ago; and, though I remembered that quite well, it wasn't any use to me. If all engaged couples behaved as they did, I'd sooner remain single, as indeed I've done."

"Tell me about them," said Teddy. "I can't remember."

"No? Take care your memory doesn't go. Learn a bit of poetry or something every day, as I do. Nothing like that for keeping the memory active. They looked like accomplices in a crime more than anything, burglars or something of that sort with a guilty secret. Hope the new young couple aren't like that."

"They aren't indeed," said Teddy. "They're the most joyful sort of thing."

"Well, I'm sure I've no quarrel with that," said Marion. "Ring the bell, will you, and then Parkinson will bring us pudding and I'll make coffee. Then she'll leave us alone, and I want to talk to you. Gracious me, how time passes! But you look pretty much the same as ever. Yet I don't know. Perhaps you're getting old like the rest of us. Are you?"

"I am," said Teddy.

"Well, don't fight it then. It's no use fighting things unless you've got a definite object in view."

Parkinson had put the coffee apparatus beside Marion, and having eaten her pudding she proceeded to make a wonderfully absent-minded performance of the brewing of her favourite beverage. She began by pouring the hot water into the milk, and perceiving her mistake, poured the milk into the coffee-

kettle. Then she pushed the whole tray across to Teddy.

"Make it, if you know how, while I talk," she said. "I got Daisy to go up to town to-day, partly because I wanted her to get some sort of change, for she's in need of that, and I told her to go to the matinee of *Feathers*. Goodness, how that helped me through the evening before I went to see Dr. Sandford. But partly I wanted to have a talk to you, for you and I are Daisy's oldest friends. There was a third thing as well."

Marion had got hold of the spoon with which she had been eating custard-pudding, and was again drawing hard lines on the tablecloth with it.

"The fact is," she said, "that the state of my health has never been so—so beastly as it was this morning, so after Daisy had gone I sent for Stables. He quite agrees with me. He wanted me to give up, and go to bed. That means not getting up again. Well, I won't do that just yet. I never could write in bed: the ink gets on the sheets, and the paper slips away from you. I knew that order would come soon, and I didn't want Daisy to be here when it came. I wanted to get used to it a bit; I didn't know how I should take it. Now it's come: I thought it would, and it was a good thing for Daisy to have a real laugh before she knows. I'd sooner have a real laugh than a week at the seaside. But I wanted to talk things over with somebody, and I

thought you'd do, if you didn't mind. If you do mind, you can go."

"I shan't go," said Teddy.

Marion gave him a short sharp nod, which implied appreciation.

"Funny what a relief it is to talk things over," she said, "if the other person doesn't care too much. You care about enough, I think. Daisy cares too much. Besides, I made up my mind not to speak of these odious things to her again. Doesn't do any good. Much better to leave them alone. It's no use dinning your troubles into the ear of some one who cares too much. But I wanted to talk to somebody. I find you do nicely."

Strength is as infectious as fear. He had not the smallest inclination to pity, for that brazen heroism flooded him with pure admiration.

"I'm glad I do nicely," he said. "I wish you'd give me something to do nicely."

"I will. I want you to keep Daisy busy. In three or four days now I must have a nurse, and I must be on my back until I'm through with it, and the sooner the better for all concerned. You must make those days as short for Daisy as you can. You've done a lot up till now, but I want you to do more. And for the three or four days before that you can do a lot for me. It's a perfect godsend that Robin and Rosemary have come, though I expect they're too late for my professional purposes.

Still I might pick up something, and make some insertions. But they're a godsend, if you can get them to come and make gaiety here. I want to have an orgy, a festival. There'll be my work most of the day, but I get tired in the evening, and don't put my best into it. That's when they might come in. If you and they will come down here and play foolish games on the floor, I can't tell you how I shall like it. It'll help me through, and it'll help Daisy through. I can't expect them to come with only Daisy and me here; but if you come too. . . . Or would they be frightened at my white scarecrow face? I must borrow some of——"

Marion only stopped just in time. The words 'Daisy's rouge' were really on her lips.

"Well, that's a capital plan," said Teddy. "You may be sure they'll come. Shall we all drop in after dinner this evening?"

"No; come and dine. We'll have a feast. We'll have a bottle of champagne. Perhaps you and Robin would let off fireworks some night quite soon on the lawn. That's the kind of thing I want; and ridiculous games. And, above all, not a word to Daisy till some morning when I say I think I shall stop in bed."

She got up, and when she spoke again, her voice was not quite steady.

"And afterwards," she said, "you'll do what

you can for Daisy, won't you? I can't bear thinking of that, and indeed it's no use to do so."

They passed into Marion's study together. It was a very few minutes before Teddy saw her casting glances as of a Peri outside Paradise at the manuscript that lay there, and he got up.

