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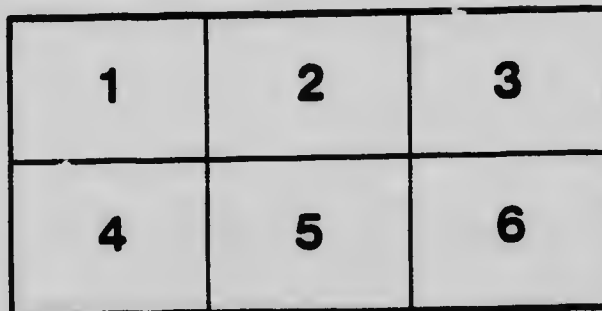
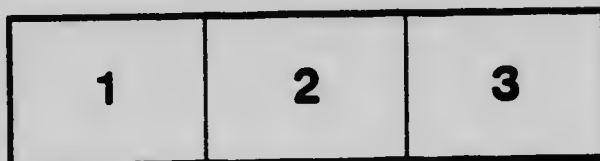
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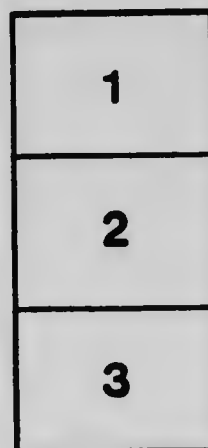
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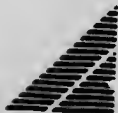
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GREEN CHALK

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CHAPTER I

GEORGE STEIN was not an artist, though many people who knew him slightly were sure for various reasons that painting was his hobby, if not actually his profession. In the first place, his flat overlooking St. James's Park was furnished and arranged with irreproachable taste ; and not a few originals by both ancient and modern masters were to be found on the walls. In the second place, he looked like an artist, being dark and pale and carelessly dressed, though his clothes always came from the most fashionable tailor of the year. He looked affected too, a fact for which nature was more to blame than George, since it had given him unusually pale blue eyes and unusually arched black eyebrows and an uncommonly black mole on his left cheek, somewhere near the eye.

In point of fact, his profession had been from the age of six even more precarious than art. He had been brought up to believe himself to be the heir of his uncle, Mr. Halifax James, an aged gentleman, whose late wife had left him, twenty years before his death, two million pounds, and whose doctor about the same time had given him two years.

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For this reason Sten's parents failed to see why he should be made ready for any other employment. He went to Eton and Oxford in the ordinary course of events, but at neither did he acquire any practical knowledge. His father died while he was still at school; his mother during his first year at Balliol, leaving him her blessing and some ten thousand pounds. After going down he went to London, where he lived partly on his capital and partly on credit for over ten years, when the event so long anticipated actually happened—Halifax James died.

His nephew arrived too late to hear the old man's last words, but in time to hear his will read. Unfortunately for George, it had been made in favour of Miss Claudia Badminton-Dale.

Tall branches of white and mauve lilacs arranged in black china vases filled the room with their scent, drowning the perfume of Parma violets massed together in a silver bowl. It was a long room panelled in oak and divided across the centre by a heavy curtain made of old Indian tapestry. Much in it was old and oriental, even the grey Persian cat, who sat with her back to her master gazing at a tantalizing sparrow twittering on the window-ledge.

George was smoking a cigarette, wondering alternately who this Claudia Badminton-Dale might be and what he himself was going to do now that his career as heir was at an end. He reviewed the professions one by one, only to

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realise that a man cannot begin life at thirty-three. Connecting his two dominating thoughts, he smiled : why not find Miss Badminton-Dale and marry her ? No, the world would laugh, and Stein hated being laughed at ; some day he might do it, but not yet. The twittering sparrow irritated him and he went out. Leaving the Horse Guards Parade he crossed Whitehall. A motor 'bus passed within perilous distance of him, and the words of a passenger standing on the step caught his ear :

" If you want a thing done get some one else to do it for you ! " As the speaker laughed, the moving bus carried him out of Stein's life as suddenly as he had entered it.

Stein walked on blindly down Whitehall Place. It was still early and there were few people about, only a man or two hurrying to business, a postman, a woman who looked like a typist, and a street-artist.

The picture the man was drawing spread right across the pavement. As Stein came near to it, he stopped almost involuntarily, it was such an extraordinary picture to find on a London street. He saw a woman's face drawn in chalk and only half-finished, but to the man who looked at it for the first time it was strangely arresting. As far as the drawing went it was perfect, the colouring was perhaps a little crude, the hair being of a bright bluish red, the skin almost white, and the lips vermilion. The eyes as yet were only drawn in outline.

" I want some green chalk for the eyes," Stein

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heard the artist say, in a perfectly cultured voice.

The voice surprised George until he looked at the man himself. He seemed little more than a boy of some eighteen years, or twenty at most. He was so thin that his dark eyes looked unnaturally large, his fair hair was rather long and waved above his small ears. The chin was rather pointed and the pale lipped mouth was like the mouth of a girl. As Stein looked at it, he felt sure that he had seen the face before or one remarkably like it.

"I haven't any green chalk," Stein said.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I was really speaking to myself."

"What's your name?" Stein asked.

"Why do you want to know it?"

"Because I like your work."

"My name's Lenormand—Philip Lenormand," the boy said, and went on developing the white face framed in red hair.

George said: "Philip Lenormand! How odd, and the sketch is signed 'L.L. 1876.' My father's name was Philip. Yes, the likeness is even more remarkable than I thought at first."

The grey cat, the only other living thing in the room, took no notice of the remark, but went on washing her hind leg. For once in his life Stein felt almost excited. The likeness between the face in the picture he held in his hands and the face of the pavement artist who had attracted

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his attention earlier in the day was undeniable. It was the picture of a young and pretty girl, which he had found years ago stowed away in a lumber room, in the house in Hampshire where he and his parents had lived, and which he had brought with him to London. He liked the face because he liked all pretty faces, and he found the story attached to it interesting. His mother had told it to him when he showed her the picture and questioned her about it—the story of the French artist whose life his father had ruined.

Like his son, Philip Stein had been attracted by the prettiness of the face, and had found time during a few months' stay in Paris to become very intimate with the girl. The attraction had proved transitory, however, and he returned to his wife and fifteen-year-old son, bringing with him the sketch signed "L. L.", to which his wife had taken an instantaneous dislike. In compliance with her wishes he had had it removed one morning to the lumber room and went out hunting, from which expedition he was brought home on a stretcher with his neck broken. A few days later, a letter arrived, addressed to Philip Stein and bearing the Paris postmark. Mrs. Stein read the letter, but did not meet Mademoiselle Lenormand at Charing Cross in her husband's stead, nor did she, when the time came, inquire after that lady's health, nor after the health of her child. "Thank God," Louise Lenormand had written, "that He has given me a great talent; it will enable me to provide for myself and my child in years to

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come. I will paint as never before, only at present I need your help and I know you will give it to me."

"If the son has as much talent as the mother believed herself to have," Stein said, as he replaced the picture on its rail, "and if he is as like her in character as he is in face, why should I not take the advice of the fellow who said, 'If you want a thing done, get some one else to do it for you'?"

Philip Lenormand did not read the penny weeklies, or he might have been tempted to arrive at friendship via some bureau. He had no friends, no brothers or sisters, no parents. His mother had died when he was still a child, but he could remember days when he had sat upon the hem of her gown while she had bent, pencil in hand, over her work. He could recall her pale face and sad eyes and sadder smile. Sometimes she would put the pencil into his tiny hand and make him draw it across the paper, saying, "Some day you will be a great artist, as I should have been." He could remember going with her from picture shop to picture shop, carrying parcels of sketches, which were examined across the counter by slightly contemptuous men who praised her work, but almost invariably refused to buy it. "Clever enough, I dare say," was the general verdict, "but there's no market for this kind of thing." Then they would return to the garret in the ugly side street in Soho, with the parcel little or no lighter than it had been when they had started out.

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When Louise Lenormand died she left her child to the care of the landlady, Mrs. Briggs, and it was from her that he learnt all he knew of his father, and that was little enough beyond the fact that he was dead and a good thing too. For the best part of two years he accompanied the two unworthy sons of the worthy Mrs. Briggs when they went to school, and there earned the contempt of his fellows by knowing more than they did, and by being, on more than one occasion, knocked down by a girl. After that, his guardian considered that he was sufficiently educated and had lived long enough on her charity. Then followed days when he tramped the streets with a bundle of papers under his arm, and made only enough money to dissatisfy his patroness. One night he did not return at the usual hour, and for three weeks she heard nothing of him. On the twenty-second day he appeared in the kitchen, with a bandaged head and the determination to change his profession. The former was greeted with jeers, the latter with disapproval.

"A hartist, indeed! I don't think. Hartists don't make no money, and comes to a bad end. Don't forget your mother, young Philip, and don't you run away with the idear that you're goin' to live with me for nothink. I've lost enough by you as it is, I've. The 'oss wat knocked you down trod on yer 'ead hand now mistake—it don't need none of your wite wrappers to tell me that! Bin in 'ospital, 'ave yer? I don't think! Bin larkin' round I should say. One shilln' an'

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threepence a week you pays me for your bed or out you goes—and not a bite of food does I give yer."

All the same, Philip Lenormand became an artist, and Mrs. Briggs received her rent pretty regularly. When he started on his new career, he had an idea of sitting in the garret room, as his mother had done, and making pictures on pieces of paper, but on this point Mrs. Briggs soon put him right.

"Wat good'll that do yer I'd like to know," she demanded. "Hif yer must be a hartist go out and pynt were you'll get pyde for it. There's them chalks wat yer mother left."

Accordingly Philip made his way daily to Whitehall Place, where the pavement is broad, and where none seemed to object to his presence. He did not, however, follow his landlady's instructions as far as producing likenesses of his sovereign Lord King Edward "an' such like blokes, wat be the most pying things," but instead gave the world of London odd pictures to look at if it chose to stop and inspect his work. For the most part it did not choose; on the contrary, it preferred to walk on, sometimes even smearing these works of art under its feet.

Occasionally some one would glance at the strange designs that spread across the pavement, or throw him a halfpenny or even question him. But Philip did not encourage this intimacy, and preferred to explain his ideas in lines and colours rather than in words. Generally the fifteenpence

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a week was forthcoming, and feeling hungry was to him a matter of course.

There was a house in a street, not far from his exhibition, which catered for cabdrivers, crossing-sweepers, scavengers and others, who had appetites that exceeded their incomes, and thither he would adjourn when the pangs of hunger were greater than usual. At night he returned to Soho, but he did not seek the company of Mrs. Briggs whose innate good nature had of late years given place to a love of alcohol. Her two sons had left the maternal roof to seek their fortunes—one in Canada, one on the sea—so that Philip could enjoy his evening meal of bread and cheese, if the day had been a good one, undisturbed except for the voices of his elated landlady and her friends, which penetrated from the basement.

On the whole, the dirt and squalor of his room and the hunger, which as often as not he could not gratify, troubled him very little—he had got too accustomed to them for that. But the inability to express his ideas for want of a chalk of some particular colour, which he had worn to a powder and applied with his thumb, and which he could not afford to replace even at the expense of his dinner; the jeers of the little gutter-snipes and loafers who sometimes collected round him and not unfrequently spat upon his beloved pictures; the ravages made by the feet of pedestrians—these were the real tragedies of his life.

Philip was sitting on his bed smoking a cigarette

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made from the collected ends of other cigarettes, when some one knocked.

"Come in," he called.

A face with a mole on the cheek and strongly-marked eyebrows appeared round the door.

"Oh, so I've found the right place after all," Stein said, coming in. "I followed you from Whitehall Place because I wanted to ask you to show me some more of your work, Mr. Lenormand. I am interested in art."

"Won't you sit down?" Philip asked, indicating the only chair in the room, a rickety wooden thing with a broken back. "I'm afraid I haven't much to show you—only a few sketches."

He wondered why Stein had come; it did not occur to him that he might be a possible buyer, because no one had ever wanted to buy his pictures. He produced a portfolio from under the low bed and put it on the table beside Stein.

His visitor turned over the sketches, studying them critically. In each one he found something good from the point of view of art, and here the colouring was much better than it had been in the drawing he had seen on the pavement. He was satisfied that he had found an artist of no ordinary promise, now he wanted some confirmation of his already strong suspicion that this was "L. L.'s" son.

He found it at the bottom of the portfolio in the form of a picture of his own father signed "L. L. 1877", with the name "Philip Stein" faintly written on the back of it.

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"Who painted this one?" he asked, smiling.

"My mother," Philip said.

"Philip Stein," the other quoted, "who was or is Philip Stein?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea," the boy said, putting the short end of his cigarette carefully aside.

"Oh," Stein said, relieved, "I asked, because funnily enough my name's Stein."

He looked through the sketches again, more quickly this time. They were of all sizes and varied in subject, but in each he found the same face that he had seen on the pavement earlier in the day.

"Yes," he said, as he laid them on the table, "I'm sure they are good. I wonder you draw on the pavement where your work can only live for at most a day. Rain and feet won't leave it much longer than that."

"I do it because it's cheaper than drawing on paper and more paying, too. No one sees it up here."

"Still it seems a pity. Tell me, have you ever studied?"

"Studied art? No, never."

"It's a pity about that, too. Look here, are you ambitious? Would you like to make money?" Stein asked, eyeing him closely.

"Making money isn't my ambition," Philip said, "but I'd like to have beautiful things and enough to eat, and a little over so as to have some fun sometimes."

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"What's your ambition, then, to be famous?"

"What's the good of fame?" the boy asked, sitting down on the bed again and beginning to roll another cigarette.

"Here, have one of mine," Stein said, producing his thin gold case. He was thinking about the red-haired girl and wondering where she came in. If Philip didn't speak about her voluntarily, he must. "If you're ambitious, but don't want fame or money, what is it you do want?" He watched the boy's clear skin turn crimson.

"Oh! You wouldn't understand," he said, with a slightly foreign accent.

Stein was determined to know all there was to know about the boy. He was not going to take more risks than necessary. The red-haired woman needed a word or two of explanation.

"Nonsense, my dear chap," he said, "of course I'd understand."

He went and sat beside Philip on the bed, again holding out the cigarette case.

"I don't know who she is," he said rather shyly, taking a cigarette and putting it unlighted between his lips.

"I've got a match," Stein said, striking it on the sole of his patent-leather boot. "You don't know who she is? I suppose you saw her somewhere, and never forgot her face. I don't wonder, it's certainly very striking."

"I don't think I ever even saw her," the boy said, letting the smoke of his cigarette come slowly down his nose. "It all happened years

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ago—ten years at least—shortly after my mother died.”

He paused a moment and sat quite still, with his brow puckered. Stein said nothing.

“I remember how cold it was, with a sort of half fog hanging about. I was selling papers then—it was before I started painting—and I saw a man beckoning to me from the other side of the street, and I started running towards him. I was knocked down by a great van and”

“Well?”

“I don’t know how it was, but when I was conscious again I remembered having heard a voice—very clear and high and childish and”

“Well?” asked Stein again, “what had it said?”

“I don’t know what it said, but it was very full of sympathy, and I hadn’t had much of that since mother died.”

“I see,” Stein said, “and so you imagined what she was like and painted her!”

“I knew quite well what she was like. I have never for a moment thought of her as having anything but wonderful reddish purple hair and deep, bright green eyes. After that I simply had to paint, and I’ve painted and lived ever since for nothing but to make her just as I see her. Some day I’ll do it, too.”

One thing Stein understood perfectly—Philip was Louise Lenormand’s son. She had sacrificed all she had for love of a worthless Englishman; he, at eighteen, was content to live in an attic,

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scribbling by night on sheets of paper which no one ever saw, drawing by day on paving stones where rain and footsteps had access, the image of a visionary girl, his sole desire to make her more perfect, as he felt she should be.

"Has anyone ever offered you the chance of learning to paint better?" Stein asked him.

"The chance to learn to draw and paint her better? No, never! Why should he?"

"If everything you tell me is true," Stein said, "I will. I'll take you to Paris and let you study, and, in addition, I'll give you a hundred pounds a year. You've got talent—there's no doubt about that. Some day you'll be able to make this red-haired woman of yours look as beautiful as you imagine her to look."

For a moment Philip was speechless. Then he said, "You'll do this for me! You'll help me to"

"Stop!" Stein said, "I said I'd do it, if what you told me was true."

"What did I tell you?" the boy asked.

"That your only ambition is to draw this face—that you neither want money nor fame."

"Of course it is true!"

Philip's eyes were fixed on the mole on Stein's cheek. He could not move them. He felt that they would be fixed there for ever, that through all eternity, though he might travel from end to end of space, he would never remove his eyes from that round black spot.

"So that's settled," Stein said briskly, "but

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of course, you quite understand that my name will appear on every picture. I must get the credit for painting them, and when they're sold the money is mine. I'll make you an allowance of one hundred pounds a year. People shall be told that you are my secretary. Is that all right?"

"Oh, yes," Philip said.

Stein took out his pocket-book, and, after having written something in it, handed it to Philip.

"Just sign your name to that, my boy. That's it. Now we'll go out and have a bit of dinner to celebrate the occasion."

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CHAPTER II

THE Calais-Paris express was late, and the girl with her back to the engine gazed wearily into the darkness through which they were passing.

Her mother sat opposite to her, with her eyes closed and her heavily powdered cheeks slightly flushed by the close atmosphere of the train.

There was little likeness between them. The older woman was short and slightly inclined to stoutness, in spite of her tightly laced corset and perfectly fitting gown. She was by profession a rich young widow ; by nature she was a rich widow who was not young. She was well over forty and said she was twenty-nine, a statement which deceived nobody. Claudia, her daughter, was tall and slim, indeed almost thin. Her hair was very thick and cut rather short, reddish bronze in colour, with purple lights in it and wonderful, tantalizing ripples. Her eyes were green and her complexion pale. She wore a frock that reached very little below her knees, and her large hat would have looked more in keeping on the head of a much younger girl. The other occupant of the carriage was their maid, who tried to imitate both her mistresses and only succeeded in being ridiculous.

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Everything about Mrs. Badminton-Dale was expensive. Her life had been spent in places where poverty is considered a sin, and sin a fashionable amusement. According to this standard, much of Mrs. Badminton-Dale's life had been spent in sinning, since her father had made and lost three fortunes and her husband had not been a rich man. During the period at which her father's second fortune was being spent, the family came to Europe. In London the only child, a plump, dimpled, silly young woman of twenty-three, with only one object in life—matrimony—met a man much older than herself, whom fate had destined for her husband. She was connected through her father with a paying lawyer's business in Chicago ; he was connected on his mother's with at least one duke. At the time of his marriage, he was the heir presumptive of his cousin, a bachelor and an earl, but unfortunately for Anthony Badminton-Dale, the cousin subsequently married a chorus girl, who presented him with twin sons.