"I think I can certainly promise to bring Robin to-night," he said.

"Then I expect you can promise to bring Rosemary as well," said Marion, looking at the white page that lay waiting. "Must you really be going? Soon, isn't it; but of course if you're busy——"

She extended him a hand that very much speeded the parting guest, and before he had got out of the room he saw that she had taken its sheath from her stylograph.

Robin and Rosemary expressed their eager willingness to afford this gallant garrison, that refused so contemptuously to contemplate the surrender which must soon be inevitable, any entertainment that was in their power, and for the next two or three evenings the sisters' house was the scene of the most extravagant revellings. There were charades in Marion's study, there were fireworks in the garden, there were gymnastic feats on the floor. Teddy had told the lovers the excellent cause for which they must exert themselves

had even hinted that if they could now and then indulge in mild amatory exhibitions, as was natural to their condition, Marion would be intensely interested. This, however, was not such a success, for on Robin kissing Rosemary when he thought no one was looking, he had chosen his moment too well, and no one observed this daring manoeuvre. But if riotous enjoyment which they managed without the least difficulty (for as long as they were together there was no necessity to simulate that) was of any use to Marion as 'copy,' they certainly gave her ample material, should there be time to use it when her manuscript came back from the typewriter. And now the sight of them together was no longer productive in Teddy of the sense of being out of it, or of the stabbing heartache which he had certainly anticipated, for all of them were working (if their eager foolery can be called work) in a cause that enlisted their complete sympathy. Marion, standing in the entrance to the valley of the shadow, wanted to get as near as possible to the dark gate, where no one could follow her, to the accompaniment of youth and gaiety and love and nonsense. These things took her easily through the evening hours, just as, during the day, she was absorbed and busied in the book that was so near completion. Often and now more frequently Teddy could see spasms of pain pass over her face, but next moment the lines would obliterate themselves again

as Daisy came in with a wreath of laurel round her hair to show she was Julius Caesar conquering Britain. That was the object of all of them, to erase those lines, to give her laughter as she lay on her sofa, and help her to get through the evening. Indeed, with her temperament, as Dr. Sandford had so gratifyingly observed, she did much more than get through it, for she could hardly believe it was eleven already. She had not in the years that were past taken any very enthusiastic share in the gaieties of the place, having rather unbent to the diversions that so greatly employed the attention of the Entertainment Bureau; but now there was no unbending about her; she threw herself into them, and begged for more, and was sure it was not eleven o'clock yet.

It was impossible to have heartache then either at the sight of Rosemary and Robin, or of that grey courageous figure on the sofa, but the evenings did not pass for Teddy without their stabs. One evening, when there was a slight interval, as everybody was too hot to go on, he had strolled down the garden on this balmy full-mooned night with Daisy, and she had stopped as they came to the budding lilac-bush at the end of the path.

"Oh, Mr. Teddy," she said, "I'm beginning to hope again. Doctors are wrong sometimes, aren't they, even the cleverest of them like Dr. Sandford. I can't but think that Marion is getting better.

She was working hard all day, and look at her this evening."

Now it had been strictly enjoined on Teddy that Daisy was to enjoy these festival evenings as much as possible, and till the morning came, when Marion must surrender, to know nothing of that. There was to be this little holiday first, before the period of bedroom and waiting began. He was not allowed to tell her.

"Certainly she does seem to be enjoying herself," he said. "I have never seen her laugh more heartily."

"Ah, I'm sure she is better," said Daisy. "Doctors are wrong sometimes: I know they are. Of course Marion has a wonderful spirit (such a temperament, as Dr. Sandford said), but no amount of spirit would make her like that if there was not some change for the better. I declare I long for Dr. Stables to come to-morrow and see if he does not think so. And she was so wonderfully cross with me to-day, and I think that's a good sign too. Nurses always say that when their patients get cross it's certain they are better."

Teddy found this almost unbearable: he had to lead the topic away somehow.

"Indeed, what was she cross about?" he asked.

"About her second stylograph pen. I hadn't filled it, and so when the first one gave out, she had to wait hours, as she told me. It really took about

three minutes. But then it leaked afterwards too."

"And the book?" asked Teddy.

"She says she thinks she will have it finished to-morrow. Isn't that marvellous? She's only taken six weeks about the whole of it, and it's as long as any of her others. She has never worked so fast before."

"She is pleased with it?"

"She says she has never done anything so true. It seemed to be forced out of her. But I think that everything Marion writes is so wonderful. Oh, Mr. Teddy, how blessed it is to feel hopeful again. Sometimes when I've let myself think about what my life would be like without Marion, I've absolutely broken down. She scolded me, quite rightly, over that, for she saw I had been crying one morning, and said, 'Did I or did I not say that there must be no sadness in this house?' just as if she was speaking of parsnips, which she can't bear. She made me say I did know that there was to be no sadness, and then all of a sudden she was so kind and loving to me that it nearly made me cry again. There's Mr. Robin calling us. I wonder what we are going to do now."