Mr. Badminton-Dale heard of Charles P. Oakley's second fortune—but not of its precariousness—Miss Oakley heard of the duke and of the earl and they got married. Two years later Anthony Badminton-Dale died leaving a widow, who was still young, and one daughter. The widow had the reputation of being rich, as well as young, and had every intention of marrying again ; and with this object in view she

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donned, twelve months after her husband's death, becoming grey, and left cards on all her friends. Thirteen years later, she found that she was no longer young, and that her daughter was growing up remarkably quickly. A little paint and a great deal of powder had been substituted for the youth, and many unpaid bills had taken the place of the reputed wealth. Short skirts, short hair and the nominal age of nine kept Claudia as young as possible, and the late Mr. Badminton-Dale's widow was still an optimist. Then Halifax James died, leaving his money to his godchild and ward.

They were gliding into the great railway station, when Mrs. Badminton-Dale opened her eyes. Doors burst open and torrents of humanity emptied themselves on to the platform below. Every one was speaking at once and every one was out of temper. All classes and all nationalities rubbed shoulders: English women in tweeds; Germans with knapsacks slung round their waists; French women smelling of patchouli; Frenchmen embracing each other with voluble greetings; maids carrying boxes and rugs; nurses with crying children in their arms; and porters in blue blouses pushing pyramids of trunks.

Marie, the Badminton-Dales' maid, elbowed her way through the crowd of loud men and louder women. A taxi was hailed and Mrs. Badminton-Dale, a few dressing and jewel cases and her daughter were packed in, while Marie

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retired to assure breathless officials that her mistresses never used tobacco, and as for spirits Marie merely denied the insinuation with a shrug.

"Mother," Claudia said, leaning forward and gazing into the crowded lamp-lit street, "why have we come here? I have never felt so sad in my life. I believe that this is a city of tears."

"A city of tears!" Mrs. Badminton-Dale scoffed. "My dear child, remember that you have left your convent, and don't be so silly. Paris is always called 'the Gay City.' Tears indeed! We have come here because it is the place in which I feel most at home, most happy. Look at the life! Every one is talking and laughing, every one is well dressed, even the poorest. They know how to wear their clothes, these Parisians, as only the French and we Americans can wear them."

"I feel that they are laughing and talking in order to hide their sorrows." The girl shuddered.

"You have inherited your melancholy nature from your father," Mrs. Badminton-Dale observed. "I remember we came here on our honeymoon, and on the way from the station I was intoxicated, half mad with the joy of life, and I turned to tell him something of what I felt and found him asleep with his mouth open. Poor Anthony!"

Claudia's mother was not the only person who referred to Mr. Badminton-Dale as "Poor Anthony."

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They turned up a quieter side street.

"That," said Mrs. Badminton-Dale, with something like a shudder, "is the hotel I stopped at last time I was in Paris. That was before your godfather died, five years ago. I was not born to be poor—a sensitive nature such as mine requires beauty and luxury to help it to expand. It is like a delicate flower, it needs golden sunshine. Yes, golden sunshine," she repeated, because the simile pleased her. "Things are very different now, thank God!"

She carefully arranged a diamond star at her throat, as if she needed something tangible to assure her that poverty was for her a thing of the past.

"It really was most opportune," she mused. "Every one was glad about it, I am sure—except his relations, I suppose."

"Of course, they must have been sorry to lose him," Claudia said.

"My dear Claudia, how refreshing my friends will find you, if you always say such ridiculous things! His relations were sorry because he failed to mention them in his will, not because earth had two gouty feet the less."

"I suppose they were very disappointed. I'm sorry about it, but it wasn't our fault."

"I can't say I'm particularly sorry," her mother said, laughing, "and I take all the blame on myself. I nursed him through his last illness, my love, and left before the relations arrived. He had only one near one, I believe; I forget

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his name—George something. Halifax James only made one mistake—he should have left the money to me entirely, not in trust until your marriage. However, it was better than nothing," she said more to herself than to Claudia.

She laughed a great deal during the rest of the drive, and seemed to have grown years younger since leaving Charing Cross.

At last the taxi drew up at the door of a grey stone house, which was joined to endless other grey stone houses all exactly like it. When Mrs. Badminton-Dale had paid the driver she turned round, and catching sight of a stout, middle-aged man, with a puffy red face and a monocle buried in the folds of flesh round his pale blue eyes, dropped her *lorgnette* with a cry of delight.

"Why, how do you do?" she said, with the slight American accent that had never left her. "How delightful to meet you here."

The man with the red face took her hand with rather less cordiality than it was given. He murmured something; but, obviously, he did not recognise Mrs. Badminton-Dale.

"Do you know my little girl? No? Claudia darling, come and shake hands. Living near here? How delightful! We've got an apartment in this house, on the third floor. Do come and see us soon *'u revoir* then, so glad to have met you again!"

"Who : that?" Claudia asked, as they entered the lift. "My dear, don't ask me, I don't know his name. I don't think I ever did

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know it. I once saw him at the German Embassy and he seemed to be the sort of person one should know. I have a wonderful memory for faces."

She was certainly in an excellent humour and actually smiled at the maid who opened the door. It was a flat of moderate size and immoderate rent, and as unlovely as no individual taste combined with the skill of the most modern decorators and furnishers could make it. Everything had cost as much as possible and there were innumerable mirrors on the walls. Mrs. Badminton-Dale was delighted.

The maid showed them into a large room where a cheerful fire was burning, watching her mistresses the while out of the corners of her eyes.

"*Mademoiselle est jolie*," she told the butler afterwards, "*avec une chevelure merveilleuse, mais madame*"

The shoulders of a Frenchwoman are as expressive as her intuition is unerring.

During her first month in Paris Claudia made a friend, that is to say, she met a woman who, having decided that she was superior to Claudia in every way, did not mind being seen with her, kissed her on the cheek when they met and parted, and told everybody that she was a dear, pretty child and so good-natured. Her friend's name was Grace Yorke.

She took Claudia out shopping and invited her to tea. Mrs. Badminton-Dale remonstrated: Claudia was only a child and must not go to large

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tea-fights, she said. After that Grace always called Claudia "darling"; and took her to Georges Petit's one afternoon when she knew everybody would be there.

The exhibition room was filled with people, and incidentally with pictures. Most of the people were women, all perfectly and ridiculously dressed. There were a few men, artists for the most part, seemingly enjoying the patronage of the leaders of feminine fashion. Only the few who had been crushed against the walls could possibly see the pictures, and to these had turned their backs; while the rest made the wrong remarks about the wrong picture, a matter of small importance, since nobody listened to them.

On the landing outside Lady Grace Yorke sank upon a red plush sofa.

"Out for my new chapeau we will not go in yet," he said to Claudia, who stood beside her, studying the catalogue. "Sit down and wait a *minute*. I want you to talk to me. How old are you, Claudia?"

"I'm eighteen," she answered, putting down her book.

"I thought you were something of the sort, because your mother told me you were fourteen. Your poor mother is not very intelligent, my dear, she makes such obvious mistakes and tells such palpable lies. The woman who tells a lie about her own age is only less of a fool than the woman who tells them about her children's. One should never mention one's age—if one doesn't, people

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generally think one a little older than one is ; if one does, they are sure."

Claudia looked with serious green eyes at the woman beside her. Lady Grace Yorke was a perfect work of art, painted in pale grey as far as the dress was concerned, with an oval face and light corn-coloured hair. Her eyes were forget-me-not blue, her cheeks exquisitely rouged, and her eyebrows arched and dark. She had a habit of raising them while she talked.

She was living in Paris partly from choice, partly to give London time to forget a certain scandal in which she had played a leading rôle.

"Your mother," Grace went on, "is too ridiculous in her attempts to keep you hidden. She'd have kept you locked up in that convent, if she hadn't been afraid of your becoming a nun and giving your money to provide free meals for overfed and underworked priests. Never mind, *ma belle*, some day your hair will have a great success: half the women you know will say that it is dyed and the rest will call it hideous—yes, it will be much admired. Shall we try to go in now? I see the dear Baronne has come out, so there will be plenty of room."

She stopped at the door to talk to some one, and Claudia found herself lost in a crowd of chattering people. A woman wearing a large plumed hat moved away from in front of her, revealing a high narrow canvas in a dark frame.

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Claudia saw a woman's figure, dressed in a clinging black gown, standing on a wet pavement under a street lamp. In the background, between the converging houses, stretched the boundless blue of the sky at night time. "*Tiens!*" she heard somebody say, "here is the picture everybody is talking about: 'The Woman Who Might Have Been.' Henriette, look, that must be the model standing in front of it."

Claudia did not know that they were talking about her, she only knew that the world had changed for her because she had seen something that seemed to her perfect. Why this was so she did not understand, but never in her life had anything moved her as this picture did. She felt tears come into her eyes, not because of the despair in the woman's would-be seductive face, but because of the perfect beauty of form and colour. She did not even notice that she was looking at a face almost exactly like her own.

"So you've found it, *ma petite*," Grace's voice said close beside her. "It's the picture of the year everybody says. What a curious name! Yes, really, George Stein is rather clever and a great dear."

"Do you know him?" Claudia asked breathlessly.

"Why, yes," Grace said, "quite well. Would you like to? I'll ask him to come to-morrow night and make your mother bring you. It won't be easy, but we'll manage her somehow. Yes, I quite agree, that picture's positively sweet!"

GREEN CHALK

"Positively sweet!" Of course, Claudia liked Grace Yorke enormously, she was so graceful and beautiful and kind, but how could she call it "positively sweet"?

"Shall we go home now?" Grace asked, yawning. "It's so tiring looking at other people's clothes."

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER III

IN the centre of a long low studio, with green walls and bare floor, a red-shaded lamp stood on the table. At one end of the room there was a fire-place with a small stove in it, and over the shelf a long looking-glass. Some unframed canvases and sketches decorated the walls. At the far end of the room stood a model throne. In one wall was a long uncurtained window, and under it a low couch. The air was heavy with the smoke of cigarettes.

Philip stood with his back to the fireplace, watching Stein, who was sitting at the table with a small glass of cognac beside him.

Philip had changed in the last five years. He was broader now and the hollows had disappeared from his cheeks. His clothes would not have looked out of place anywhere, his hands were absolutely clean and his pale hair was not too long. He was perfectly contented: the face of his red-haired girl, whether she laughed or wept, danced or lay dying, frowned or caressed, was beautiful—the perfect likeness of the mistress of his dreams. He had even ceased to long to have her in the flesh—as a being living only in his mind and in his art she was complete.

GREEN CHALK

Stein, too, had changed. The monstrous black bow tie and the wide-brimmed felt hat were new. In his expression there was something akin to fear, bred by the consciousness of a folded sheet of paper hidden in his safe. There was something discontented about the look of his mouth. The supposed painter of Philip Lenormand's pictures was becoming immensely popular, whereas George Stein, the man, was nobody in particular. His friends had not seemed unduly surprised to learn that he had at last found time to indulge in an old passion for art, and his acquaintances had always thought him an amateur; it therefore seemed quite natural to both that being disappointed in his expectations regarding the inheritance he should choose this way of earning a living. The mole on his cheek had prepared them, he told Philip. Only the mothers of unmarried and unmarried daughters looked at him with less favour after the publication of Halifax James's will; the daughters themselves found him picturesque and delightful. For the last two years he had been a lion cub, with every prospect of becoming a full-grown lion before long.

His obvious dislike of speaking about his art, or receiving visitors at his studio, earned him the reputation of being modest. His old friends said it was so unlike Stein; his new ones liked it. He was the artist of the day and charged for his pictures accordingly, but he still lived beyond his income.

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"Do you know," Stein said, blowing a smoke ring, "I've been asked to meet the girl who inherited my uncle's money. Funnily enough, I've never seen her. She's just come to Paris with her mother. By the way, Lenormand, was that yarn you told me years ago, about the girl you always paint, true?"

"Quite, why do you ask?"

Stein looked at him keenly.

"I only wondered, because people say that the Badminton-Dale girl is rather like her. It's only chance, I suppose."

He laughed and sipped his cognac. Of course, it was pure coincidence. How could Philip have seen her? And yet it annoyed and puzzled him—he hated anything he didn't thoroughly understand.

"Read that," he said, throwing Philip a scented letter written on thin, pink paper, with the initials "G. Y." printed on the flap of the envelope.

"Dear friend," it ran, "people have been talking about you all day and to-morrow they will want to talk to you. They are all coming here in the evening, plus a certain lady of few years and many charms, who seems to have fallen in love with your latest picture. Encourage her to transfer it to the painter, she is an enormous heiress. Her name is Claudia Badminton-Dale. Don't disappoint her and me, but come.

Sincerely,

GRACE YORKE."

GREEN CHALK

Philip folded the letter carefully and gave it back to Stein.

"Who is the lady who gives such sound advice?" he asked.

"Grace Yorke," he answered, "is foolish enough to have a past, beautiful enough to have a present, and probably too notoriously dangerous and dangerously notorious to have a future. She does everything she shouldn't do and is invariably found out. She lives here because, she says, English people have no temperament, which means that they will stand a good deal but not Lady Grace Yorke. I knew her husband a bit before they were divorced, and I've seen rather a lot of her since I came here. She amuses me and I like watching her, she is as graceful as a cat and not unlike one in other ways."

"And do you mean to take her advice?" Philip asked, smiling.

"The idea is by no means new. I had it myself when I heard Uncle Halifax's Will read."

"But if you don't like her?"

"My dear fellow, don't be ridiculous! I like her already. I'll like her face if all I hear of it is true, I like her age—she is, I believe, about nineteen—already I am in love with her income, and I have every hope that she may be a fool."

"Somehow," Philip said seriously, "I never thought of your getting married. Do you mean to tell your wife about—about us, Stein?"

GREEN CHALK

"My God, no!" Stein exclaimed. "I have always thought that the one thing which would make married life bearable would be that the wife should know nothing about the husband. Trying to find out would keep her occupied, an idle woman has nothing to do but to get on her husband's nerves."

"And the husband, must he know everything about his wife?"

"If he has ever known a woman intimately, he unfortunately must. All women are the same. It is not the fault of the ugly women that they are good, it is their misfortune."

As George Stein was announced, Grace Yorke got up from a sofa where she had been sitting talking the latest scandal to an *abbé*. She greeted the new arrival with a smile and two outstretched, jewelled hands. In an adjoining room a singer sang something about the bliss of solitude and silence, which was drowned by the ceaseless clatter of many tongues.

"So you've come at last," she said, "I thought you had forgotten all about us. In your profession one is permitted to have a bad memory, isn't it so?"

"A bad memory is one which remembers what it should forget, not so much one which forgets what it should remember," Stein said. "Where is the lady I was to be asked to meet?"

"Ah, are you going to take my advice, then?"

"To fall in love with her?"

GREEN CHALK

"No, no. To let her fall in love with you."

"It comes to the same thing. If a woman makes up her mind that she wants a man she generally gets him," he said, admiring the delicate profile beside him.

To-night Grace wore a pale yellow dress almost the colour of her hair, cut very low on the shoulders, showing off their white roundness. As she turned towards him, he smelt the scent of the lilac she always used.

"And if two make up their minds about the same man, what then?" she asked.

"Then he chooses"

"The richest?"

"Not always."

"Very nearly always."

"Or goes to Salt Lake City."

"I have never known that happen."

"Nor I. He chooses the one he wants and the other declares that he is provincial, or that she hates baldness, or that his ears stick out, and people still go on saying that a woman can marry whomsoever she will."

"And now I must stand by the door and say my good-byes," Grace said, getting up.

"First you must do your duty," Stein said, "that pleasure must wait."

"My duty?"

"Introduce me to Miss Badminton-Dale, please."

"Of course, I had forgotten."

They made their way through the thinning

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crowd of gaily coloured dresses and black coats.

"That is her mother over there in pink satin and golden hair. She is very keen that you should paint her."

"I will leave it to her obviously competent maid," Stein said.

"She is talking to the Contessa. You know Giulia, of course," Grace remarked.

"Only slightly, but why, 'of course'?"

"She is famous for two things: she is a bridge player *par excellence*, and for the last twenty-five years she has been madly in love with her own husband."

"How long have they been married?"

"Twenty-five years."

"And he?"

"He has, what is technically called, a great respect for his wife and a *grande passion* for half the other women in Paris. They are, all the same, one of the happiest couples I know."

"Doesn't she mind, then?"

"She doesn't know."

"She is wise. Who is that," he asked, catching sight of a slim girl, dressed in white, sitting at one end of a pale blue brocade sofa.

"That's Claudia. Isn't she a darling? I'm afraid she'll be exactly like her mother some day."

"Her mouth is like the mouth in Rossetti's 'Day dreams,' and her eyes are rather wide apart. But I don't think she's like Mrs. Dale," he said, looking at the girl critically.

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A short man, who looked about forty and wore a single eye-glass, was leaning over the back of the sofa. He had a rather red face and was slightly bald ; when he laughed his monocle fell out.

" And the man, who is he ? " Stein asked.

" I forget his name."

They made their way towards the sofa. As they reached it, the man stuck in his eye-glass and looked at them. Then he went to another part of the room.

" Mr. Stein," Grace explained to Claudia, " has come to be congratulated."

When she had left them, Stein sank down on the sofa beside the red-haired girl. His first sensation was one of wonder. Why did Grace Yorke allow hair like this in the room with her ?

As Claudia looked at Stein, a feeling of dissatisfaction came over her. She tried to analyse it, but its very unreasonableness made analysis impossible. He was still young, certainly good-looking and perfectly dressed. The mole on his cheek looked rather like the black velvet *mouche* her mother sometimes wore, but all the same she liked it, nor did she object to the white camelia in his button-hole.

She was angry with herself for being, for no apparent reason, disappointed with the man who had painted the most wonderful picture she had ever seen.

" What are you thinking about ? " he demanded, smiling. " I've asked you three questions, and

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made two remarks besides, and you haven't taken the slightest notice of any of them ! "

" I'm so sorry ! " she exclaimed, turning her eyes full upon him.

As she did so, the words " green chalk " came into his mind, but he couldn't connect them with anything.

" But I want to know what it was," he insisted. " Really I do. You looked so puzzled and disappointed. Had you imagined me different from what I am, or hadn't you thought about me at all ? Please be careful not to humble my pride."

" Oh, yes," Claudia said, blushing, " I had thought about you—a lot. You see, I simply loved your picture."

" And when you saw me you were disappointed. My vanity as an artist is flattered, but my vanity as a man is—well, simply crushed."

" But I never said I was disappointed," Claudia protested.

" All the same you looked it, Miss Badminton-Dale. Under the circumstances, I hope you will talk to me about my pictures and leave my personality severely alone."

" I've only seen one of your pictures," Claudia said, " and that seemed to me full of personality. It was the one at Georges Petit's, ' The Woman Who Might Have Been.' "

" And you liked it ? I'm very glad," he said, " perhaps some day "

" I simply adored it, but what were you going to say ' some day ' "

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"I'm afraid the length of our friendship—if I may use the word—would not warrant what I was going to say."

"Green Chalk!" Yes, he remembered now. Philip had asked for it the first time he had seen him, and he had said that it was for the eyes of his picture. Claudia Badminton-Dale had green eyes and her hair was deep red. Even her features were amazingly like those of the woman who appeared time after time in Philip's paintings. Stein could not understand it. Was it possible that the boy had had some sort of acquaintance with her, and was he, for some reason, concealing it? Stein did not think it likely and yet it seemed impossible that he should have painted her so often without having seen her. How would this strange coincidence affect himself? Already the few people who had seen Claudia had remarked on it. Had the girl noticed it herself? What would Philip say if he saw her?

"Are you a philanthropist, Miss Badminton-Dale?" Stein asked suddenly.

"Am I what?" she asked, surprised.

"Did you ever visit the poor when you were in London? Did you give them woollen mufflers and hot soup and good advice?"

"Never!" she assured him, laughing.

"You were quite right. If they have never worn woollen mufflers or tasted hot soup they do not want them; and as for good advice the more one has of it the less one wants it, whether one is rich or poor."

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He was almost satisfied that it was only coincidence, and it might even prove useful to him if he decided to carry out his intention of marrying his uncle's heiress. He looked at her critically and began weighing the pros and cons. Her money was, of course, the chief thing in her favour, on the other hand, she was uncommon—Stein would have preferred an insignificant wife.

"Now you are thinking!" Claudia laughed.

"Yes, I plead guilty, but I will be more frank than you were. I was wondering, my dear young lady, if you realize that your face appears in each of my pictures? Perhaps that is why they attract you?"

"My face!"

"Yes. If you will do me the honour of coming to my apartment, I will show you endless portraits of yourself."

"But—but you have never even seen me until to-night," she stammered.

"In the flesh, no," Stein said, "in spirit, I have known you all my life. Perhaps it is the memory of some past existence in which I saw a lot of you."

"Here comes mamma," Claudia said, getting up. Stein also rose.

"I am sorry about that. But I hope that this existence will be similar, at least in one respect, to the other one. Dare I hope that you wish it too?"

"Yes," Claudia said to the man who had painted the "Woman Who Might Have Been."

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER IV

HAVING decided that the desirability of possessing, to all intents and purposes, some two million pounds outweighed the undesirability of having an uncommon wife, Stein sat down and wrote to Grace Yorke :

“ Dear Lady of the Corn-coloured Hair,
Will you bring Miss Badminton-Dale to breakfast, tea or dinner any day this week which may happen to suit you. I love the sun’s rays best when the glow of fire is near them.

Your sincere friend,

GEORGE STEIN.”

In answer he received the following note :

“ My dear George Stein,
I will not because

I am,

Your very sincere friend,

GRACE YORKE.”

Two mornings after Lady Grace Yorke’s “crush,” Mrs. Badminton-Dale was surprised to see a letter from that lady brought to her with her coffee and rolls.

“ Dear Mrs. Badminton-Dale,” she read,

“ It was so charming of you to bring your little

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daughter last night. I always find children so delightfully refreshing. A young man who knew you when you were Claudia's age told me you were exactly like she is now, only of course you were always *blonde*.

What do you think of the latest engagement? Poor Charlie Burlington! Why will men nowadays always marry women of such unsuitable ages? She will verily bring his gray hair with sorrow to the grave. Lucile de Longueville isn't seventeen yet, I'm told. If her poor mother had been alive she would never have allowed it.

By the way, if our little Claudia were seventeen instead of fourteen, I should almost prophesy another betrothal! A certain eminent artist is perfectly infatuated with her. But, as the child is fourteen and not seventeen, the whole thing is simply told you *pour rire*.

With love to Claudia and kindest regards to yourself.

Yours very cordially,

GRACE YORKE."

By the same post she received an invitation to dinner.

"Dear Mrs. Badminton-Dale," it ran,

"It would give me great pleasure if you and Miss Dale would come to dinner next Monday, the 20th, at eight.

Yours sincerely,

GEORGE STEIN."

Mrs. Badminton-Dale was seriously alarmed.

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For the last ten years she had anticipated with dread the day when Claudia would no longer be a child, and she realized that that day was now dawning. What would happen next? She asked herself the question with her eyes on Grace Yorke's letter and George Stein's invitation. Claudia was growing up, and some day she would want to marry. If Halifax James had not made his godchild his heir, matters would have been different, in that case she would have found her daughter a husband as quickly as possible. As it was, the money was Claudia's, and on her marriage her mother would have no right to it.

"Marie!" she called.

"Madame?"

"Bring me a time-table."

"*Oui, madame.*"

The maid fetched the book and gave it to her mistress.

"The weather is getting so hot that I may decide to leave for Aix-les-Bains sooner than I intended. We shall probably start in a day or two. You will have everything ready, I hope."

"*Parfaitement*," Marie said.

Grace had written to Claudia at the same time that she had written to Claudia's mamma.

"My dearest little friend," she said,

"Write to me and tell me of all your joys and a few of your sorrows, but let the sorrows be really few. Other people's intrigues, other people's troubles and other people's children bore me—so would my own, if I had any."

GREEN CHALK

You looked so charmingly pretty last night, I must speak the truth at the risk of making you vain. All the same, dear, I am sorry you came. I asked you to meet the man who painted the picture you admired so much, without thinking that it might make you unhappy to know him. George Stein's pictures make one expect so much and in reality he is quite a commonplace person with a mole on his cheek—that is all! Like ninety-nine men out of a hundred he is thoroughly selfish and thoroughly unmoral. But *qu'est-ce que tu veux?* Of course, people are making a fuss of him because he is the fashion. I hope, dear little Claudia, that you weren't too dazzled by the painter's work to see the man in proper focus.

I write all this, *chérie*, because I am your friend and feel such interest in your happiness. I hope, as I said before, that you were not too disappointed, but I hope still more that you were just a little disappointed!

Forgive me for talking such nonsense and
Believe that I am your affectionate friend,

GRACE.

I want you to call me 'Grace' and not bother about the other part."

The adverse criticism of a third person, especially if the judgment is inconsistent, has often the effect of removing rather than strengthening an unfavourable impression. In Claudia's case, the unfavourable impression made by Stein no

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longer existed ; and, thinking about it afterwards, she decided that she must have been to blame. As she read Grace Yorke's letter, she felt angry with her friend for trying to influence her against the man whose genius had opened to her senses a whole world of new perception, appreciation and understanding. His work had convinced her that to create the beautiful was the highest calling a man could follow. And her vanity as well as her senses had been gratified : the artist had told her that her face, conceived in his mind years before his eyes had actually seen it, appeared in each of his pictures. Why had Grace Yorke written to her like this ? She remembered that Grace had once spoken of George Stein as " a great dear " and now he was " a commonplace person with a mole on his cheek " " thoroughly selfish and thoroughly unmoral." The scent of lilac, which hung about the thin, pink paper, brought the image of Grace Yorke vividly before Claudia's mind—beautifully artificial, gracefully cat-like, insincerely kind. How had she been so easily and completely deceived by her ?

Two days later, on the morning of her departure for Aix-les-Bains, Claudia received another letter and a flat parcel wrapped in brown paper. She opened the letter first and found that George Stein's signature was at the end of it. She read it eagerly.

" Dear Miss Badminton-Dale,

I have had the luck I deserve, that is to say,

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none at all. Your mother tells me you start for the north of Scotland to-morrow, and so she cannot bring you to dinner with me as I begged her to do. I am very disappointed.

I am sending you a sketch, which I much hope you will accept and like.

We may meet in Scotland, as I hope to go there early in September, with a view to killing as many feathered and antlered things as I can.

Wishing my unconscious model and inspiration a pleasant holiday,

I remain,

Very sincerely hers,

GEORGE STEIN."

To which Claudia replied :

" Dear Mr. Stein,

Thank you many times for the picture. I think the whole thing is wonderful and beautiful and perfect, and yet I have the want of modesty to add that I do see what you mean about the ' unconscious model ' !

Mother must have made a mistake or written remarkably badly ! We are just starting for Aix, not for the north of Scotland !

With many many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

CLAUDIA BADMINTON-DALE."

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER V

SUZANNE was a model. Suzanne was also famous. She owed her reputation to the pinkness of her heels and to the whiteness of her skin. If she had vices, they were never mentioned, perhaps never even noticed. In the quarter in which Suzanne lived, people were as slow to see the mote in their brother's eyes as they were to perceive the beam in their own, which is the same as saying that they did not notice it at all.

Her mother had been a pickpocket and, in her own way, a genius. For twenty years a female figure, clad in a bulky brown cloak, had been a familiar object in such large shops as the Louvre and Bon Marché ; in churches when there was a crowded service going on ; on busy pavements ; and in picture galleries. She was generally more rotund on leaving than on arriving at the scenes of her labour, for she was proficient in her art. On the days of great sales, she was known to bring back from the shops as many as twenty purses, many odds and ends besides, and always the inevitable umbrella. It was an unending source of annoyance to Suzanne's mother that it was against the laws of fashion to carry more than

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one umbrella, as they were easy to get ; but to be seen with more than one would have aroused suspicion.

One day she was arrested on leaving the Bon Marché. Some one conducted her very politely to a private room, and some one else requested, equally politely, that she should remove her cloak.

" *Quelle impertinence !* " exclaimed Suzanne's mother.

" I regret it infinitely," the second polite man assured her. " Pray allow me to help you to unfasten it, madame."

In the enormous inside pockets were found various things : pieces of lace, gloves, two dozen handkerchiefs, a bottle of rose perfume.

" I have just bought them," she explained quickly, " I am much offended ! Let me go now. You are wasting my time ! "

She proceeded to re-button her cloak.

" Pardon me, madame," a third person said, unbuttoning it again, " of course, madame may have bought them and doubtless madame has a violent cold ? "

" I am wretchedly cold," she told him, sniffing.

" Does madame always carry three purses ? " he asked rather sadly, producing them from a newly discovered pocket.

" Always ! " said Suzanne's mother. " One is for copper, one for silver, and one for gold."

" Four, five, six," said the man, and brought them out one by one.

Two years later Suzanne's mother came out of

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prison, but her nerve was gone. It was not the hardships of prison that had affected her, but the disgrace. Her outlook upon life was darkened. Her pessimism grew into melancholy madness, and she ended by drowning herself in the Seine.

In early life she had made what she herself considered a *mésalliance*. José was only a Jewish beggar of Spain, who, though he had two legs, found it more profitable to sit in the rue Val de Grace—where it makes a right angle with the Boulevard S. Michel—with one tucked under him, while the other, accompanied by an empty trouser, was pathetically stretched out before him. José died before his wife. The sole offspring of this alliance was Suzanne. She had inherited from her mother her name, her clear, pallid skin and her expressive mouth. From her father's race she had received her lustrous dark eyes and an idle disposition.

It was Saturday night, the same night on which Stein first met Claudia. It is on this night above all others that the inhabitants of the Latin Quarter make merry, and Suzanne was no exception to the rule. She was wearing her Saturday evening clothes, a short dark blue serge petticoat and a red shawl, her dark hair was covered only by a wide scarlet ribbon. A string of bright blue china beads was clasped round her bare throat.

Her companion was tall and dark, and looked as if he came from somewhere south of Russia. He carried under one arm a fiddle, which was blackened through long use, and under the other

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a cat, once white, but now as black as the fiddle, through long residence in towns. His name, by which he was never known, was Gummution ; his friends, and they were few in number, called him Gummy. His cat was called La Neige, so named at a very early age, at which time it had been more appropriate than now.

Gummy adored Suzanne with a dog-like devotion. La Neige hated her with a jealous hatred, which animals and children alone understand. Only the fiddle was indifferent. Gummy had never once in all his life told Suzanne that he loved her, never so much as hinted at it. La Neige also kept her opinion to herself, she was woman enough to know the folly of unhidden jealousy. All this made no difference at all to Suzanne. She was perfectly aware of both their feelings, and was as indifferent to Gummy's love as she was to the hatred of La Neige.

They crossed the Boulevard Raspail and walked along Montparnasse. They stopped outside a *café* and went in. Some faces were familiar to Suzanne and Gummy, others were singularly out of place, Americans and English, would-be spectators of the *Vie de Bohême*. At some tables men were playing cards, others sipped coffee or something stronger, most smoked. A red-coated band played "Sole Mio," while a girl, wearing a black dress which reached only from her breast to her knees, was dancing on a table. Her face was almost repulsive in its ugliness, but the grace of every movement was indescribable. Two cherries

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growing on the same stalk hung round each of her ears and one dangled from her large mouth.

"Vanda is looking uglier than ever to-night," Suzanne said, when she and Gummy had found a table, "If I had a face like that I'd get under the table, not on it."

A waiter brought them coffee and cigarettes. Suzanne lighted one slowly and blew out the match. She drew long puffs of smoke and inhaled it with her head thrown back, conscious of the fact that Gummy's were not the only eyes fixed on her.

Gummy sat motionless, watching Suzanne, his eyes feasting on her upturned face. An almost irresistible desire to tell her of his great love had taken possession of him. Suddenly the music stopped and Vanda was on the floor again. There is no word to describe how she got there, to say that it was like the alighting of a butterfly on a flower would give an impression of too much heaviness.

There was much clapping of hands, while the dancer's ugly face smiled pleasantly at her admirers.

"What people see in her . . . !" Suzanne exclaimed. "And look at her mouth! It is eighteen *centimètres* long, I should say. And her hair! What people can find to admire in red hair, *Mon Dieu!* For weeks I have been sitting for an English artist in a studio in the Impasse du Maine, who will paint nothing but red hair. He says that he is English, though he speaks French

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to perfection and has a French name. I only sit for the figure there, which is an insult to my face, isn't it, Gummy ? "

" Indeed it is. Why do you do it ? You should go elsewhere," he answered.

" I have my reasons," she said, and paused. " Gummy, I am in love."

He started so violently at her words that the cat, who had been asleep on his shoulder, awoke and slipped on to his knees.

" Oh ! " he gasped, " with the artist ? "

" *Au nom de Dieu*, no ! " she laughed.

" Ah, with whom then ? "

Gummy held his breath. The suspense was almost more than he could bear. It seemed to him half a life-time before Suzanne answered : " With one who is also a foreigner."

Suddenly hope awoke within him. Was it possible ?

" Will you marry him ? " he asked.

" He has never asked me to," Suzanne said.

" Oh, Suzanne, Suzanne ! My little beautiful one, is it me you love ? *Chérie*, I am not worthy of so much happiness ! "

He closed his eyes to shut out the scene before him ; he felt he must cry aloud in his joy. Then through the noise of music and voices a sound of laughter came to him. He opened his eyes and saw Suzanne lying back in her chair, rocking with merriment.

" But you are *bête* ! " she said, when she could control her voice. " The one I love is English,

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too. His name is George—George Stein. He also is an artist, though I have never seen him make a stroke with the brush. He comes often to the studio in the Impasse du Maine and talks to me while I sit for the other man. It is for that I go there, my poor Gummy! For some reason I love that Englishman as I have never loved any one else."

Gummy stroked La Neige convulsively.

"And he, does he love you too? Of course he does, who could do otherwise than love you, *ma belle*."

"He told me many times that I was beautiful, that it was a sin that I should ever wear clothes, and . . . Oh, Gummy, it is from his kisses that I know he loves me!"

She sipped her coffee, which had grown cold.

"Give me another cigarette, little Gummy, and light it for me."

As he struck the match and held it to her cigarette, he said: "I am afraid, Suzanne, of these English messieurs. If he does you any harm, I will kill him!"

"But you talk foolishly," she cried, in anger, "I know he is good, my Englishman."

"I am sorry," Gummy said, "you may be right—I hope you are. One day I shall ask your pardon if I am wrong. In the meantime I do not take back what I said."

"I hate your serious talk," she said crossly. "Gummy," she went on, laying her hand on his, "tell me, have you ever had a pain somewhere inside you, when you see some one

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much? It is a lovely electric feeling, not at all like the toothache."

"Yes," he said, "I think I know what you mean."

"Dear Gummy," she said, "now you are reasonable again. As a reward, I will tell you what he is like, my Englishman."

"Yes," Gummy said, "please tell me what he is like."

Suzanne leant forward with her elbows on the table, gazing through her half-closed lids at the gay crowd before her.

"He is tall," she said, "he has dark hair and a complexion as smooth and white as a girl's. And, Gummy, on his cheek there is a little round black mole—but it is *épatante*, the little mole! It is late now, shall we go home? See, that odious Vanda is going to sing now."

They left the *café* together and retraced their steps along the Boulevard Raspail. Gummy took Suzanne back to the house by the river where she lived and bade her good-night.

She had opened the door and was standing on the step when a taxi passed. The light of a street lamp fell on the face of the man inside. Suzanne caught Gummy's arm.

"Did you see him?" she asked. "That was my Englishman. It was George! What do you think, Gummy—is he not perfect?"

"Yes," said Gummy.

She closed the door, calling good-night over her shoulder, and left him outside. La Neige under

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one arm, his violin under the other, he went home along the river side, looking at the rows of lights reflected in the water. Perhaps he wished himself below them, but that would have meant that La Neige would be left alone, and so he went home, through many winding streets and crooked alleys. He lived up six flights of stairs under the roof; and, when he had mounted, he gave La Neige all there was in the room to eat, tuned his violin and fed his own soul on the sweetest of sad music until it was time for most people to get up; then he went to bed.

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About four o'clock on the afternoon of a warm June day, Suzanne sat on the edge of the model-throne in Philip's studio. A cigarette hung between her lips, and the room smelt faintly of smoke, and of mignonette, from some flowers in a bowl on the table.

Philip was squeezing little snakes of red paint on to a palette, while the model yawned ostentatiously from time to time.

The studio was very hot and the long open window let in the rumble of Paris.

"I wonder," Suzanne said, brushing away some ash which had fallen on to her dress, "why you dislike my face so much?"

"Do I dislike your face?" Philip laughed.

"Surely," she said, "otherwise why do you never paint it?"

He paused, palette-knife in hand, to consider the matter.

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"I don't think you would understand, if I did try to tell you," he said presently.

"I can understand anything that is really complicated," she told him, laughing. "And that red hair, too! Why do you like it so much, monsieur?"

"Would you mind taking the position again?"

She threw away the end of her cigarette and got up.

"How hot it is!"

"Turn the body slightly to the left thank you, that is enough. Now raise your arm, please."

"Monsieur," Suzanne said, "you have not yet told me about the face with green eyes. There is a dancing girl at the Café Ramoneur in the Boulevard Montparnasse who has red hair. *Mon Dieu*, but she is ugly!"

Then Philip told her the story of his red-haired girl, much as he had told it to Stein five years before.

"It is very strange," Suzanne said slowly, "and the face seems to change, too. When I sat for you first, it looked so very lonely and so sad. Now it is not lonely at all; but still it is sad. I wonder why it is—perhaps some one has come into her life."

"By Jove, perhaps you're right! I believe the expression has changed. We'll have a look at some old sketches afterwards."

He looked at the half-finished picture he was painting. Here the girl, wearing the dress of a

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Columbine, was dancing upon a creature, half man, half monster ; only one leg was visible, and that was intentionally too long. She was incomplete, and out of proportion, dancing upon all that is ugly and sad and terrible in life.

"Come and look at this one I'm doing now," he cried excitedly. "What do you think of it? Surely there is no unhappiness there?"