There could not have been a more convincing testimonial as to the success of Marion's courage; there could not, either, have been so infinitely pathetic a success, in that it had made Daisy enter-

tain hopes of her recovery. She had said that she could not contemplate life without Marion, and so soon that contemplation would become a reality. She would have to start again, start again out of emptiness. How could her life be filled for her, how given another mainspring ?

Teddy was walking across the village green next morning on his way to the carpenter's to call for his three framed pictures, when he observed Mrs. Vickary scudding across the grass in a diagonal that would certainly intercept his path. She jerked her head from side to side exactly like a thrush as it runs over the lawn, and like a thrush's her swift feet twinkled below her skirts. She gave him a bright smile of welcome when she got within convenient signalling distance, and then composed her features again into that earnest expression which she was accustomed to think brought such strength and comfort to sick parishioners.

" And how is our poor dying friend ? " she said. (" What a lovely morning ; but in the midst of life we are in death, are we not ?) Have you seen her lately, Mr. Teddy ? "

" Yes, I saw her last night," said Teddy. " She was in excellent spirits."

Mrs. Vickary drew in her breath with a pained hiss. She had seen fireworks shooting across the sky and had observed the glow of undoubtedly Bengal lights, had heard the detonation of obvious

squibs, two evenings before, as she went up to bed, and had suspected they came from the Miss Macdonalds' garden.

"Indeed? Excellent spirits?" she said as if unwilling to believe anything so terrible. "You dined there, do you mean, actually dined there?"

She spoke as if no self-respecting person could think of having dinner within a certain number of days of his death. Teddy thought it best to ignore such an inference as to Mrs. Vickary's attitude.

"Indeed, I did," he said. "A most delightful dinner too. Your recipe for toasted cheese, which you so kindly gave Miss Marion, formed part of our entertainment. And afterwards we played charades."

"Then perhaps I was unfortunately not mistaken," she said, "when two nights ago I thought I saw fireworks being let off in Miss Marion's garden. Were those fireworks sent up from there, do you know? Can it possibly have been so? Fireworks?"

Teddy was afraid his inference was well founded.

"Yes; I let off a lot myself," he said brightly.

Mrs. Vickary sipped the air again, closing her eyes as if in pain, and opening them suddenly again, to Teddy's great astonishment. She peered into his face: it was as if he had been letting off hell-fireworks.

"Then it's all too true," she said; "I had hoped up till this moment that it was not. Dear Mr.

Teddy, surely you must see how terrible it is that when the awful day of reckoning is so near to our poor friend she should be thinking of fireworks. My Vicar and I hoped—oh, how we hoped—that we were wrong, and that they came from the next garden. We clung to each other on the stairs.”

It had entered definitely into Teddy's head that here was a splendid piece of entertainment for Miss Marion. If her book was finished this morning, she would be interested to hear about the views of the person she called Vickary. He deliberately led her on.

“I am afraid it shocks you,” he said.

Mrs. Vickary blinked her eyes very rapidly eight or nine times.

“No, no, not ‘shocks,’” she said. “I hope I am a better Christian than to be shocked. But, oh, how unsuitable! And my Vicar and I have been ready to go to her at practically any hour of the day or night to help her, to console her, to enable her to face what lies in front of her.”

Teddy gave her the credit of having a sort of sour sincerity about her. He reconsidered telling Marion.

“She wants no consolation,” he said. “There was never any one so courageous. She makes everybody else feel brave: there is the truth of it.”

“Ah! How nice! How very nice! Bravery! What a beautiful quality! Please tell dear Miss

Marion how happy I should be to help her through these hours, or any books I can send her. Dear me, how she would pull me up for faulty grammar! But when the heart speaks, it does not so much matter what the lips say. A beautiful thought, is it not? My Vic had the germ of it in his sermon last Sunday: I but elaborated it a little. So pleasant to have seen you. And now I must run on. It is my Martha-hour, when I must be busy with much serving. It has been a treat, a refreshment! Such courage! I would gladly look in this evening, if dear Miss Marion would wish me to."

Teddy decided that he would tell Miss Marion as much as he could remember of this. She would probably keep on exclaiming 'Vickary!' in a tone of contemplative indignation. . . .

He found his three pictures already glazed and garnished, and took them away himself, for the giving of little presents was a performance he enjoyed so enormously that he could not bear to postpone it till the paste on the back had had time to dry. With them and the framed tortoise under his arm, he strolled homewards, when a sharp tapping on the front window of the Miss Macdonalds' house as he crossed the green again, and the sight of Daisy's face showing who made that signalling, caused him to direct his steps to the door. She had it open before he arrived there.