Suzanne got off the platform and came and stood beside him

"No, there is neither loneliness nor sorrow there," she said. "The some one who has come into her life has banished sorrow as well as loneliness. I think he has promised to stay."

"No, no," Philip cried, "I can't, I won't believe it."

"*Hein?* Is Monsieur jealous? Does he not like to think of his beautiful red-haired, green eyed, alabaster-cheeked dream in the arms of another man?"

"You may be all wrong, Suzanne," he said, "the change may be caused by my own change of mood."

"Monsieur has longed for her passionately for years ; he would naturally hate to think of her as the possession of another man. I am sorry," she said, half laughing.

"She was mine, she has always been mine!" he cried.

"I was only guessing," Suzanne said. "Monsieur, you must not be so angry."

"I'm not angry," he said, throwing down his

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brushes and palette; "but I can't paint any more today. You may go home."

He went over to the fireplace and stood smoking a cigarette, with his back turned towards Suzanne. She was in the act of unfastening her wide gauze skirt, when she caught sight of a picture framed in black and half hidden by some canvases. Filled with curiosity to look at it, and see how far she had been right in supposing that the expression on the face in Philip's pictures had altered, she walked across the room, the dancing shoes she was wearing as Columbine making no sound. It was the painting of a water nymph, which had been returned from some exhibition, with the number still pasted on the frame. Suzanne carried it to the window and studied it carefully.

Yes, though the lips smiled, the expression was strangely sad, even on the reflected face in the still water. Then her eyes travelled to the signature in the corner, and she gave a cry of horrified surprise.

"But the name! 'La Nymphe des Eaux' was painted by you, Monsieur Philip, not by George Stein. What does it mean?"

She looked at Philip and noticed that the colour had gone from his face, even his lips were white. He came and took the picture from her.

"That is not one of my pictures," he said, "Stein painted it."

"No, no!" the girl said emphatically. "I remember it all so well. I posed for it last autumn, and I remember even now how my back

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ached with bending forward for so long. Besides, no one but you could paint like that. The great sweeping strokes of the brush, yet detail everywhere ; the expression of the sad, red-haired girl ; the reflections—they are all yours. And then the large black name, George Stein ! ”

Philip put the picture back in its place in silence.

“ Please tell me what it means,” she entreated, “ I must know. Once I knew an art student who stole the half-finished painting by his master, completed it himself, signed it with his name and sent it to the Salon. He thought no one would recognize it, but they did and never spoke to him again. It was an infamous thing to do, to put his name to another man’s picture. I do not believe that George Stein did it—I will not believe it ! ”

“ Stein did paint that picture,” Philip said, doggedly.

“ I try to make myself believe it, I love him and our lips have met many times, and yet it is not possible that he should have painted something so exactly like your picture, nor do I think that any man could have copied your work so absolutely. That picture is the inspired work of the man who loves the red-haired woman. And yet I do not know what to believe,” she cried, throwing herself upon the couch, her pretty dress crushed under her, her face buried in the blue cushions. “ I do not know what to think ! Where is he now ? Why has he not been here all these days ? Is he found out—disgraced ? ”

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"I tell you he did paint that picture. He is not found out, because there is nothing to find out. He is holiday-making in the South."

"I know he did this thing!" Suzanne cried passionately. "Have I posed since I was six years old without knowing something about art? I do not mind his having done a vile thing, I do not want to know why you wish to deny it, what I fear is that he may be found out. The poor boy! I would give my life to shield him. I love him! I believe he loves me, for his lips when they found mine told me so."

"Be reasonable," Philip said, watching the heaving body in dismay. "Will nothing convince you that you are wholly mistaken?"

"Nothing! I am not wrong. Oh, God, if he is found out!"

"If you will not believe me, you and you alone will ruin George Stein. You will tell your dearest friend what you think you have discovered; to-morrow it will be all over the Quarter; next week the whole of Paris will know."

"You are unjust, unkind," she sobbed, rising and sitting on the edge of the couch. "I love him. Do you know what it means when—when a Frenchwoman loves with all the passion that is in her?" Then in a voice in which anger had given place to wonder she added: "Tell me why you let him do it?"

"You said you had no curiosity about that."

"It is true," she said, "that matters not at all."

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When Suzanne had gone, Philip wandered round and round the studio, looking for nothing in particular. It all seemed a hopeless muddle. Would the girl talk? What if she did? It would not be his fault. Did he hope she would? No, and yet——

Another thought came into his mind, driving away the others: Who was it that had sent the loneliness out of his red-haired girl's life, and the sorrow out of her eyes?

It was still light. Mechanically he took up his brushes and paints and set a fresh canvas on the easel. For half-an-hour or more he worked without knowing what he was painting, his brush passing backwards and forwards, unguided by his will.

When he stepped back, he saw the head of a pale-faced girl with red hair, deep green eyes as bright and hard as glass, and red lips parted in laughter. There was a string of green glass beads in the red-purple hair.

He ran towards it, and with his palette-knife cut it again and again, for the face in the picture was the face of a madwoman.

That night Gummy came to see Suzanne in the house by the water. He found her sitting by the open window, with hard, dry eyes.

Gummy set down *La Neige* and looked at Suzanne in silence.

"Why have you come?" she asked him, in a voice as hard as her eyes.

"I have come to see you, little one. But you

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are unkind. Why is your voice so hard? It hurts me—it is so hard and cold.”

“It is meant to hurt.”

“Has some one hurt you that you want to wound again?”

“No one. But your silly talk makes me tired.”

“Shall I go away at once?”

“If not sooner!” she screamed. “Go, go, go, you and your dirty cat. I never want to see you again, do you hear?”

“You are sure of that, Suzette?”

“I hate you with all my soul,” she said.

She darted at him and pushed him towards the door, then picking up La Neige she threw her after him.

When the door had shut behind them, she found a long, red scratch on her arm. She sank down beside the bed and wept until the morning began to break over Paris.

CHAPTER VI

THE women of Aix-les-Bains are, for the most part, of one type. They have creaseless vermilion lips laid thickly upon their pallid skins. Their hats are of vast dimensions, and placed upon undulations of hair, either golden or jet black, but never of a shade between. Their dresses are the exaggeration of the prevailing fashion.

Mrs. Badminton-Dale did not look out of place at Aix. Year by year she brightened the shade of her gowns, her hair, her lips ; it consoled her, in a measure, and helped her to forget that she was still a widow, still growing stouter, still growing older. Her past had been spent in trying to prevent these things from happening, and to her present self-imposed duties she had added the tasks of preventing Claudia from growing older and taking to herself a husband. It seemed to her that fate was against her. She was sitting on the terrace of her hotel thinking of this, when George Stein, from his bedroom window, caught sight of her.

He was not surprised to see her, it was the fact that she and her daughter were at Aix that had brought him there. When he had got Claudia's

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letter announcing their departure, he determined to follow them. A few days later he arrived at the Grand Hotel ; he would, he said to the manager, probably stay only one night. He asked for the list of visitors and found that Mrs. and Miss Badminton-Dale were staying at the *Splendide*. Next morning he told the manager that the level of the lake was too hot for him, and mounted the hill.

He watched Mrs. Badminton-Dale through the sun-blind, and blew the smoke of his cigarette towards her. He felt rather sorry for her—a woman fighting desperately against time and losing.

He saw her raise her *lorgnette*, seemingly looking at some one at the far end of the terrace. He wondered if at her mother's age Claudia, too, would be stout and painted. He searched for some likeness to her daughter, and fancied he detected a faint resemblance about the mouth and chin.

Then Claudia came in sight. She was wearing something short and white, covered with a great many little frills of lace. Her wonderful hair was partly hidden by a small, lace-befrilled hat. He listened to their voices—the mother's hard and shrill, the daughter's high and clear. When Claudia was forty, hers, too, would be hard and shrill. What did it matter ?

Mrs. Badminton-Dale got up, gathered together her book, her parasol of dainty cream lace, her fan and her pink muslin skirts, and disappeared

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round the corner of the hotel, leaving Claudia alone.

Stein left his room and entered the lift.

"Ground-floor," he said.

He saw Mrs. Badminton-Dale in the hall, and put the end of his cigarette into a pot of palms.

"How do you do?" he said, shaking hands.

"My dear Mr. Stein you here—of all people in the world!"

"I've just arrived. I hope you like Aix?"

"I adore it," she told him, "the colour of the lake, the mountains, the weather, the dresses, the music—everything is perfect."

"Are you going to make a long stay?" he asked.

"Unfortunately, no. Almost immediately we have to join some friends in Switzerland. It's too annoying."

"Very! And your visit to Scotland didn't come off either?"

"That again was too provoking," she grumbled.

"Is your daughter with you, or did she go north without you?" he asked.

"No, Claudia is here. She does not like the place as much as I do; beauty does not seem to appeal to her, I am sorry to say. That is another reason for our departure; the child is so self-willed! She would not rest until she was out of Paris and now she must be *en route* again."

He left her and went out on to the terrace.

Claudia was reading a book bound in red. He noticed that her shoes and stockings also were

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red—was it done purposely?—how had she found a shade of red that toned with her hair?

Stein's rubber-soled shoes made no noise on the paved terrace, and he was quite close to Claudia before she heard him and looked up.

"Oh!" Claudia exclaimed.

"You are surprised to see me," he said, smiling.

"A little," she confessed.

"I hope not unpleasantly?"

"No, I love surprises."

"How do you like Aix?" he asked.

"I find it quite adorable. I've never been here before."

"Are you to be here long?" he inquired, smiling.

"Oh, yes, a month at least, probably more."

Stein went on smiling.

"I want to thank you again for that . . . picture. I can never find an adequate adjective when I want to describe your work," she said.

"I'm glad you like it."

"Do tell me what it means. It is very stupid of me not to understand?"

"It is the portrait of a sensation," he told her, "a sensation that is somewhere between hope and realization. What are you reading? May I look?"

He took the book out of her hands.

"*The Light That Failed*? How do you like it?"

"It makes me want to see the picture of laughing melancholy. If you painted her would you make her laugh?"

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"To me melancholy does not suggest a woman or a man or a child. The most melancholy thing I ever have seen is a Parisian *café* at night-time. Every one is trying so hard to be happy. When happiness becomes an effort it is not happiness any longer, it is simply tragic, without the excuse for self-pity which makes tragedy almost enjoyable."

He took out his cigarette case.

"May I smoke?"

"Of course you may."

"And you?"

He held it out towards her.

"No, thanks," she said, "smoking isn't one of my accomplishments."

"Are men's bad habits considered accomplishments in women, just as what are called vices in women are men's ordinary amusements?" he asked, striking a match.

"I don't know," Claudia answered.

Marie came towards them.

"Madame wishes me to tell you that it is time to dress for dinner, mademoiselle," she said.

"Ah! so you are here," said a lazy voice beside Mrs. Badminton-Dale, as she and her daughter entered the doors of the "Villa des Fleurs."

"But how charming, *chérie*. Is this the little daughter? I had no idea she was such a big girl."

"I'm delighted to see you, Contessa. Yes, this is Claudia. I'm afraid she does look old for her age."

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The Contessa was a plump little woman who had neither beauty nor the energy to acquire it. She called every woman "*chérie*" and every man "*mon cher*," because it was less trouble than remembering their names.

"I'm all alone, as you see," she went on. "My poor Giovanni is kept in Paris by some business or other. He never will explain his business to me, thank goodness; he knows I would not understand it if he did. Shall we watch these people for a little before we go into the baccarat room? They interest me, these petits chevaux-players. One finds among them two types: the holiday-maker who is afraid to lose a few francs, but still more afraid to return home saying he has not gambled; and the old baccarat-player who, having pawned his last dress-suit cannot enter the other room. There is one over there, do you see him in his shiny black coat? He was once enormously rich. Ah! he is looking in our direction," the Contessa waved her fan, "but he will not recognize me, though I knew him and his brother well, at one time. His brother was one of the handsomest men I ever saw. Poor fellow, he died of the same disease that this one has."

"Is he ill?" Claudia asked.

"He has baccaritis. His brother shot himself at Monte Carlo two years ago, because he had no more money to lose and, consequently, nothing to live for."

"Let us go into the other room," Mrs. Radminton-Dale said, "this is a child's game."

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They pushed open the swinging doors.

"This is no place for old women and young children," the Italian said with a shrug. "The little one and I will walk in the garden while you enjoy yourself, madame. The people here do not interest me, one can almost smell their diamonds."

They left Mrs. Badminton-Dale and passed again into the outer hall. Stein, from a table in the centre of the room, watched them go out and followed them.

"Do you see that distinguished-looking woman in black just going into the room?" Stein heard her ask. "One is one of the lucky ones, but look, the expression on her face is the same as the rest. I believe she was a barmaid at Nice or somewhere at one time; and she will be a barmaid again, I have no doubt. Ah, good evening, Duchesse," she waved her fan to a little fat woman in yellow velvet. "Play? No, no, no! To-night I am going to be discreet."

They passed on into the garden and there Stein let himself overtake them.

"And here is our charming friend! How do you do, monsieur? Come and stroll with us in the beautiful garden."

"Why are you not playing to-night, Contessa?" Stein asked. "You make a mistake, I am sure. You are wearing opals and this is the thirteenth of the month."

"So it is. I had forgotten, and I am born in October, too. What a blessing you reminded me. I must go in for a few moments just for amusement.

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To me this play is only that, nothing more. But our pretty child here—what about her ? ”

“ Will you not show your confidence in me by leaving her in my charge ? ” Stein asked.

“ True, I might leave her with you, why not ? Only the very young and the very old may walk with impunity by night in an enchanted garden with an enchanting man. *Au revoir, mes enfants,*” she called over her shoulder as she disappeared into the Villa.

“ She is charming, our little Contessa,” Stein laughed, “ but she has her peculiarities : she is one of the most confirmed gamblers I know, and every night she swears that she will not touch a card, yet every night she plays for hours. I was at Dieppe with her last year.”

They wandered down a winding path, covered by overhanging branches hung with innumerable coloured lamps. In the distance they could hear voices and laughter, and from the open theatre came the strains of “ The Jewel Song,” from *Faust*. Somewhere behind the trees a golden rocket went skyward.

“ Oh, look ! ” Claudia exclaimed.

“ I can’t, I have no eyes for rockets.”

He caught Claudia’s hands in both of his and drew her to him. He heard her breathing quickly, and saw her eyes shining in the light of the lamps overhead. What strange eyes they were ! Women had loved him before, but never had he seen the same look in any eyes. He thought that the eyes of a snake would look like this, if by some

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miracle its cunning had been turned to innocence, and its venom had become love. To Claudia it seemed that they stood like this for a whole lifetime. She felt his breath on her face and his lips against her lips.

Gradually she became conscious of his voice ; perhaps he had been speaking a long time.

" and for years I have held you like this in spirit. Can you doubt it ? You are the only woman I have ever painted because you are the only woman I have ever seen. I knew that the others were there : I heard them talk, I danced with them, I sat by them at dinner—but, to me, they simply didn't matter. For me they simply were not. And now the world has changed, because you are no longer made of paint and canvas, but of ivory and rubies and emeralds and garnets, sprinkled with the dust of sapphires."

She felt his kisses raining on her mouth, but her own lips never moved. Had they really been turned into rubies ? Had they always been rubies ? Would they always be

Mrs. Badminton-Dale was very pleased—to-night she was having a run of luck. It seemed that she could not lose ; Claudia was in the garden with the garrulous Contessa ; Stein had apparently not come to the Villa that night ; and a red-faced man, wearing a monocle, was leaning over the back of her chair giving her his undivided attention. She spoke from time to time to him with the self-confidence of a woman whose hair is perfectly arranged, and whose gown

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is obviously as expensive as any other in the room. She almost fancied she would change her plans again and stay a little longer at Aix.

She gathered in her winnings carelessly, as one to whom winning and losing are of equally small importance.

"I have had enough," she said, getting up. "Let us go and look for my little Claudia, she is somewhere in the garden."

Turning round, she caught sight of the Contessa at a table at the other side of the hall.

"One moment," she said, "I must say a few words to a friend. I will meet you at the door."

She hurried across the room.

"Where is Claudia?" she asked, tapping the Italian's shoulder.

"*Qu'est-ce qu'il y a ?*" Giulia asked, in her slow voice.

"Claudia—where have you left her?" Mrs. Badminton-Dale demanded.

"Ah; the child. She is in good company, fear not, *chérie*. I left her in the beautiful garden with the charming monsieur—what do you call him? The artist who is so fashionable just now. It is well, the little daughter did not seem to mind at all."

"You left her with that man?" Mrs. Badminton-Dale cried, turning livid with anger.

"But he is delightful, the young artist. Your Claudia is a little English girl, and in your country such things are always done. Besides she is only fourteen, had she been *débutante* I should have

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been more discreet. But see, we are making too much noise ! ”

With a helpless gesture, Mrs. Badminton-Dale left her. She glanced round, but her friend was nowhere to be seen, nor had she time to look for him. She crossed the outer hall and found the garden. There they were, coming towards her.

“ Claudia ! What does this behaviour mean ? ” she demanded, almost choking.

“ It means,” Stein said, “ that your daughter has promised to be my wife.”

“ But it is not possible ! She is only a child. Are you mad ? ” She turned angrily to Claudia.

The girl did not answer ; she had in her eyes the expression of one who sees nothing real and everything that is unreal.

“ Answer me ! ” her mother commanded.

The dreamy expression left Claudia’s eyes and gave place to one of fear. Stein wondered what she would say. Had her mother any influence over her ? There had been no doubt in his mind as to what Claudia’s answer to his proposal would be, but he had left Mrs. Badminton-Dale out of account. There was a short silence before the girl spoke.

“ Yes, it is perfectly true, mother.”

“ It is ridiculous,” Mrs. Badminton-Dale cried in desperation, “ why, the child is not fifteen yet ! ”

A few people turned round and regarded them, smiling. Stein felt that he was looking ridiculous. How vulgar this woman was ! Why should she make a scene here, of all places ? He looked at

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Claudia, and fancied he saw a new look of determination about the tightly-closed lips. Had his personality already had its effect upon her? Yes, already he had changed her, he, George Stein, who had deceived the world, and by his marriage with Halifax James's heir would cheat fate. If only these people would not stare so.

"You must come away with me at once. To-morrow we leave Aix."

As Mrs. Badminton-Dale turned, she caught sight of the red-faced man standing at a few yards distance, holding his monocle to his eye.

"It is so late," she murmured in confusion, "we really must be getting back. I shall see you to-morrow morning, Mr. Stein, if you will come to my sitting room. Good night, *mon ami*," she called to the other man, who dropped his eyeglass and bowed stiffly.

"Be patient," Stein whispered to Claudia, "very soon no one will have the right to take you from me."

They were out of sight at last. Stein went into the baccarat room.

That night he quite enjoyed losing some two thousand francs; never again would the scarceness of money trouble him.

In silence Mrs. Badminton-Dale and Claudia found their car. As it started, the elder woman gripped the girl's wrist.

"How dare you do this thing?" she demanded hoarsely.