"How rude of me!" she said. "But I did

want to speak to you. Marion is writing the last page or two now. Dr. Stables called, but she would not see him. She is like that: she won't be interrupted when it comes to the end. Mr. Teddy, is it very forward of me? But do you think you would let me come to lunch with you, and stop up there, and go for a bicycle ride till tea-time? I know how odd it sounds."

Teddy beamed at her.

"My dear Miss Daisy," he said, "what's odd about it?"

"It must be odd till I explain. But it's Marion's wish. I went in to see if she was comfortable half an hour ago, and she gave me the most awful scowl. 'Get away out of this house,' she said, 'and make Mr. Teddy amuse you till evening. Go away!' That's what she said."

"Well, there's good news," said Teddy. "She's busy and happy."

Daisy looked at him with those pleasant blue eyes that ten years ago might have held the magic of life for him. For the moment it struck him how like she was to the earlier version of her portrait by him. In the dim green light below the budding lime tree that shaded the porch, the resemblance was really remarkable, for he had painted her as sitting underneath a lime in his own garden.

"Yes, she's happy inside," said Daisy eagerly. "She doesn't mind about Dr. Stables. She's

having a splendid time. That's why she was so cross with me. Oh, and what are those pictures?"

"Put on your hat," said Teddy peremptorily. "We'll look at them when we get up to my house. Bicycle? No; I want your advice about the flower-border by the tennis-court. I'm going to have it tremendously gay this summer."

Daisy gave a fleeting glance at her dress; she would have liked to be a little smarter.

"Mayn't I make myself a little tidier?" she said. It is idle to deny that she thought of little boxes and bottles on her dressing-table.

"Not an atom tidier," said he. "You've got to grub about in my flower-bed all the afternoon."

"Gloves then," said Daisy, and diving into the hall, she emerged again with a pair of great gardening gauntlets.

Directly after the mutilation of his picture, Teddy had stowed that desecrated canvas behind a heap of abandoned beginnings, and had noticed with accumulated conviction that neither Robin nor Rosemary had noticed its disappearance. But now, before he had shown Daisy what were the pictures he carried with him, she looked round the studio and was aware of its absence.

"And where has Beatrice and the beautiful meadow gone?" she said. "Have you sent it to the Academy already? I'm sure they'll accept it. Fancy if it was on the line!"

Teddy had no conscious sense of drama when he slipped the three framed pictures from under his arm.

"No, I haven't sent it to the Academy," he said. "It's being more directly useful. There's Rosemary and there's Robin."

"Out of your picture?" gasped Daisy.

"I don't think of it like that," he said. "It wasn't a picture. It was Robin and Rosemary."

He laughed as he set them up against the sofa back.

"There's Robin for Rosemary," he said, "and Rosemary for Robin. They liked them: well, you can't do better with what people like than to give it them."

He himself looked at the two young smiling faces which he had painted.

"The picture was dead," he said. "But there were little living bits in it. I cut them out. I rescued them."

The final wave of disappointment, of middle-age, of bitterness passed over him. He came out on the other side of it.

"Bless their jolly faces!" he said. "And I'm rather proud of myself too. My pictures are like them: they've got their look. They think so themselves."

"And what's the other one?" asked Daisy.

"Well, that's like too," he said. "It's just the

tortoise enjoying the spring. Don't you recognize it? Me, my dear Miss Daisy! And tortoises can have a wonderfully nice time, if they'll only recognize that they are tortoises."

There was the last drop of spray from the bitter wave. Instantly he wiped it off.

"Jolly it is to see young people like that," he said. "What fun they were last night! And they are so kind, you know, so kind. I'm twenty years older than Robin, and the dear boy lets me into his spring-time. He talked to me last night, after we got back from that delightful party at your house, in a way that made me feel a boy again. He gives me the credit of understanding. Now it's a great thing to a man when a boy allows you to feel that you understand—he might so easily have assumed that I was a fossil."

He looked at Daisy with all the completeness of conviction. She did not know if he were young or old: he was old if he wished. But for herself, she felt like the smiling face of Rosemary opposite her on the sofa, though she had not invoked the aid of the small drawer in her dressing-table.

CHAPTER XVI

THAT day, even as she had hoped, Marion arrived at the last page of her manuscript, and a couple of hours before she expected Daisy to return from the superintendence of Teddy's flower-beds, had despatched it by Parkinson's trustworthy hand to be typewritten and returned to her with the smallest delay possible. Then she put her stylograph pen back in her writing-tray, and from force of habit shook the second supplementary one, which it was Daisy's business to keep full in case the first gave out, to see whether its reservoir was well supplied. And at that it struck her that Daisy would not have to concern herself with any further fillings of those thirsty pens. . . .

It was not without design that she found herself alone in the house. She had wanted to be secure from interruption for the traversing of her last pages, but also she had wished for a space of solitude after she had finished the final lines of her book. Hitherto by concentration of her labours during the day, and by the purposeful hilariousness of the

evening, she had averted her mind from the contemplation of the next stage that awaited her and from its conclusion. She had kept all her faculties bright and eager for her work, demanding of them a cheerful and undiluted application to it, to the exclusion of all else. Now they were needed for that no longer, and she wished, alone and undisturbed, to take them up to her future, give them a good look at it, and ascertain what they really thought about it all. This she did now, presenting the case to them uncoloured and unvarnished, and asked their views on it.

Well, she was quite sure she did not like it at all, but she was equally sure she was not afraid. She hated illness, she hated pain, and she did not in the least want to die. But these three things, illness, pain, and death, indubitably and immediately awaited her. She would very gladly have cancelled the first two altogether: she would have certainly chosen, had it been possible, to be concerned with the third without further delay. But when, dismissing these two depressing prospects, she presented the third to her mind, she was aware that mixed with her thorough dislike of it was an intense curiosity. She hid her face, and instantly began to peep. . . . She could form no idea what it would be like, nor what was the nature of that which should follow it, for that there was a hereafter she had no doubt at all. Broadly, and on Christian

lines, she believed that she was going to be taken care of, and into that care she found that she was perfectly willing and even eager to trust herself. Such shrinking as she had she was sure was physical. It was not fear: her mind at least was unterrified.

Marion's eyes fell upon a new novel which had arrived from the lending library a couple of days ago. She had not yet had time to glance at it, for she had been too busy with writing to think of reading. And though she had dedicated this hour to appropriate meditation, she found that she had to make an effort before she could dismiss her desire to start on this volume at once, for she had heard brave things about it. But the worst of it was that in a space of quite a few minutes she appeared to have got to the end of her appropriate meditations. She was quite sure that the less she thought about illness and pain the better, for no amount of anticipatory thought would alleviate them, and, on the other hand, it was possible that she might not have so much to bear, in which case to have thought about it at all would be a waste of nervous energy. Again, having once formulated her conviction about death, she found that her mind, instead of harking back to dwell on it, kept wandering away from it. She had no bent towards unpractical speculation, and no data except those she had already accepted to build theories upon. She had devised for characters in

her books all sorts of deceases, pious (you might perhaps say unctuous) and otherwise, but none of her imaginings seemed to fit in with her own experience, now that she was contemplating (she hoped from not far off) a death-bed of her own. She could not keep her attention to it : her mind strayed, and she had to make efforts to bring it back to the point again. She did not feel in the least unctuous or afraid ; she merely found the thought of it dull. And two minutes later, she gave up her meditations as a bad job, had lain down on the sofa, got the cushions thoroughly comfortable, and had begun to read the book she had not been able to begin hitherto. Almost immediately she found a split infinitive, which gave her a sense of superiority, for that was a crime of which she believed herself completely innocent. Then the story enchained her, and when Daisy returned an hour later and gave her her tea, Marion burned her mouth in her desire to get through with tea as quickly as possible, and continue reading.

But next morning her study was empty, and over the house brooded the tense quiet that hangs round the approachings of life and death. For those last days, by sheer force of that indomitable will, by sheer determination to have a festival of work and gaiety, Marion seemed to have kept her physical foe at bay. Her mind had half-defied, half-ignored it : she had been too busy to attend to it.

But that was over, and now like a famished beast it leaped upon her. Already she had taxed her strength and her power of resistance to the uttermost ; now she collapsed, for there was nothing left to fight for, and her only wish both for herself and Daisy was that the period of waiting might be brief. A nurse arrived during the day : all that could be done for her was to keep her as far as possible free from pain.

Daisy had seen Dr. Stables when he came that morning, and with a strange mixture of bitter grief and intense thankfulness had heard that it was very unlikely that her sister would live many days. Now, as she sat in Marion's study, or wandered aimlessly about the room, she tried to adjust herself to the knowledge. There was her sofa, where for these last days she had worked, and by it the little table that carried her writing materials. Her two stylograph pens were in the tray, and, by habit, Daisy took them up, even, as Marion had done yesterday, shaking them to see if they were furnished. On the carpet, only half obliterated, was the chalk-line Robin had drawn for some gymnastic feat, to show where the toe of the performer must not trespass, on that night so few hours ago, when by the lilac-bush she had told Teddy that she had begun to hope again. That seemed years ago ; and was it yesterday only that she had gone up to help Teddy with his flower-beds ? She

remembered that she had told him she would telephone to him in the morning.