Claudia sat erect and said nothing.

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"Don't sulk! You fiend, have you no consideration for anybody? What have I done to you that you should so absolutely ignore my wishes? Answer me!" she commanded, pinching the arm still harder, until her pointed nails broke the skin.

With closed eyes and tightly pressed lips, Claudia felt the pain exquisite; she almost wished it had been a hundred times what it was—she was suffering it for the sake of the man who had painted as no other artist could paint, for the sake of her promised husband.

"It is for your own good that I ask—that I order you to give him up. I am older than you are and I know the world and also George Stein. If you knew George Stein and the world as I do, you would not hesitate to part with him for ever. He is"

Claudia bent forward quickly and her mother felt a sharp pain in the shoulder. Deliberately the girl pressed her teeth into the woman's flesh.

Mrs. Badminton-Dale screamed. A wild terror seized her. Had the girl gone mad? What if she murdered her? In her imagination, she felt two slim hands gripping her throat. She tried to call again for help, but her mouth felt dry and no words came.

All oblivious, the chauffeur guided the car up the hill towards the hotel.

Claudia's jaw relaxed and she sat up panting, while her mother cowered and whimpered in a corner of the car.

GREEN CHALK

" Oh, my God ! " Mrs. Badminton-Dale repeated again and again.

The car drew up outside the door of the hotel. Mrs. Badminton-Dale pulled her opera-cloak tightly round her shoulders and got out. Claudia followed her, a small trickle of blood from her wrist running down the palm of her hand.

Mrs. Badminton-Dale stumbled along the brightly lighted corridor and fumblingly opened the door of her room. Marie, heavy-eyed and yawning, was brushing her mistress' second-best chignon. She looked without comment at the dishevelled figure in the doorway, and went on brushing the peroxide object in her hand.

Everything in the room seemed to Mrs. Badminton-Dale unreal. The heavy scent of flowers and bath-salts met her like a suffocating vapour ; the tortoise-shell brushes and gold boxes, the bottles and everything on the table seemed to assume enormous proportions ; the gowns in the open wardrobe had strange, unearthly bodies in them. She thought the maid was holding a newly-born child and beating it with a brush.

" Marie ! Marie ! "

" Madame ? " said Marie, laying down the hair.

" Undress me quickly. Oh, my God ! " she cried, sinking upon the bed.

" *C'est entendu, madame.* "

Claudia lay in bed and dreamed that she was made of gold, and some man, whose face she could not see because her eyes were sightless emeralds, melted her down and coined her into sovereigns.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. BADMINTON-DALE awoke, with the feeling that her rest had been disturbed by bad dreams. She lay on her back, gazing up at the ceiling, the bedclothes tucked close to her chin.

" Marie ! " she called.

" Madame ? " came from the next room.

" Please order my breakfast."

The maid did as she was told and then drew up the blinds.

It was a perfect day. Sitting up in bed, Mrs. Badminton-Dale could see the Lac du Bourget sparkling in the sunlight, with Hautecombe to the right and the blue mountains of Switzerland to the left. As she lifted her arm to adjust her boudoir-cap, she felt a sharp pain. Then she remembered the events of the previous night and realized that her sensation of unrest was not due to bad dreams.

" Marie ! "

" Madame ? "

" Is Miss Claudia awake yet ? "

" Yes, madame, mademoiselle is having her coffee on the balcony."

" Oh ! "

GREEN CHALK

"Does madame wish to speak with mademoiselle?"

"No, no. Have they brought my breakfast?"

"I hear the waiter putting it in the sitting-room, madame," Marie answered, arranging the various objects on the toilet table.

"Bring it to me in here, I am too tired this morning to get up so early." She drew her nightdress close about her neck, hoping that the maid might not have noticed the mark on her shoulder. Marie helped her on with her wrapper, and placed the tray in front of her mistress.

"Take away the butter," Mrs. Badminton-Dale grumbled. "I have told you often that I will not have it brought to me. You know that my frocks are all getting tighter."

As she sipped her *café au lait* and nibbled the crisp roll, Mrs. Badminton-Dale realized that the fear of having a married daughter was now insignificant compared with the fear of living alone with Claudia. It was not fear, it was absolute terror. As she remembered the feeling of the small, sharp teeth pressed into her flesh, a cold perspiration broke out on her forehead and her knees trembled until her coffee splashed out of the cup into the saucer and on to the white cloth, which covered the tray. It had been the bite of an infuriated animal, inflicted not in uncontrollable passion, but in passion that the animal had no desire to control. And she had known Claudia for years, had lived with her for months at a time and thought her meek, simple,

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childish. Let her marry George Stein! Let her marry anybody provided she did it at once. What if Stein saw her as she had seen her the night before? He would go away, and leave Claudia and her millions with her mother till the end of life. Mrs. Badminton-Dale's teeth chattered. Till the end of life! How long would her life be under the circumstances? Oh, God, to be murdered in cold blood by your own daughter!

There was a knock at the door.

"Marie! Marie! See who that is and tell her not to come in."

"It is mademoiselle, madame."

"Tell her I am ill. She must not come in."

"I am sorry you are ill," Claudia said, in a perfectly composed voice. She was standing in the doorway, screened from her mother by Marie.

"Go away! Go away!"

"Are you going to get up or are you too ill for that? Mr. Stein asked me to find out at what time you would see him."

"Tell him I shall be ready in two hours. Go away now, Claudia." Marie closed the door and Mrs. Badminton-Dale heard the retreating footsteps with relief.

"Dress me quickly, Marie!"

"How will madame take her bath?"

"As usual, only be a little quick."

What if the true Claudia showed herself to George Stein during these two hours? Even sitting in the warm, scented bath Mrs. Badminton-

GREEN CHALK

Dale felt cold with fear. For the next couple of hours she gave herself over to Marie and to thoughts petrifying in their fearfulness. As the toilet advanced, the terror grew: as Marie's hands massaged her neck, she fancied she felt them tighten about her throat; for the first time in her career as lady's maid Marie let the nail scissors slip and stab her mistress's toe; the curling tongs seemed to burn her scalp, and in the expression on the woman's face in the mirror she seemed to detect a look of malice. Were they in league against her?

"How pale I am to-day! Marie, put it on thicker about the cheek bones," she cried. "I will wear a pink gown, it will give me colour." She chose a dress of cerise made of soft charmeuse, and on to her hair the maid pinned an ecru hat, surmounted by an artificial bird composed of peacock feathers and swan's-down, tinted pink.

"I will wear my pink pearl earrings you're hurting me! Don't go on screwing them tighter."

"I regret infinitely, madame."

There was a knock at the door of the adjoining room.

"Go and see who it is. If it is Mr. Stein, ask him to wait, I shall be there immediately."

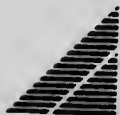
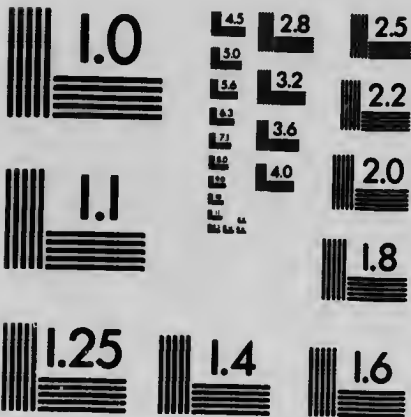
"It is Monsieur Stein, madame; he begs you not to hurry."

"A handkerchief, quick! Scent it with *maï-maison*. Am I ready?"



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"Madame is perfection."

She went into the next room. Stein was standing by the window, a study in cool whiteness, which had the effect of emphasizing the round, black mole on his cheek.

They shook hands, with much cordiality on her part and a little on his, and sat down.

"You have come to speak about Claudia, *bien entendu*," Mrs. Badminton-Dale said, smiling. Stein bowed.

"My one desire in life is that the child should be happy," her mother told him.

He murmured, "Of course."

"Since the day of her birth I have given her my undivided attention and love. She did not even have to share it with a father, Mr. Stein—my poor Anthony died a month before she was born. You will understand, I am sure, that I cannot contemplate parting with her without a pang."

Her fingers pulled convulsively at some lace on her gown. Stein watched her in amazement; he had expected her mood to be quite different from this.

"I am afraid the thought of being separated must be very painful to you both," he said.

"You misunderstand me. If this thing is going to be for Claudia's happiness, it is for mine, too. As I said before, her welfare and happiness are my only care, Mr. Stein. Do you wonder? She is so sweet and gentle and good. I cannot tell you what a treasure you have chosen. She

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will indeed be a crown unto her husband, as—as they say."

He felt as if a clever salesman were pressing indifferent goods on him. He could not understand this total change in Mrs. Badminton-Dale's attitude towards his proposed marriage.

"I feel I can trust her to you," the lady went on, "with far more peace of mind than I could to any other man I know. You will complete and beautify each other's lives; you will . . ."

She broke off to pass her scented handkerchief very carefully across her eyes. They both got up.

"I won't keep you now," she said in a voice that was still trembling, "go and find my darling child."

"It is very kind of you to say all this," he said, and left her.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Badminton-Dale dabbed a little more white and pink upon her face and regarded herself in the long mirror. She was forty-three and stout, but she saw no flaw in the rose-gowned, feathered reflection.

"I have ordered *déjeuner* for two in my sitting-room," she said to Marie; "take this note to No. 313, and wait for an answer."

"Yes, madame."

In five minutes she returned with her mistress' note in her hand.

"The Boots tells me that monsieur left Aix this morning, madame," she said.

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GREEN CHALK

They were married in the little English Church at Aix one afternoon in early July. There was nothing particularly notable about the wedding, apart from the fact that the bride wore a motor bonnet and the bride's mother the happiest of smiles.

They left the church to the strains of *Lohengrin*, and entered their car to the accompaniment of the "Valse triste," played by a strolling violinist who, with his cat, had taken his stand in the road outside.

CHAPTER VIII

PHILIP had not left Paris during the heat of summer. It was now September, and with it had come rain and cold winds, which swept over the whole of France, driving the Parisians back from spas and sea shores, to seek the shelter of their own houses.

Two months had passed since Suzanne had guessed at Philip's compact with George Stein. The day after her discovery, she did not appear at the appointed time. Philip waited for an hour and then set out to seek another model. He found a girl who was by profession a dancer. The proprietor of the *café* where she was engaged had been so satisfied with her performance that he fell in love with her and doubled her salary. His wife objected to his behaviour: she could have overlooked his appreciation of art—even his appreciation of the *artiste*—but not his disregard for economy.

"It is ridiculous," she had said, "her former wages were more than sufficient."

"The money is mine and I will spend it as I like," he had answered. "Forget not that thou didst come to me without a *dot*."

"I forget nothing, and because of that thou art no poor man. My memory and my economy

GREEN CHALK

have made thee what thou art." A scene had ensued.

Next day the dancing girl found herself out of work. Her name was Vanda.

When Suzanne came back to the studio, she seemed surprised to find the other girl in her place.

"What are you doing here?"

"Guess!" said Vanda.

"Send her away!" Suzanne cried, turning to Philip.

"Why did you not come here six weeks ago?" he asked.

"I was ill."

"She's lying," Vanda said. "I saw her myself." She looked at Suzanne. "You did not seem very ill that night at the Rat Mort."

"Send her away!" Suzanne repeated. "I tell you I was very ill of a fever, Monsieur Philip."

"Why did you not let me know?"

"I cannot write, monsieur. I am only a poor girl."

"I'm afraid you will have to go away. Perhaps next week if you come back"

"Look at that face! How can you endure to paint such a thing? Mine was not good enough for you, but this is. It is an insult. Where is your green-eyed woman?"

"What is the matter with my face?" put in the model.

"Only everything!" Suzanne said.

Philip opened the door and waited for the girl

GREEN CHALK

to go out. She cast a scornful glance at the usurper on the model-throne and went down the stairs.

In the yard she met the concierge.

"That red-haired cat has taken my place," Suzanne said, in passing.

"And with such a face! Come into my room and wait. This weather is not fit for a dog to be about in."

"They are right when they say I am ugly," Vanda said, standing before the studio mirror.

"No," Philip said, "I don't think so. It is a mistake to judge a woman's beauty by her face alone. Is the figure nothing? Are the movements nothing?"

"They are nothing because they are considered so little. It is not what is that matters, but what is thought to be. If I could dance through life, people would love me. I cannot dance along the streets. See! I will cover my face with a shawl in case they mock at me when I pass."

She wound it round her head, so that only the eyes were uncovered, and walked slowly down the stairs and out into the darkening world. Philip gathered together his paints and brushes, and put them away in their place. He lifted the canvas off the easel and set it with its face to the wall. How he hated painting now! For the last six weeks he had tried to forget his pale visionary companion of the past thirteen years, yet he could not. The mad face, with its laughing lips and grass-green eyes, haunted him. He dared

GREEN CHALK

not paint her again. He chose Vanda as his model, because in the very ugliness of her face he felt safety. There was nothing there to remind him of the delicate white skin, the curved scarlet lips, the sad green eyes. He was glad her hair was red—in no respect did it recall the wonderful mass of purple shaded threads.

What would Stein say when he returned? Philip felt sure he would object. He would argue that it was the strange red-haired girl that had won the painter his popularity, probably he would insist upon her reappearance in his pictures. What then? What if the face were always the face of a madwoman? The world would probably call it clever and pat George Stein on the back. Philip felt that it would kill him to look again at the mad, laughing face. What would Stein care if his soul did die, so long as his body lived on to produce picture after picture to strengthen his growing fame and popularity? He hated Stein. He wondered now why he had ever felt a liking for him. Perhaps it was not liking at all, only an overwhelming sense of gratitude to the man who had given him the chance to gratify his boyish obsessions. And he had taken the chance and realized his desires and now

He turned round to strike a match upon the stove, and saw standing in the doorway the figure of a girl, whose pale face was framed in a mass of purple-red hair, whose eyes were sad and green and infinitely deep, whose curved lips were crimson and parted in a smile.

GREEN CHALK

"Thank God," he cried, "you're not mad!"

"I hope not," the girl said, in a clear, high, rather childish voice, coming forward with outstretched hand. "May I introduce myself? I'm Mr. Stein's wife, you are his secretary, Mr. Lenormand, aren't you?"

A boundless calm took possession of Philip. He realized that this was not a visionary being, but a woman made of flesh and blood, for whom he had been waiting for thirteen years. She was beautiful, as he had always known she would be: her hair was full of purple lights and tantalizing ripples; her eyes were green and deep; her lips crimson and curved; her voice high and clear and childish—and she was George Stein's wife.

"I beg your pardon," he said, shaking hands. "I don't know what I said, but I expect it wasn't very polite."

"You said 'Thank God, you're not mad!'" Claudia said, laughing. "Had you been asleep?"

"Yes, and I fancy I was still asleep when you came in."

"I am sorry I disturbed you. My husband told me to meet him here. I expected to find him when I arrived."

"He'll turn up all right, I expect. By the way, he never told me he'd got married."

"Didn't he? How exactly like him! We were married at Aix about a month ago and only got back yesterday."

"Isn't it getting frightfully dark?" Philip asked, "I'd better light the lamp."

GREEN CHALK

He struck a match and held it to the wick until it burnt, then he set the red shade on the lamp.

"I feel as if I were in a Holy of Holies," Claudia said, "here in the place he painted all these wonderful pictures."

"Yes," Philip said, "most of them were painted in this studio."

She thought the pictures wonderful! She had said it in the same clear voice he had heard so long ago. Philip felt no bitter disappointment, because she had married George Stein. It was a mere accident; she had seen the pictures—his pictures—and had loved them with a passion akin to the painter's passion, and had married the man she thought had painted them. It was all perfectly clear. Of course, she did not love George Stein. She had always been his—Philip's—and she was his now. Little by little she would realize that Stein never could have painted those pictures and then she would come to him—it was inevitable. He had no desire to tell her, he had waited for her for thirteen years, and he would wait a little longer. He was sorry for Stein—his fame, his popularity, his wife, all belonged to another man.

"May I walk about and look at everything?" Claudia asked.

"Of course, but isn't it rather dark? If you like, I'll bring you some of the old sketches done years ago and you can look at them under the lamp."

GREEN CHALK

"Will you? I'd love to see them. Do they show the first sparks of genius?"

"Yes, and the awakening of the soul, and all that sort of thing." He brought them to her in the same portfolio in which Stein had first seen them. He watched her turn them over carefully, almost reverently.

"They are extraordinary; how old was my husband when he did them?"

"Eight to eighteen or something like that."

"And always the same face!"

"Always your face."

"It is extraordinary, isn't it?" Claudia asked.

"He had never even seen me until two months ago."

She came to a sketch that seemed to puzzle her. She turned it round and looked at it from all angles.

"Is it a nightmare?" she laughed.

"I don't know. I should think it was an accident. It must be one of the very early ones."

"So it is! It's really rather realistic when one has once discovered what it's all about. I remember once seeing a poor little paper boy run down in Oxford Street. I shall never forget it. My governess and I were quite close to him, standing on the pavement. Poor little fellow! I'm afraid he was nearly, if not quite dead."

The ex-paper boy smiled.

"Don't you paint, Mr. Lenormand?"

"Not at all, I'm afraid."

GREEN CHALK

"I thought I saw a spot of colour on your sleeve."

"I've been tidying up a bit and got a bit messy, I expect."

"Oh, here you are at last!" Claudia said to Stein, who had just come in.

"Sorry to be late. Hullo, Lenormand! Been entertaining my wife?"

"Mr. Lenormand has been showing me all your old drawings."

"I see. It's rather late, Claudia, hadn't we better be getting back? The Contessa hates unpunctuality in other people."

"All right," his wife said, getting up. "Good-night, Mr. Lenormand, thanks so much for showing me the sketches."

He held the door open and watched the retreating figure on the stairs.

"I say," Stein said, pausing in the doorway, "that's Claudia Badminton-Dale. Do you remember about her? The girl who"

"Yes, I remember," Philip interrupted.

Stein laughed in a self-satisfied way and ran after Claudia. They passed the door of the concierge's lodge. In the shadow a woman was standing, putting up her umbrella. Neither noticed her, but she stood perfectly still and watched them get into their car.

.

"Come in!" Philip called. "Hullo, Suzanne! What is it now?"

Suzanne ran into the room and stood beside him, panting and bright-eyed.

GREEN CHALK

"Monsieur, who is she?"

"Who is who?" he asked carelessly, gathering together some sketches and putting them in the rather shabby portfolio.

"The woman with George Stein. They passed me just now. Tell me who she is—I must know! Is it"

"Mrs. Stein, of course," Philip said, looking half amused, half sympathetic.

"I know it, I knew it," she wailed, sinking on the chair and rocking herself to and fro. "My heart is dead, and you—you stand there smiling."

"I'm really very sorry for you, Suzanne," he said, gravely.

"You do not know what I am suffering. I saw her face clearly under a street lamp, and she reminded me of some one—I cannot tell who."

"Of the girl I always painted," Philip told her.

"Ah, that was it! How very strange, is it not?"

"I don't think so; you see she is the woman I always painted."

The model looked at him in amazement.

"She is your visionary woman come to earth; she is married to another man, and yet you tell it to me, smiling. Have you no hearts to love with, you English people?"

"What does it matter?"

"Oh, you bewilder me with your carelessness," the girl cried. "But I care! I will be revenged, too. Monsieur, to-night I write to her and tell her all I know."

GREEN CHALK

Philip looked at her with a little pitying smile.

"Suzanne," he said, "what a fool you are. Do you think he will love you more because you do this dishonourable thing?"

She regarded him for a moment in silence.

"Anyhow, he could not love me less."

"How do you know?"

"Has he not married her?"

"Men do not always marry the women they love."

"Ah!"

She bent across the back of the chair with her chin resting on her arms. Philip waited, wondering what effect his words had had on her. At last she turned to him.

"Perhaps you are right, I will wait. On Monday I come here to sit, is it not so?"

"If you like."

She got up and arranged her shawl.

"We shall see," she said. "If I can have his love I do not grudge her his name. Monsieur, the memory of his kisses gives me courage."

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER IX

"**Y**OU look *À* in that black dress, Claudia," her husband said, as the car carried them over the wet, shiny streets and across l'Etoile.

"Do I? I always think it is too obvious when a woman with red hair wears black. Help me with this button, dear," she said, holding out her gloved hand, and added: "What a surprising person Mr. Lenormand is."

"Surprising? Claudia, what a ridiculously small button."

"He was so different from what I expected. A man discovered in the slums of London hasn't generally a face like that. I've seldom seen more delicate features on anyone and never on a man. And his voice, George!"

"His mother was a Frenchwoman. I'm not sure I like him much."

"I did, quite. What does he do? I can't think why you have a secretary at all, especially if you do not like him," she said.

"He's all right and really very useful. He looks after all the business part of my work, sends the pictures to the right exhibitions and sees they're paid for when they're sold. I didn't

GREEN CHALK

imagine you'd like him, all the same ; he's rather an ass."

" Here we are," Claudia said, as the car slowed down and drew up at a house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

When they entered the Contessa's salon, they found that the other guests had arrived before them.

" I'm afraid we're late," Claudia said.

" The artistic temperament, my dear," her hostess assured her, " is an excuse for anything. My husband has insisted on taking you in. I pleaded for you, but in vain. He said brides must pay the penalty of being newly-married."

" Do you know Lady Grace Yorke ? " Giulia's husband asked Stein.

" Yes," Stein said, glancing towards the white-gowned figure. He noticed that the long blue pendants in her ears and some forget-me-nots fastened at her waist had the effect of making her eyes look more than unusually blue. So he was to take her in to dinner. Stein wondered what she would say *à propos* of his marriage. The idea of a *tête-à-tête* with her amused him.

" Then my duties as introducer are over, but they are as nothing compared with the task before us all. To be a good diner one must possess all the virtues and most talents. One must be hungry without being *avide*, one must be critical yet appreciative, one's fingers and teeth must be dexterous, one's tongue ambidextrous, but above all the artistic perception must not be lacking.

GREEN CHALK

By the way, Mr. Stein, do you know Madame de Berci? You will find her on your other side."

"I have the pleasure of knowing her slightly."

"She is delightful, and does not, I am sure, merit such a stern rebuke," the Count said, laughing. "I allow she reminds one of a cinematograph. One takes one seat, as it were, and the play begins. If one leaves at the right moment all is well, if not we find it beginning all over again, just as we saw it before. Her topics of conversation are limited."

"Giovanni, the dinner is served and Mrs. Stein is faint with hunger," his wife cried.

A minute later Grace Yorke's hand was on Stein's arm and they were following their chattering host.

"Well," Grace said, "so you have returned at last. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Getting married," Stein said.

"What, all the time? I'd no idea, Claudia . . ."

"Well?"

"Nothing. I wonder which side of the table we're on."

A footman pulled out a chair and Grace sat down.

"Anything been happening since I've been away?" Stein asked, watching her draw off her long gloves.

"Mademoiselle de Correa has eloped with a tenor from the Opera Comique—I forget his

GREEN CHALK

name. A fat man with a voice like an angel. She was rather a friend of yours at one time, wasn't she ? "

" Yes, I love everything that is beautiful."

" Do you judge her by her character or by her face ? "

" Her face. Do you not admire it ? "

" I have never seen it. Mademoiselle de Correa washes in private."

" Then you do not admire art ? "

" Pictures bore me."

" I'm sorry about that."

" No, my dear friend, you are not. You are tired of the people who admire your pictures and forget to admire you."

" You are in a bad temper to-night."

" I've been neglecting my pleasures all the day. Now I want to be amused, and you have said nothing to make me smile."

" Dear lady, when one loses one's heart one loses one's sense of humour."

" At last you make me laugh."

" I'm glad. Why did you refuse to dine with me ? "

" I did not wish to encourage you to lose your sense of humour."

" I thought Claudia was a friend of yours," he said, stooping to pick up her gloves, which had fallen on the floor.

" You are mistaken, I have a great admiration for Claudia."

" We have reached the entrée and you have not

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made a single remark to me, Mr. Stein," Madame de Berce complained.

"I was on the point of asking Lady Grace Yorke to define her idea of a friend," Stein told her. "Will you help me instead?"

"If you are a woman, go to a reception with your hat awry—the first woman who tells you of it is your friend. I did it once by mistake; I arrived, I talked with woman after woman, each said to me: 'but, *ma chère*, you look *ravissante* to-day.' I was delighted, what would you? one is but human after all, and I glanced about me until I saw myself in a mirror and found—I was *décoiffée*."

"Then the looking-glass is your only friend?"

"I fear so."

"You should be flattered, the popular woman is she who squints."

"And now you shall tell me what it feels like to have been married for three weeks," she said.

"Surely you know?"

"You are wrong, my husband died after a fortnight of my society. Do not ask me the recipe, my dear Mr. Stein, I will not tell it to you."

"The knowledge of it would be dangerous."

"Save me," Grace whispered, "my right-hand neighbour has asked my views on Humanitarianism, and I have none."

"In this case, the conversation might have been interesting."

"Tell me rather your views on mothers-in-law."

"In general or in particular?"

GREEN CHALK

" In particular. Generalization is safe, therefore dull."

" Mrs. Badminton-Dale is charming," he said.

" Does she return the affection ? "

" I flatter myself she does."

" You must be a united family. It is a mistake to have relations, either one's best story loses its point for want of a preface such as ' When my aunt was young ' or ' An uncle of mine ' or one is had up for defamation of character. How do you like my gown ? "

" It is exquisite," he assured her, glancing at the sheath-like garment intricate with lace and pearls.

" You are not looking at the one I am speaking about. Madame Rosenkranz who is sitting next to our host has the peculiarity of buying her dresses from an agent, it seems, and my maid the impertinence to sell my last year's gowns."

" I thought the Rosenkranzes were among the richest people in Europe."

" They are. We might all be rich if we wore second-hand clothes or"

" Or ? "

" I leave you to finish the sentence."

" Grace, you are unkind."

" And I believe you are in love after all," she said, sadly. " Are you ? "

" I don't know, when I find out I will tell you."

In the salon Claudia found Grace Yorke by her side.

" Your husband has been boring me all dinner

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time as only a man can bore a woman when he is in love with some one else," Grace said. "Come and tell me everything."

"It would take too long, I'm afraid. Please give me a less comprehensive task."

"Tell me about the *voyage de nocce*. Did you sit in a cornfield while Benedick painted your hair?"

"What a strange name Madame Stein's maid has," said Madame de Berce *sotto voce* to the Contessa, having overheard Lady Grace Yorke's last words.

"He hasn't painted at all since we were married," Claudia answered. "We went to Cadenabbia."

"Why did you not answer my letter, dear?" Grace asked. "Were you angry with me?"

"A little."

"I'm sorry," she said in all friendliness. "Your husband wanted to be good, and not clever enough to disguise the fact. I was with you when you fell in love with him, and I was afraid. Do you remember the afternoon at Georges Petit's?"

"Yes, I think that was the time; as soon as I saw that wonderful picture I loved the man who painted it."

Grace smiled.

"Am I forgiven for asking you to be careful?"

"I am so happy that I could forgive anything, and in this case there is nothing to forgive."

"Do you like Grace Yorke?" Claudia asked her husband as they drove home.

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" I don't know. Do you ? "

" Yes," she said, " I think I do—quite. She was talking to me after dinner about the day I first saw one of your pictures. She called it the day I fell in love with you. She was quite right."

He felt Claudia press his hand, but he did not answer the caress.

" I wish," he said, " that I had never painted a picture in my life."

" Never painted a picture in your life ! " she repeated in surprise.

" I should like to be unknown and unloved as an artist. I believe it is only the pictures you care about. They are only pieces of canvas smeared with paint, and yet I believe you value them a thousand times above the man who painted them. Do you ? " he demanded almost fiercely.

" I have never thought it possible," she said in a puzzled voice, " to disassociate you from the painter of these beautiful pictures. You are you and the pictures are you. You put so much of yourself into them. As you are, I adore you—you know it ; but I cannot imagine you without your art."

He disengaged his hand and leaned back against the cushion of the car.

" Are you angry ? " she asked sadly. " Oh, George, I wish I could make you understand."

" I wish I understood less clearly," he said.

" You don't, you don't," she cried bitterly. " It is simply because you are you that you cannot help painting as you do. It is the way you have

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chosen to express yourself. If you had liked, you could have chosen music instead—anything ; but I am glad painting is your art, for it taught me to know how I filled your life and thoughts long before you met me."

She stopped as the car drew up, and in silence they mounted to their apartment and entered the hall. At their bedroom door Claudia stood still, but Stein went on towards the library.

"Aren't you coming to bed ? " she asked.

"Not for some time ; go to bed quickly. Good night."

Claudia hesitated a moment and then opened the door.

"Good night," she said, without looking round.

Stein banged the door behind him and sank into a deep arm chair. So it was the painter she loved, he was nothing to her. The thought galled him. He got up and found a cigarette, then looked round the room for a match. Did he care for Claudia apart from the fact that through her he had cheated the ghost of Halifax James ? Where were those matches ? Did he care for Claudia ? Of course not, it was mere vanity that made her opinion matter to him. He liked to acknowledge his self-esteem, he had every reason to be proud. Probably no other man had done what he had done Who had hidden the matches under the newspaper ? He struck one and the head flew off. Confound these French matches ! He managed to light his cigarette at last and flung himself again into the arm-chair.

GREEN CHALK

As he inhaled the smoke a great desire took possession of him to see again and feel a woman who loved him for himself. Grace Yorke! She frankly admitted that the pictures bored her—it was his personality alone that she felt—and Suzanne! . . .

Was he destined to spend the best years of his life with a woman who loved Philip Lenormand?—because it came to that.

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER X

"**H**AVE you seen her again?" Suzanne asked, throwing her shawl upon the table.

"No," Philip answered, dabbing on a back ground with his thumb.

"And him?"

"No," he repeated.

"But you are strange!" she cried, watching him work. "She was yours and she is yours no longer, and yet you stand there painting her face, making her smile as she smiled at him when they passed me in the yard."

"She is mine as much as she ever was," Philip said quietly.

"I cannot bear to look at her face," the model exclaimed, turning away from him. "Monieur will you do something to please me?"

"If I can."

"Promise it! I want you to paint me; body, face, all. Just this once will you do it?"

"Why?"

"He must see that there are other beautiful faces besides hers. Will you do it?"

He could not resist the entreaty in her voice, and promised.

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She slipped off her plain brown dress and torn underclothes, and sitting on the edge of the model-throne drew off her stockings, throwing them together in a heap on the floor.

"Make it very beautiful," she begged. "See, I will lie like this in entreaty and abandonment."

She threw herself down on the hard boards.

"You cannot remain in such an uncomfortable position. I will arrange the rugs and cushions for you," Philip said.

"I will not have them. What does discomfort matter? A woman in her moment of desire and grief doesn't arrange for herself a bed."

"Have it as you will," he said, and fell to work.

For an hour the girl never moved.

"You may rest now," Philip told her.

"I will not, go on."

Another hour passed.

"It is midday, we must go out and have our *déjeuner*," he said, laying down his brushes.

"I cannot eat, go yourself, if you are hungry," she said, without moving. He went out, leaving her still in the same position.

When Stein came in five minutes later, he found only the girl who loved him for himself.

"Suzanne!" he said.

At the sound of his voice she started up.

"Why have you come here?" she asked piteously, "is it to torment me? Go away, you have made me suffer enough already."

"I came to speak to Lenormand and I have

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found you," he said; "do you expect me to go and look for him?"

"He has gone out to get some food. Don't touch me! George, don't!"

"What has happened to you, child? Last time I saw you . . ."

"Don't speak of that, I cannot bear it. I saw you two days ago with a . . ."

"With a cold woman who loves canvases," Stein said.

.

When Philip returned Stein was alone.

"Hullo!" Stein said.

"Oh! You're here, are you?" Philip remarked.

"Where's Suzanne?"

"How do I know? What's this?"

He was looking at the picture of Suzanne, which stood on the easel.

"A picture of Suzanne," Philip answered.

"What's happened to the red hair and green eyes?"

"I did that for a change," Philip said carelessly.

"You did, did you?"

Stein had a great wish to strike the boy. The knowledge of how much he hated him came to the man suddenly. He had regarded him as a tool, and as such had felt a satisfaction in his existence. Now, with his whole soul, he hated the boy who had done the thing that had made him famous. Philip Lenormand's personality

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expressed in art had made him a rich man, as the husband of Claudia Badminton-Dale.

"Do you mean to stick to this new style, may I ask?"

Philip shrugged his shoulders. He was sorry for Stein, but his ineffective anger amused him.

"Is it likely," Stein asked, "that a man would paint red hair for years and stop the day after he married a beautiful, red-haired woman? Have you found in this a means of giving me away?"

"I don't think the fact that you're not in love with your wife would be news to anyone," Philip said carelessly, with his thumb still smoothing a too rough place on the offending picture.

"That's not the point. People will talk—I don't want that. Was that yarn of yours true about the accident in London? I don't believe a word of it, do you hear?"

"It was perfectly true. I loved your wife and waited for her from that day. She saw my pictures, fell in love with them, and married the man she thought had painted them."

Stein struck the table with his fist.

"Do you mean to insinuate that my wife is in love with you? How dare you? You need not judge all women by the standard of your mother."

"My mother was the most perfect woman that ever lived," Philip said, angry in his turn.

"Your mother was my father's mistress," Stein said. "No, I didn't expect you to know. Did you think it was philanthropy that made me

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pick you out of the gutter and make you what you are? No, it was because I knew that you were the son of a woman who would have been a great artist if . . ."

"If your father had not ruined her, I suppose."

"Our father," Stein corrected.

"Our father," Philip repeated. "Oh, my God!"

.

There was the scent of flowers in the room, and by his side the low, caressing voice of a woman. They were sitting on the pale blue sofa where Claudia had sat the first time he had seen her, but Stein was not thinking of this. He leaned back and looked at the oval face framed in the pale gold hair, at the slender body in its clinging white gown, at the white, jewelled hand playing with the palm leaf that drooped above her head. She was beautiful, ethereal-looking, and she, too, loved him for himself.

"I could not have believed that one could feel almost happy between breakfast and tea," she said.

"Almost?"

"Yes, almost. If it were eight hours later I should be perfectly happy; but, as it is, it is only almost."

"I wonder why some hours are so much shorter than others?" Stein said. "I really ought to go."

"Don't go yet. I want you to talk to me."

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Yes, I wonder that, too, and many other things."

"For example . . . ?"

"Why you came here? The other night you . . . I don't know what you were, but you made me angry."

"I came here because I am unhappy."

"You and Claudia have had a quarrel, I suppose. My dear friend, you've come to the wrong person, I know nothing about peace-making, because I never quarrel. It's excellent for the digestion, but ruins one's complexion. Personally, I care more for my . . ."

"Don't laugh!" Stein cried. "Can't you see that I'm serious?"

"What's happened?" she asked, letting go the leaf and sitting forward with her hands clasped in front of her.

"I have realized that I have married a woman who loves an artist and doesn't know—doesn't want to know—the man the artist really is."

"So you've found that out?"

"Did you know?"

"Of course I knew. I shall never forget the look on her face when she saw a picture of yours for the first time. You asked me why I refused to bring her to dinner with you. The reason was that I knew you, and realized that a woman who loved your pictures not artistically but passionately, even before she saw you, would never satisfy you. Was I right?"

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"You anticipated. How could you know that I would want to marry Claudia?"

She gave a strange little laugh.

"Give me a cigarette," she said.

He produced his case and held it out to her.

"How did you know?" he repeated.

"It was so obvious—I was a fool to introduce you."

He held a match to the end of her cigarette.

"Five years before you introduced us, I made up my mind to marry Claudia Badminton-Dale."

She looked at him in surprise.

"She inherited some money that should have been mine," he explained.

"Then it was entirely because of her money—I thought so. Oh, George, you fool! Clever people think that money is everything; people who are cleverer still know that it is not. Why did you not marry me? I could have loved you. Your pictures are nothing to me. It is your personality I could have loved. I think I hate your pictures, somehow they seem to me unlike you."

He thought he was watching her in silence; then he heard a voice, which he recognized as his own, speaking.

"I am not surprised," it said, "because I did not paint one of them."

"What?" Grace cried.

"I don't know what I'm saying. Oh, Grace! If you only knew how wretched I am!"

Her beauty was about him like the enervating

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air of a hot-house, heavily laden with the scent of flowers. She looked herself like some tall, white flower, leaning forward as if broken by the wind. What had he said? He did not care; he only knew that she loved him, that the knowledge of his secret would make no difference to her. He caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately, as he had kissed Suzanne two days before. She returned his kisses and let him hold her thus, it seemed for hours.

"Is it true?" she asked at last.

"What did I say?"

"That you did not paint one of those pictures."

Suddenly he released her and sat erect. He realized what he had done. Fool that he was! Was it too late to deny it?

"Of course not. You make me half mad, Grace, with your beauty and your love. To me love is like food to a starving man . . . Claudia starves me, with her passion for pictures and her indifference towards humanity. I meant that you were right when you said that my work was unlike me, in a sense it isn't mine at all. There are two George Steins: the one who paints and the one who lives."

Grace got up, and, taking a cigarette from a box on the mantelpiece, lit it and turned round.

Why didn't she accept his explanation in words instead of standing silently there with the cigarette held between her lips? He got up, too, and went and stood beside her.

GREEN CHALK

"Now I must go," he said. "Thank you many times for giving me . . . food."

"Poor Claudia," was all she said in answer.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because she knows such a little, insignificant part of you."

"You are right—the artist is little compared with the man," he said.

CHAPTER XI

CLAD in a subtle brilliance of shimmering white, Claudia stood receiving her guests. "Where's George?" her mother asked, as Claudia's lips brushed her cheek.

"He—hasn't come in yet," she answered, hesitatingly.

"Indeed?" was Mrs. Badminton-Dale's only comment.