She had left Marion's room when the doctor came, and had told the nurse to call her when she could see her again. At this moment she came into the room, and Daisy got up from Marion's sofa, where she had seated herself.

"May I come up?" she said.

Nurse Bayliss shook her head.

"No, not now," she said, "I have just given her the morphia Dr. Stables ordered if the pain got bad. I wouldn't disturb her now. But she sent me with a message to you."

"Yes?" said Daisy.

"You were to be sure to get Mr. Teddy—would it be Mr. Teddy?—to take you out for a couple of hours. You were to telephone to him at once. It was her orders, she said."

Daisy hesitated.

"Oh, I don't think I could!" she said.

"You had much better. It will please your sister to know you've done as she wished. It will do you good too."

Ten minutes later Daisy was on her way up to his house, knowing in her heart that she yearned for the presence of a friend. Robin and Rosemary had passed her on the hill, whirling downwards in the motor which Rosemary was learning to drive, but she did not want them; Mrs. Vickary had

twinkled towards her across the grass with an indescribable face and a silent pressure of her hand (for she had seen the arrival of the nurse), and whispering "My heart bleeds, dear Miss Daisy," had twinkled away again, and assuredly she did not want Mrs. Vickary. But she knew she wanted Teddy: he would be natural. She had seen him natural in a sorrow of his own. He met her at the door, with that pleasant smile that was never anything but sincere.

"You and I needn't say much to each other, Miss Daisy," he said. "You know all that's in my heart, don't you, and I know what is in yours. And so you've come up again to help me with my border? Sure you wouldn't sooner come for a walk, or let me run down and fetch your bicycle?"

"No, I would sooner garden with you," she said. "And I do know what's in your heart, and I thank you for it."

"Oh, I can't have that," said Teddy.

"I think you must put up with it. And I should like to tell you that it was Marion who sent me up here. She sent word that I was to go out for a couple of hours with you, or I wouldn't have forced myself on you."

Teddy looked at her a moment.

"Ah, if you say that you don't know what's in my heart," he said. "As if it could be anything but a privilege to do what I can. Now will you

come indoors for a bit first? Robin's not here: he's teaching his Rosemary to drive a motor, to the great peril of the King's lieges on the roads."

"I know, I met them. They have been good to Marion, too. She loved those silly evenings."

"And the book's done?" he asked.

"Yes, she finished it yesterday. When that was done I think she couldn't hold out any more."

"Well, she got it done. There's a lot to be said for doing what you mean to do. When your sister sets her mind on a thing, you know, that thing happened."

Daisy smiled: it was just this she wanted, this simple kindly friendliness as shown by the right person. Mrs. Vickary's bleeding heart meant nothing to her.

"And Marion must get her way now," she said, "so let us begin our gardening. We were going to sow sweet-peas in clumps at the end of the bed, weren't we, for late flowering."

"Yes, if you refuse to let me make an avenue of them."

"Oh, do have clumps," she said, finding that there was still savour in the settlement of sweet-peas. But she could not have sown sweet-peas alone in her own garden.

Robin, who was going in for his Tripos in May, left Lambton for Cambridge a week after this and once again Teddy was solitary in his house. But

now there was a certain addition to the quality of loneliness which beset him. All last autumn since his mother's death, all this spring while the picture grew luminous with his own hopes on the canvas, he had had as his companion the brightness of the conjectured presence of Rosemary. Now Robin had taken that from him (though indeed it had never been his), even as he had taken from Teddy's picture the lovely head of the girl that he had painted therein. And though he had taken, yet Teddy had given ; he had no sense of being robbed by the boy of what was his. Teddy had neither grudged, nor tried to withhold ; he had, in a way, turned necessity into a voluntary act ; he had endorsed with the signature of free-will the deed which destiny, the fact of his arrival in middle-life, had put before him. Above all, he had not acquiesced sourly, he had parted with no atom of his own wholesomeness. With his whole heart he had 'blessed their jolly faces.' That, with all its uncomplicated simplicity, could not be bettered as an accurate expression of his feelings.

But this thoroughly manly acceptance of his fate did not make his loneliness more supportable. His outlook, that subconscious musing of the self, that so largely determines the conscious happiness or unhappiness of the individual, existed no more for him. He had no outlook ; the future was unpictured to his imagination. He had conjured up

to himself during the 'long dark winter evenings' a May of enchantment, wrapped in rosy mists that were the mists of dawn. Instead, the lengthening of the days of the sweet month had lengthened with shadows. And chief among the shadows was the thought not so much of his loneliness, but of the loneliness that was coming so near to his old and his dear friend. He could perhaps get used to his own solitude, or diversify it by distractions that would prove a narcotic to its aching; for a man, by no means selfish, holds in his constitution a certain fibre of self-sufficiency which an unselfish woman necessarily lacks. Round her, if she is alone, the years build bars of iron: soon the far-eyed sorrow of the caged animal who longs for some mate, some companion, is hers who would only have used the liberty of which time has robbed her to give herself to the service of another, even as Daisy had always done. The most pitiful of all tragedies would be hers, the tragedy of not being wanted.