The large rooms were already crowded—the Stein ménage excited a certain amount of curiosity. The people who judged by appearances found Mrs. Stein solitary, composed and rather absent-minded, and her husband conspicuously absent; those with keener intuition felt a vague atmosphere of semi-tragedy in the apartment.

"*Ma belle Irène*, let us find a corner," the Contessa whispered.

"If the room were not rectangular I'd swear that there were none," Madame de Berci replied. "As it is, I can only say I cannot see one. Our hostess dislikes corners, I should imagine—she will be building a circular *salon* one of these days. What does it matter anyhow? If we speak loud enough no one will listen to us."

"It is true, then, that they are not the most united of couples?"

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Madame de Berci raised eyebrows and shoulders.

"Perhaps, not," she said.

"The fault is hers, I suppose?"

"A fault, *chère* Giulia, when it is a question between husband and wife, is always a feminine noun. They have been married now two months. If our friend the artist chooses to spend much of his time with another lady he is merely being ordinary, and if his wife has nothing worse to complain of she should consider herself fortunate."

"And the other woman is—?"

"Grace Yorke, of course."

"She is not here, I suppose?"

"Mrs. Stein's tact, I imagine, is not enough developed to send an invitation to her husband's dearest friend," Madame de Berci said, rather contemptuously.

"Hush!" whispered the Contessa, her eyes directed towards the door.

Madame de Berci turned and saw a flame-coloured figure framed in the doorway.

Grace advanced daintily towards her hostess, conscious that George Stein was walking behind her, and aware that the significance of the fact was lost on no one, certainly not on Claudia Stein.

For a moment there was a hush in the room, then everybody spoke at once. Grace approached slowly, wondering what Claudia would do. Dared the girl ignore her?

Without the slightest hesitation, Claudia held out her hand.

"I've just looked in," Grace said, "to tell you

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how much I like you husband's latest *chef-d'œuvre*."

"Really? I haven't seen it yet."

"You must go, *chérie*, it is charming—a divine little brown-haired creature, dressed in veiled emotions."

"I will go to-morrow," was all Claudia said.

She did not even look at her husband.

Grace passed on, feeling that somehow an effect had been lost.

People came and went. Mrs. Badminton-Dale left early, she was at her ease in the same room with her daughter only when some scores of other persons were present. At intervals a harpist played so well that nobody enjoyed his performance. Enthusiasts crowded the bridge-room and everybody else talked.

"Stein's latest picture isn't up to his usual form," Claudia heard a man say to some one.

"So I hear," was the reply.

Otherwise the evening seemed to her uneventful.

The last guest had bidden her good night and she was alone with her husband. There was silence, except for the clattering of dishes in another room. Stein shut the door.

"I say, Claudia," he said, "I hope you didn't mind me bringing Grace Yorke here to-night. I knew she was a friend of yours and that you'd only forgotten to send her a card; she told me you had at dinner and seemed a bit hurt."

"I didn't mind at all," she assured him, throwing her gloves on the table. "I hadn't asked her

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because I didn't particularly want her to come. If you had told me that you wanted her invited, I should, of course, have done so. So you expected me to mind, since you excuse yourself for bringing her?"

"Of course I shouldn't have done it, if I'd thought you'd really cared about it, only she seemed bent on coming. I thought you seemed a bit aloof, that's why I asked."

"Am I aloof to-night?" she asked carelessly.

"Rather. What's up, Claudia?"

For an answer she burst into a passion of tears, loud, unrestrained and continuous crying like the crying of an unhappy child.

"Good Lord! What's the matter?" Stein asked in alarm, coming and standing by her chair without attempting to comfort her.

She did not answer, but continued her incessant, monotonous weeping.

"Are you ill? Claudia, you're tired, you'd better go to bed."

"No, no," she sobbed, "it isn't that. Something I heard . . ."

"My dear child, do you believe everything you hear?"

The crying stopped as abruptly as it had begun. She gave an odd little laugh and looked at him with bright wet eyes.

"Oh, not about that," she said. "People talk, of course about your . . . what shall I call it? You see I think so little about it that I cannot even give it a name."

GREEN CHALK

Stein reddened.

"Of all the wives you are the most inexplicable. What is the matter, then?"

"I overheard some one say that the only picture you've painted since your marriage isn't as good as the old ones," she explained, sadly. "Oh George, if you only knew what it meant to me to hear it."

"Probably he knew nothing about it," he suggested.

"No, the man he was talking to had heard it. George, I can forgive people for saying you are in love with Grace Yorke. If it is true, I am sorry, but it isn't your fault or mine; if it is a lie, so much the better. But this other thing! The fact that you have changed your model after all these years is in itself significant . . . My face was the inspiration of your art—that was before you met me. When you saw me you recognized your inspiration and married—my face. When you got to know the woman in me you were disappointed, disgusted. You changed your model, and your art has deteriorated. I have spoilt your art."

She clutched at her throat convulsively. Stein watched her in wonder, which changed to horror as he realized what she was trying to do. He grasped her hands in his.

"Claudia, you mustn't!" he cried.

"Why not?" she asked in a cold, almost indifferent voice. "Let go my hands, George."

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I want to kill myself because it is the only thing left to me to do."

"For God's sake don't talk like that!"

"Why not? I'm not being melodramatic, I'm simply doing the obvious thing. Your art is everything in the world to both of us—I have spoilt your art already and as long as I am a living woman it will suffer. If I were dead, everything would be as before, or practically as it was. The memory of my face would inspire you as the imagination of it used to do."

She struggled to free herself, but he held her tightly. Something in the quiet voice convinced him that the hysterical words were not spoken for effect but to state her determination. What if she executed her threat?

"Claudia," he pleaded, "be reasonable. You must not say such things. What would people say if you did this thing? Think of your mother, imagine what you would make me suffer."

"People!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "What do they and their opinions matter? My mother never cared for me, and you . . ."

"Do you think I don't love you?"

"My face, as I said before, is all the world to you, otherwise I am nothing. If I were . . ."

"Finish the sentence," he begged. "I want to hear you say it."

"I don't know what I was going to say."

"You do," he said "and so do I. So you are a little human after all. How I have longed these last few weeks to see you burn with jealousy!"

GREEN CHALK

It seemed that you didn't care as long as I went on painting pictures whether I loved you or some one else, or nobody. Darling, don't you see that I am jealous of my own pictures ? "

She looked a little bewildered, but perfectly happy.

" So you too have not been contented all these days, I am glad."

" How could I be contented, feeling as I did ? That vain, artificial woman was nothing to me but the personification of a regard which had in it everything human and nothing artistic."

" And my love " she said, " is for a man who is himself art."

" No, for a human artist," is corrected.

She did not argue the point, but stood up, smiling at him.

" And now to bed," she said, " it is long after midnight."

" I'll come in five minutes," he said. " I've got a letter to write."

She went to her bedroom, he to the library. He shut the door carefully and took up the telephone-receiver. He gave a number and waited. "Hullo! Is that Lady Grace Yorke ? . . . Yes, it's I, George . . . I say, Grace, I'm awfully sorry I can't come after all. I'll explain to-morrow . . . What ? . . . No, it would take too long . . . Yes, business, of course, what else would it be ? . . . Yes, naturally, to-morrow at any time you like . . . Luncheon ? Right-ho ! . . . Good right."

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As he walked to Claudia's bedroom, he determined to tell her everything. In her forgiveness would lie the proof that she loved him, felt the power of his personality, understood him—and therein also would be the proof that Philip Lenormand's pictures were nothing to her compared with her love for her husband. As he opened her door, he thought perhaps after all it would be more prudent to wait a little longer. Why hurry? Let her love and admiration have time to strengthen. Instead of telling her he kissed her passionately.

CHAPTER XII

A WEEK later, George Stein received a letter from Grace Yorke. He carried the scented, pink thing to Claudia's room, where he found her sitting before the fire, wrapped up in something white and fluffy, sipping her *café au lait*.

"I find myself on the verge of making a deadly and dangerous enemy," he told her.

"Who is she?"

Stein laughed.

"So you guess the enemy's sex. She is Grace Yorke."

He noticed his wife's brow contract for a moment before she, too, laughed.

"What's her trouble?" Claudia asked.

"Listen to what she says:

"Dear Man Who Might Have Been,

Do you want to know what you might have been? If you have any curiosity, you will find me, *chez moi*, at tea-time to-morrow. Or does this 'business' of yours still last day and night?

Yours neglectedly,

G."

"Is that all?" Claudia asked.

GREEN CHALK

"Yes," Stein said, tearing the pink paper and throwing it into the fire.

"Poor Grace Yorke!" Claudia mused.

"Why?"

"I don't know why, but I am sorry for her. I don't think it's a question of going to tea with a friend, or refusing an enemy at your peril, all the same," she said, getting up and going to the toilet-table.

"I was only laughing about it."

"Haven't you been to see her since—since she came here last week?" she asked, beginning to brush her hair.

"No, I think I'd better go and see her. Come too?" he suggested.

"I can't. I've promised to be with mother at five."

"Is Mrs. Badminton-Dale alone now?"

"No, her friend Mrs. de Mendi is still staying with her. Do go and have tea with Grace Yorke, all the same. Please ring for Berthe."

.

He went. He found her, as usual, smoking a cigarette, and, as usual, beautifully dressed. She did not rise to greet him, when he was announced, but continued to recline lazily in a deep chair, with her satin-shod feet on the fender.

"So you have come," she said lightly, holding out a limp, white hand.

"Of course," he replied, taking the hand in his and keeping it there until she languidly withdrew it.

GREEN CHALK

"Business finished?"

"Yes. I was asked to paint the Russian Royal Family, and my last week has been spent getting out of it," he lied. "I've had to interview their Minister and God knows who besides."

"So your reputation is becoming international. I must congratulate you."

The butler came in with the tea-tray and set it on a table beside the fire.

"What might I have been?" Stein asked, when the man had closed the door noiselessly behind him.

"You might be useful now, if you would make the tea and save me the trouble," Grace said, flicking the ash off her cigarette.

"I will, but you have not answered my question. You mistook my mood."

"So I mistook your mood," she smiled, "your more than perfect mood derived from your own consciousness. God, you make me feel at school again with your pluperfect subjunctive moods! But I'm sorry it was more than perfect, for me perfection, less than perfection, suffices. What you might have been is just that—less than perfect. And this mood of yours, it was derived from your own consciousness of what—a man's duty to his wife or an artist's duty to the Russian Royal Family?"

"An artist's duty to the Russian Royal Family," he answered, bringing her a cup of tea.

"Lemon and sugar and no milk," she said, "I take it *à la russe*. Does this duty of yours

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include Russian tea-drinkers as well as Russian Royalty?"

He laughed and offered her bread and butter.

"*Foie gras* sandwiches are my besetting weakness," she told him. "Thanks. What will you have? There are some sticky hot things over there."

He chose instead, a complicated looking cake, and carried it together with his cup to the fire, where he deposited them on the mantelpiece. Then he turned round and stood silently watching his companion, wondering what she would say next. He felt sure her light remarks had only been a preface to something else. When the "something else" came he did not recognize it.

"I want you to paint me, George," she said, suddenly.

He hesitated a moment.

"Don't, if you value my friendship, make your favourite remark," she cried, in mock alarm.

"I may be stupid, but really I don't know what you mean."

"Then you are saved and shall be my lifelong friend. I was afraid you might refuse to compete with my maid."

"And I am afraid to compete with nature."

"Nonsense! I want you to do it, please," she entreated.

"I think I told you once upon a time that I loved to feel that my art bored you—that the George Stein you knew wasn't an artist at all, only a man. Didn't I, Grace?"

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A smile played about in her eyes for an instant and disappeared.

"Did you?" she asked carelessly. "I'd forgotten."

In spite of her unconcerned tone, she was looking at him intently through her drooping eyelashes and fancied she saw a look of relief pass over his face.

"I did," he said, "and I meant it. I wish you wouldn't ask me to."

"All the same, I do. It would amuse me to sit in a studio for hours and hours, and do nothing except watch some one else doing lots of things. It's one of the most restful things in the world—almost as good as seeing somebody just miss his train. Do let me come. Your *atelier* is somewhere on Montmartre, isn't it?"

"No, it's in the Impasse du Maine."

"You will promise to paint me, George?"

"No, I absolutely refuse."

"Why?" she demanded, with raised eyebrows.

"For the reason I have already given."

"You are horrid. Give me more tea."

He obeyed in silence.

"Was Claudia angry at the advent of an uninvited guest the other night?" she asked, helping herself to sugar with delicately curled fingers.

"No," Stein answered, frowning.

"Madame de Berci," the butler announced.

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"Good night, Monsieur Philip," Suzanne called, as she closed the studio door behind her.

Paris was in her autumn sadness. The colour of the trees had changed from green to brown, and the sky was heavy with rain clouds. The year was fast growing old, with only the greyness of the short winter to follow; and, standing at the open studio window, there came to Philip a breath of hot, sluggish air, as if the year were sighing in self-pity. The depression in the atmosphere had affected him. The picture of Suzanne was finished and shown to the world, and the world had shrugged its shoulders. The artist was glad that the world he lived in should detect the absence of spiritual inspiration, and returned to his former model with more perfect success than ever. He stood before the wet canvas, smiling at the radiant face.

"How much longer must I wait?" he asked the painted image, who only went on laughing in reply.

Somebody knocked at the door.

"Come in!" he called.

The knock was repeated, and Philip opened the door.

A woman, wrapped in a long dark coat and thickly veiled, stepped quickly into the room. For a moment Philip thought it was Claudia, but at the sound of her slow, careless voice he realized his mistake.

"How dark it is in here, George."

"Mr. Stein is not here," Philip told her.

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She turned round quickly, raising her veil. Of course it was not George Stein, she had known that all the time.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "I must have come to the wrong studio. I thought the concierge said that this was Mr. Stein's."

"It is Mr. Stein's; I am his secretary."

"Oh, I see. Mr Stein must be coming almost immediately, he told me to meet him here. May I wait?"

"Of course," he said, helping her to take off her cloak, and bringing a chair for her to sit on.

"Please let me walk about and look at things. I've never been in a real *atelier* before."

"I'm afraid there's very little worth looking at, only a few sketches and rough canvases. Mr. Stein generally sells his pictures or takes them to his apartment. Isn't it getting very dark? I'll light the lamp," he said, going to the fire-place for the matches.

When his back was turned, Grace hurried noiselessly towards the easel and touched the canvas with her finger tips. Yes, it was wet. When Philip had found the matches, he saw her standing at a little distance from the almost finished picture, examining it through her *lorgnette*, her pretty head slightly tilted to one side.

"This model of Mr. Stein's is fascinating. Really, she's amazingly like his wife. Have you met Mrs. Stein? But of course you have."

"I've seen her once," he said, lighting the lamp.

"Only once!" she exclaimed in surprise.

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"Then she doesn't come here and watch Mr. Stein paint?"

"He does not like people near him when he is working."

"And you. Are you, too, an artist?" she asked, sitting down at the table.

"Unfortunately I have no talents."

She leaned her elbows on the table and her chin on her clasped hands, smiling at him.

"Why 'unfortunately'? If one has talents one has also obligations to mankind. It is less trouble to admire than to create. Please pass me that miscellaneous collection of things on the other side of the lamp."

He gave her the things she asked for: a gold bag, an enamelled cigarette-case, a match box and pencil, chained together.

She took a cigarette and put it between her lips, waiting in silence until he had lighted it for her.

"*Ça-y-est*. Thanks," she said, "What a long time Mr. Stein is keeping me waiting; I suppose he left no message for me of any kind. How long is it since he went out?"

Philip hesitated, looking at the paint on the unknown lady's finger-tips.

"He went out about two hours ago," he said.

"No, I'm afraid he left no word of any kind."

As Grace inhaled the smoke of her cigarette, her eyes smiled. This man—whoever he might be—had hesitated, with his eyes on her hand. He had said that Stein had been in the studio two hours ago. At that hour he had been, in point

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of fact, drinking tea in her own drawing-room. He had tried to explain away the fact of the picture being wet, therefore he was in league with Stein, but, not knowing Stein's programme for that afternoon, he had made a mistake. He had confirmed her suspicions—suspicions aroused by a few words spoken by Stein in a moment of emotion, and strengthened by his refusal to paint her portrait. She had got the knowledge she had come there to find, further delay was unnecessary. Yet she did not hurry. Why should she? George Stein had taken five years to insult her. He had made love to her for over five years and forgotten to ask her to marry him. She had taken no pains to conceal her love for him, and he had married Claudia Badminton-Dale. His wife had given him the money he needed, but not the love; and he had gone to the woman for that and she had not refused him. Stein's discontent with Claudia's love for the pictures she believed her husband to have painted was another thing that helped to confirm her suspicions. Then something had happened, and Stein no longer desired the love of the woman who was not his wife. Yes; he had taken five years to make her feel to the full his contempt—why should she not take her time to make him regret it?

With much deliberation she finished her cigarette, and with the end of it lighted a second.

"Am I in the way? Perhaps you are busy?" she asked.

"Please don't hurry away. Really, I have

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nothing particular to do this evening," he answered her.

"Do you live here in this studio?"

"Yes, I do."

He did not like her inquisitiveness, and he was certain that the five rouged finger-tips had not touched the wet canvas accidentally. What was she doing there, anyhow? He had never known Stein use the studio as a place of rendezvous before, if indeed her excuse for coming there were genuine.

"Let us introduce ourselves, my name is Yorke."

"Mine is Philip Lenormand."

"Are you by any chance related to George Stein? Something about your face reminds me of his—the expression of your eyebrows or something. Eyebrows are expressive things, aren't they?" she asked, raising her own.

Again Philip hesitated.

"I believe we are distantly connected," he said.

"George Stein is a very old friend of mine, I wonder he has never spoken of you to me."

"Our relations are practically wholly confined to business," he said. "Our kinship is so remote that our friends are not necessarily mutual."

"I don't think you want them to be, Mr. Lenormand," she said, laughing. "My intuition tells me that you do not altogether approve of me."

"Intuition is liable to err."

"Not when it is a question of a woman feeling

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a man's opinion of her. Therein it is infallible, I assure you. Have women not told you that before ? "

" I have never known a woman intimately."

She laughed at him incredulously.

" Then I hope my intuition is at fault. To be a man's first friend would indeed be a new sensation. My life is spent seeking for new sensations and my life is a failure. Now I must go," she added, standing up.

" Shall I give Mr. Stein a message from you ? "

" It is unnecessary. I am angry and yet glad that he has not come. Even to meet a man who has never known a woman intimately is an experience ! "

She went out, leaving behind her the faint scent of lilacs in the room, a feeling of uncertainty in Philip's mind, and five finger-prints upon a still wet canvas.

As the taxi crossed the river and turned into the Champs-Élysées, Grace allowed her mind to wander for a moment from George Stein to George Stein's secretary. She did not believe that Philip Lenormand was his secretary at all. On the other hand, there was nothing to prove that he was the real artist. He had said that he was a distant relation of Stein's, but had only once seen Claudia. Was this last statement made purposely to put her off the scent ? If he had really painted the pictures that so strongly resembled Claudia, it was natural that he should wish to deny any extensive acquaintance with her.