At present the sense (and also the analysis) of this impending dusk was not very vivid to Teddy, it but hovered over the flowering shrubs, dimming their colour, as a passing cloud might, for his more active mind was engaged not with the situation as it would soon be, but as it was now in the house by the village green, where every day Marion lost a little more of her grip on life. Day by day there still came the peremptory orders to Daisy to be

sure to get out of doors for a good long spell, but day by day her sister wanted her presence more, so that often when Daisy had been away but half-an-hour she would tell her nurse to see if she had come back yet, and would visit her. Hence it happened that Daisy would not go beyond the garden, so that she could be quickly summoned if Marion wanted her ; but since Marion always asked shrewd questions as to what she and Teddy had talked about, he went down to the house regularly in the morning and again in the afternoon, so that Daisy should be able to report on his companionship and conversation. Marion had long intervals of drowsed consciousness, when she lay under the power of the drug, and was already losing the sense of the distinction between days, so that in the afternoon she would speak of the events of the morning as belonging to yesterday.

Then for a couple of days she would be freer from pain, and her consciousness recovered the clearness of its normal outlines. Then Daisy was with her more, and from her seat by the bed would read out the type-written manuscript of Marion's last book, inserting the corrections that she made, and, as commanded, put into her reading the punctuation-marks about which Marion was so extremely scrupulous. She had corrected the larger part of the book herself, and it took but a few days' reading to finish the rest. This was accomplished one afternoon

some ten days after Robin's departure, and she greeted the accomplishment of her task with the liveliest satisfaction.

"That's done, then," she said, "and now I can take a holiday. You'll have to correct the printed proofs, Daisy. Mind you do it carefully. Sit in a good light always: it is so easy to miss the commas. And what news is there in Lambton?"

"Not much news," said Daisy. "Mrs. Vickary has got a croquet-party this afternoon."

"You're going?" asked Marion.

"No, dear, I really thought I wouldn't. I don't feel very much inclined for croquet."

"You're not going to sit here all afternoon," said Marion truculently. "Don't think that for a moment."

She turned slowly round in bed and faced her sister.

"Daisy, my dear," she said, "I want you not to give up any of the little pleasures and parties you used to like. Why, they are the very things to help you along. You won't have me to take up your time with—with scoldings and stylographs, and you must fill up the time with plenty of other things. Upon my word, I should like to know that after you've left me safe in the churchyard you would go home and change your dress and have a good ride on your bicycle."

"Oh, Marion——" said Daisy.

"It's no use saying, 'Oh, Marion.' You'll please me best by letting me know that you'll occupy yourself, and have your time full. I wish you would have your heart full too. Hasn't Mr. Teddy——?"

"No, dear," said Daisy.

"I can't think what you find to talk about then."

"We've been doing a good deal of gardening lately," said Daisy.

"Well, I suppose you might do worse, though I never know one flower from another. Such names as they have, too: Aurora Borealis and Delirium Tremens. Give me people. And talking of people, I wonder if Mr. Teddy would come and see me. Or would it shock him to see a female in bed? Where's nurse? Nurse, do people in my state have their gentlemen friends to come and see them?"

"Why, of course, Miss Marion," said Nurse Bayliss. "Is it Mr. Vickary you want to see? He called here yesterday and asked if you would like to see him."

"Well then, I wouldn't," said Marion. "What's the use of a clergyman when you're dying? No, I want to see Mr. Teddy. Would he come this afternoon, perhaps on his way to the croquet-party? Can you make me tidy enough?"

"To be sure; but if you're to have another

visitor this afternoon, you'll have to get a good rest first. Else you won't be able to enjoy it."

Marion nodded at Daisy.

"Don't be alarmed," she whispered. "I'm not going to be indiscreet. Now, go away, dear, will you? I'm going to be obedient for once and get a good rest, as I'm told."

Teddy had arrived a few minutes previously, and was waiting for Daisy in Marion's room downstairs, to take her out.

"Well, here's your nursery-maid, Miss Daisy," he said. "Ready for a walk, or shall we just stroll in your garden?"

She shook hands.

"You are a faithful and regular nursery-maid," she said. "I think the garden. And Marion's asked if you will come and see her this afternoon. Will you?"

"Indeed I will. How is she to-day?"

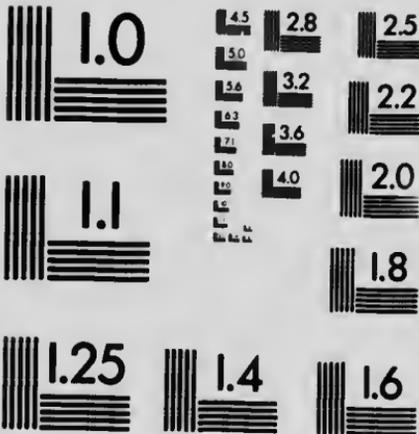
"Very much herself. We've finished reading and correcting her book, and now she is resting in anticipation of your visit. It is good of you: she will enjoy it."

Teddy had often had occasion to admire Marion's unaffected fortitude, and during this last fortnight of seeing Daisy so constantly and so intimately, it seemed to him she was in no whit behind her sister in the simplicity of her courage. She was bearing the long strain of hopeless waiting with a tran-



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quillity and an absence of all apparent effort that was beyond praise. Trouble, that lancet in the hands of God, did not cause her to wince at its strokes: she bared her bosom to it, and smiled at the kind stern face of the celestial surgeon. She was heroic, she was child-like; the immortal youth of love shone from her.

Daisy stopped a moment and picked up a twig on which she lifted a worm from the path.

"Dr. Stables has been to see her to-day," she said. "He finds her, though she is so cheerful and free from pain, very much worse. She had an attack of heart failure yesterday. It will come that way, he thinks. I do hope so, and I hope it will come soon."

"Yes, dear Miss Daisy, we must all hope that," he said.

She looked at him a moment with quivering lip.

"I wish I could tell you all you have done for me in these days," she said. "But I can't tell you: it's no use."

"And I wish I could tell you what I have learned from you these days," he said.

Teddy returned again that afternoon to see Marion, with his mind made up. He did not know, he did not trouble himself to think whether Daisy would accept him: all that was certain was that he wanted her, not indeed with the tumultuous demand of youth, but with the sober and deep-hued

need of a lonely man. He hoped, too, that he could make her happier with him than she could ever be in the loneliness which would certainly be hers, and into his love for his old friend no doubt the sincerity of his human pity entered, for there is no questioning the validity of their kinship, and he desired not only to enjoy but, if he could, to console. That was all he had to offer her, but he kept nothing back: he was eager to give without reservation, and, if he was accepted, to take with a thankfulness into which no shadow of regret entered. His dream of the impossible had vanished in the pleasant quiet daylight. . . .

He found on arrival that Marion expected him, and he went up straight to her room without seeing Daisy to speak to, catching a glimpse of her outside under the May-tree. Marion had been made very smart for this unique occasion, with a red shawl round her shoulders, and a very bright blue coverlet on her bed.

"Well, this is an adventure," she said. "Fancy me receiving a gentleman in my bedroom. But I like it. I'm not shy."

Teddy instantly caught her note.

"Good gracious, it would be a miserable thing if you were shy of me after all these years," he said.

"Not such a fool. I wanted to see you. Last time, you know. Shan't see you again. Don't

say anything pathetic. I want you to say something useful."

"What's that?" said Teddy.

Marion dropped her eyes a moment, fingering her bright blue coverlet.

"Mr. Teddy," she said, "I want you to do as much for Daisy as you can. I want you to encourage her to take up her life again, and run the Entertainment Bureau with you, and go on just as usual. If it had been she who was dying, and I who was going to be left, I should have begun two more books at once, I believe, and written one with each hand. She's splendid now, quite splendid, but what makes me want to cry is the thought of her afterwards. Please do what you can."

Teddy moved his chair a shade closer to the bed.

"I am going to do what I can, Miss Marion," he said. "I'm hoping to make myself a very happy man in asking Daisy to be my wife."

Marion raised her head, and stared at him with an expression of extraordinary impatience.

"Good Lord, what are you waiting here for then?" she said. "I'm not Daisy. Go and ask her at once, Mr. Teddy, if you really mean that. She'll say 'yes' fast enough: dear me, I oughtn't to have said that, but I know I'm right. Please go away at once. She's in the garden: I sent her out. And open that window there, wide, and the moment she's said 'yes,' whistle loudly on your

fingers, as Mr. Robin taught you to do, so that I shall know at once. And then both of you come up to see me, and be kissed, if you can bear it. Lord, what an afternoon."

Teddy obeyed these imperious instructions. It was a very few minutes afterwards that the sound of a shrill whistle came in through the open window.

"Thank God," said Marion, and with the help of her nurse sat up in bed to greet the entrance of the 'young people.'

A week later they stood together by Marion's grave. The engagement, at her request, had been instantly announced, and Mrs. Vickary wrote a very neat note of combined condolence and congratulation beginning, 'But joy, my dear Miss Daisy, cometh in the morning.'

THE END