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He was certainly the most likely person, living as he did in the *atelier*.

All the same, Philip puzzled Grace. If he knew Claudia well, how had she not discovered the secret compact between him and her husband, and again if what he had said was true how had he painted her all these years without having seen her? The world, who looked upon Stein as the artist, had accepted the likeness between Claudia Stein and the woman in the pictures as coincidence, with Philip Lenormand as the artist the coincidence became neither more nor less extraordinary. If Philip were indeed the painter of the pictures—and from Stein's silence about him, coupled with Philip's lie about the other man's presence in the studio that afternoon, she believed this to be the case—why should he take such pains to conceal the fact, allowing Stein to get the credit for the work he had himself done?

Finding no answer to the question, she put it from her, returning to the contemplation of her immediate revenge. The fact that she really cared for George did not detract from her enjoyment. She had offered love to a man who had despised it, and she longed to make him suffer as she had suffered. Her longing was about to be gratified and she was content.

She might have blackmailed him, telling him of her discovery in order to force him into whatever relations with her she wished. This, however, did not seem to her a satisfaction—a complete retribution, and the humiliation it would bring

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with it would be her own rather than his. As she entered her apartment, she asked herself again and again : Does he love Claudia ? For weeks she had persuaded herself that Claudia without her wealth meant nothing to him. Standing before her bedroom fire, she asked herself the question dispassionately. The fact that Stein bitterly resented Claudia's worship of him as an artist rather than as a man might be explained in two ways : either the man's vanity was wounded or the lover's passion was unsatisfied. Very probably George did not himself know whether his love or his vanity predominated—most likely his dissatisfaction was due to much of both ; in any case Claudia's feelings towards him mattered intensely to him, and consequently, his wife would be the weapon with which she—Grace—could most deeply wound him. With a little, contented sigh, she rang for her maid.

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CHAPTER XIII

"YOU are late," Stein said. "It is midnight and you have just arrived."

"How do you know? Anyone might be in this crowd for a week without being seen."

"My dear lady, if the whole of Paris were in this room, you would still be conspicuous."

"To be conspicuous is to be vulgar," Grace said.

"I think you are wrong. Your gown is Promethean, like fire from heaven."

"I am afraid heaven is a vulgar place, peopled with narrow-minded men and ugly women."

"Shall we dance?"

"I have not come to dance, but to go away again," she said, examining the throng through her *lorgnette*. "I arrive and say how-do-you-do to my hostess; I find my host and bid him adieu, and return to my bed with a sense of duty done. Is that Claudia over there, in green?"

"No, Claudia was tired and went home two minutes ago. I wonder you did not meet her," he said. "I wish you would dance with me just once."

"The music is *entraînante* and you dance divinely, but I must look for my host. Do you know Mademoiselle Bartkowska? No? You

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must. She dances to delirium. There she is, leaving the room with Raimond Rombeau, let me introduce you."

Stein followed her, and the next moment found himself bowing to a girl whose face was as ugly as her figure was superb.

Grace left them and, having been wrapped in her vermilion cloak, took her departure from the house.

"Is Madame Stein at home?" she asked the footman. "If she has not yet retired, ask her if I may see her."

She was shown into the drawing-room, where Claudia was discovered reading a letter.

"My dear Claudia," she said, "I heard you were alone and came to keep you company. I'm not surprised you found that room unbearably hot. To enjoy dancing at my age, one must be partnered by Terpsichore's own son in an empty room the size of the Albert Hall." She slipped off her cloak and threw it over the back of a chair, smiling at the small, heliotrope-gowned figure.

"It was nice of you," Claudia said.

"But not wholly disinterested. I wanted to hear you admire my new frock," she confessed, standing so as to show off the flame-coloured creation to advantage.

"It's beautiful," the girl assured her.

Grace sank into a low arm-chair, covering a yawn with both hands.

"I saw your husband," she said, "resplendent with a gardenia button-hole."

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" Yes ? "

" My dear, I believe you are half asleep ! That's new, isn't it ? " she asked, nodding towards a small picture.

" Oh, no. George painted it, and gave it to me before we were married."

" Will you ever forgive me, *chérie*, if I say I do not love those pictures which are signed George Stein ? "

She saw Claudia frown and open her lips, then close them again without speaking. She laughed.

" I know what you wanted to say. You think that one cannot love the artist without loving his work. You are sure that the two are inseparable, that these pictures are part of your husband. Claudia dear, you are insentient."

Smiling, she watched Claudia flush with anger.

" You don't know George as I do," the girl protested.

" I think," Grace said slowly, " we both know George Stein well. It is not hard to understand him, because he is not unlike nineteen out of twenty of the other men of our acquaintance. He is a little more selfish perhaps and a little cleverer"

" I do not wish to discuss my husband," Claudia said, getting up and turning towards the fire-place.

Grace saw her catch her lower lip between her teeth, and pick a large white chrysanthemum, with nervous fingers, from a vase on the shelf.

" *Ma belle* Claudia," she drawled, " do not

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agitate yourself. I have done with George Stein, and now I propose to lament the fact that our acquaintance with the great artist, who has his studio in the Impasse du Maine, should be so limited. Both of us have met him once, isn't it so?"

"I don't understand your meaning," Claudia said, pulling to pieces the great white flower.

"I knew it would be difficult to explain, but I felt it my duty to try. George Stein is a very clever man and the artist of the Impasse du Maine is a remarkably clever painter, but apart from their cleverness they have really extremely little in common. In spite of"

"What does it matter?" Claudia asked in irritation. "You think my husband has a dual nature—that he is half artist, half a man of the world. I do not care what you think of him."

"I express myself so badly," Grace apologized, leaning back languidly against the cushions. "My excuse is that I have been trying to break some news to you as gently as I can. I have been endeavouring to make you understand that your husband has never in his whole life painted a picture of any kind. By some cleverly conceived plan he has got some one else to do it for him—the man's name is, I believe Philip Lenormand."

There was a moment of absolute silence in the room, and then Claudia laughed. The white chrysanthemum dropped in a shower of petals to the floor, otherwise nothing moved. Motionless and with half-closed eyes, Grace watched the

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effect of her words. Somehow she expected a curtain to drop—the act was finished. Her dramatic sense was satisfied: she liked the silence broken by the strange, sudden laugh; she liked the rapid fall of snowlike petals; and the still, pale woman with the firelight playing on her dress. She was glad the room was dimly lighted

She waited expectantly for Claudia's indignant denial of the charge—this had been no scene in a play but the disillusioning of a human girl. She sat for a long time, with her eyes on the pale, expressionless face, but no outburst came. Had Claudia been transformed into an image of stone, she would not have been more still. Perhaps she had known all the time

"Well?" Grace said.

She saw Claudia move and pass her hand across her eyes. The girl turned her head and looked at her in bewilderment, but said nothing. Her conduct was so unexpected that for once Grace felt as a loss for words. She rose to her feet, murmuring something inarticulate.

"I beg your pardon," Claudia said, "I didn't hear what you were saying. Do forgive me, Lady Grace, I was thinking about something I'd just heard—something which astonished me very much. Is this your cloak? It's really quite cold to-night, isn't it? Must you go now? It was sweet of you to look in. Do let me fasten that properly for you, one is so apt to catch cold going out at night after one has been sitting before

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a hot fire. Gustav will go down with you and find a taxi, as the concierge is probably in bed by this time, or did you come in your car? Good night."

"Has your mistress gone to bed?" Stein asked.

"Madame is still in the *salon*, monsieur," the footman answered.

Stein went into the drawing-room. From the door he saw his wife standing beside the fire with a torn chrysanthemum at her feet.

"It's dark in here," he said, switching on some more lights. "I expected to find you in bed and sound asleep. It's after two, you know."

She took no notice of his words but stood perfectly still, with her head turned away from him, gazing at a little flame, which leapt up and down behind a lump of coal.

"You should have stayed and danced, if you didn't mean to go to bed," he went on, "it was first-rate after three-quarters of the people had gone. What a mess that flower's made falling on the floor like that."

He stooped to pick up the petals, and as he did so his hand touched her foot.

"Don't!"

She stepped back quickly, as if his touch had stung her. Something in her voice told him that all was not as it should be. A sense of impending disaster seized him, as he caught sight of her white face and shining eyes. He threw the handful of petals into the grate.

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"Claudia," he said, "what's the matter, dear? You look scared to death. You should have gone to bed hours ago—you must be tired out."

"Go away! I don't want to see you or hear your explanations," she said, in a level voice.

"It is I who need an explanation," he remarked, "what is the meaning of this behaviour? Why did you start when I touched you? It was as if—as if I hadn't been clean, or something!"

His mind was working with extraordinary clearness. Something had happened. From her conduct, he was sure that it was a thing of importance. Had somebody told her? It was not possible, only one man in the world knew the story of his life. Philip Lenormand! Had he been here? If she knew the truth he must deny it—it was his only hope. If he confessed and pleaded forgiveness, it was more than likely she would not grant it. Why did she stand there, with her eyes on the fire, saying nothing?

"I am your husband," he said, authoritatively, "and I demand an explanation!"

"You are not my husband," she cried, "I married an artist."

"Am I then not an artist?"

So she knew Whatever happened he must not anticipate anything. He must simply wait and hear what she had to say, then deny it, once and for all.

"You an artist!" she laughed. "An artist in deception, perhaps! Your work was well done, I must congratulate you."

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"Claudia, what do you mean?"

He tried to touch her, but she started back again, until the draught from the chimney caught her dress and drew it towards the fire.

"Look out!" he exclaimed.

"How long do you propose to keep this up?" she asked. "To make matters short, let me tell you that I know all about your ingenious plan. You never painted a picture in your life—Mr. Lenormand did them all!"

She spoke perfectly coldly, even with a touch of boredom in her voice. Turning her back on him, she leant her arms against the mantelpiece.

"Philip Lenormand has been here telling you this lie," he cried, "and you believed him. Oh, my God!"

"Philip Lenormand told me nothing at all. As far as I can remember, no one has been here since you went away."

"But no one else—" he began, and checked himself.

"No one else knows!" she finished the sentence mockingly. "So you do not deny that there is something to know. I am glad of that, it will save time."

"There is nothing to know," he protested. "Who has been telling you this lie?"

"What does it matter who told me? I know and you know—to-morrow your clever secret will be public property."

In the glass she could see, between the reflections of high black flower vases, his face working

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convulsively. The next moment he had stepped forward and grasped her with his arms—a struggling mass of scorn and loathing.

"They have lied to you, Claudia! It would not matter if it were true, all the same. Who cares about lifeless pictures? You love me—"

"Let go!" she panted. "I never loved you! Liar, hypocrite, parasite, your touch is killing me!"

"Darling, I love you! Is that nothing?"

"You love me!" she repeated. "I do not believe you—I was only one of your tools. You have been very clever, no doubt, but not clever enough. Thank God, I never for a moment loved you. I adored and married and gave my life to an artist—you are nothing to me."

"Ah!"

He relaxed his hold on her and she tottered back, leaning against the wall.

"So you never loved me! There were times when I felt sure of it."

"I wish I could make myself believe that you did love me," she said, "then I would know that your punishment was more complete. I cannot—you gave your love to yourself absolutely and entirely, you lived for nothing but yourself. People were your tools and your playthings, that was all. When the tools were blunted, when the toys ceased to amuse, you threw them away."

"Claudia, I adore you, I have always worshipped you," he insisted. "It is true that I have deceived you, but only because I was afraid of losing your love."

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" Oh, yes, you loved me years before you met me, I have heard that before ! " she mocked.

" Oh, my dear," he pleaded, " can't you forgive me ? If you only knew "

" What, is there still something I don't know ? "

" Oh, my wife, can't you forgive me ? I will go away and begin my life all over again. When I have done something, I will come back. Claudia, give me another chance—only one ! Claudia, for God's sake, don't stand there laughing at me. Oh, my darling, don't you believe I love you ? "

" And then," she questioned, " when you have stolen a new box of tools, what then ? You are being ridiculous with your face buried in your hands ! Of course, you will go away, I cannot imagine you staying here while the world laughs at you—I shall be left to enjoy that."

" No one need know if you "

" If I help you in your noble work, I suppose ; to-morrow the whole of Paris shall know, because I will tell them. I advise you to go at once."

The mole on his cheek showed doubly black against his white skin, as he raised his head and looked at her in entreaty.

" I hope you quite understand that I'll have nothing more to do with you—nothing," she went on. " If you want to beg for money, do not come to me."

He got up and came unsteadily towards her, while she stood with her arms stretched out to keep him off. Never had she seemed to him more

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desirable than she did standing against a background of white wall, her pale face and shining eyes framed in a cloud of untidy hair. He noticed every detail about her, even the little pink nails, shining like pieces of wet coral. What a fool he had been not to tell her himself! Would it have made any difference? He was sure now that she had never loved him—it had always been those pictures. Philip Lenormand had told her, either directly or indirectly—there was no doubt of that. Of course, he had the bond signed by him and promising secrecy, but of what use was it?

"How can I go?" he asked, despairingly.
"Where shall I go to at three in the morning?"

"Of course, you can spend the rest of the night here—the rest of your life—if you like. Only you must understand that I will not voluntarily see you again."

"To-morrow you will think differently."

"To-morrow I shall think what I think now, and to-morrow you will be the laughing-stock of Paris."

"You cannot mean what you say!" he cried, coming closer to her; and, seizing in both hands the little white fingers with their pink polished nails he raised them to his lips.

"Don't kiss me, let go my hands!"

He felt her bury her nails in his lips and yet he did not let her go.

"Oh, you fool," she said, "don't you understand that I hate you? Can't you realize that your silly love-making bores me? I have said all

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that I have to say. If you will be kind enough to remove your hands, I will go to bed."

"Yes, go now," he said, "to-morrow you will think differently."

She left the room without so much as a backward glance. He heard her bedroom door open and shut.

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He knocked gently at the door of Grace Yorke's apartment, and almost immediately it was opened from the inside. She stood in the dimly lighted hall, with her finger to her lips, then beckoning to him to follow her went towards the door of her boudoir.

"Well," she said when they were inside, "why have you come here? I was standing with one foot in my bath when you rang me up."

He noticed that she was wrapped in a loose blue kimono, embroidered with a flight of purple swallows and a rising sun, that her stockingless feet had been slipped into shoes of violet morocco leather, and that her hair was elaborately arranged as it had been at the ball; her fingers also were still covered with rings. He sank upon a low cushioned divan, gazing at her.

"I've come to talk to you," he said. "Why do you stand so far away? Grace, please sit beside me. I can't—"

"My dear George, not being quite stone deaf, I can hear all you say from where I am."

She raised her arm to reach for a cigarette.

"What a strange mood you are in to-night,"

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he complained. "I've come to you for help, because I believe you are one of the few people who care for me—or at least, I believed it. Why are you like this?"

"Like what?" she asked, striking a match.

"Distant—cold. Why have you changed?"

"You are quite wrong, I am the same as I always have been."

"Then come beside me, I want you to."

Laughing a little, she did what he asked, sitting upon the divan with her legs curled under her?

"What's it all about?" she asked.

"I'll come to that later. First, tell me again that you love me," he insisted.

"You know I do."

"For my own sake—not because of other things?"

"Yes."

"Thank God," he said. "But I didn't come here that you should tell me that, I came so that you might prove it."

"Well?"

He bent towards her until his lips touched her neck.

"I don't suppose you'll believe me—I never painted those pictures, Grace," he said. "Another man did them all."

"You are very clever," was the only comment.

"Clever!" he repeated. "Good God, I'm a fool! I was blinded by my success as an imposter, and I thought no one would ever guess. To-night

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when I got home I found Claudia waiting to tell me—what she thought of me. Lenormand, the man who really painted them, must have told her ; nobody else knew."

"The only thing that I can't understand is, why he didn't tell her and every one else years ago," Grace remarked.

"Because he was bound in honour not to. It was a bargain between us : I got the credit for his work, he got something else ; it was perfectly fair."

"I see. And what did the woman who had married the painter rather than George Stein say to you ?"

"What one would have expected. Grace, can't you help me ? She is not going to shield me from public scandal—my own wife will be the first to give me away. To-morrow Paris will rock with laughter."

"You won't like that, will you ? But how can I stop her ?" she asked, blowing a smoke-ring.

"I don't know—I can't think. Put that cigarette away, Grace. Don't you realize that I'm ruined unless you help me ? I believe I'm going crazy !"

She put the end of her cigarette into a pot of pink camellias, which stood on a table near her, before she spoke.

"You are very clever," she said, "but you made one mistake : you should never have married Claudia. I told you that once before, and I suggested an alternative when it was too late. George, you should have married me ; you knew

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I loved you, and I believe you cared for me in your selfish way. Had I been your wife and discovered your secret, do you suppose I'd have cared? I'd have loved you all the more because of your audacity. As it is, you are a ruined man—you will have to leave Paris, Europe, Civilization in fact, for ever."

"Oh, God! Is there nothing to be done?"

"As far as I can see, there is nothing."

She sat beside him playing with her rings, knowing well what he would say.

"I was a fool," he cried, "to marry the wrong woman, but surely if you love me—because you love me—that, at least, is not irrevocable. My beloved, come with me; I believe I'm afraid to go alone. You will change my exile into paradise. It isn't selfishness, dear, it's for your happiness as much as for mine. Grace, I need you, you need me, we both need love. You will come with me?"

She wound her arms about him, letting him kiss her. In silence she listened to his passionate words, with her chin resting on his shoulder she smiled and waited.

"Darling," he whispered, "fate has abandoned me, the world will laugh and hold me up to ridicule, what does it matter? You, my beloved, have restored me my self-confidence—you have promised to give up everything for love and me."

"Have I?" she asked.

He raised his head and looked into her mocking, laughing eyes.

"Oh, you fool,"

"I love you

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enough for that ! Once you made me love you, and married another woman. When you found she did not satisfy you, you came back to me ; when you grew tired, you left me again. And now you offer me—what ? The privilege of ruining my life for the sake of a worthless man. You think it would be amusing, I suppose, to drag me down with you, something beautiful to look at, something to satisfy your sensuality, when you can get nothing better ! Shall I tell you how your wife discovered your clever secret ? I went to her to-night and told her what an ingenious man she had married. I told her, do you understand ? The only woman who realizes the depths of your personality, the finality of your perfection, the one woman who loves you for yourself gave you away ! It is I who have ruined you, I who have exiled you from Paris, Europe and Civilisation. Go on clenching your fists and biting your lips—it makes me realize the fullness of my success. Why don't you try to strangle me ? It would only complete your fame. You'd be afraid to, I suppose, just as you were afraid to go away alone. When you played with me, you thought I was a toy and you have found a little too late that I am not a toy after all. You have been playing with fire, my friend"

"Oh, stop !" he groaned. "Are you not satisfied with the perfection of your retribution ? Only I want to know one thing : who told you ?"

"You did," she answered, lighting another cigarette.

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CHAPTER XIV

AS Stein banged the studio door behind him, he caught sight of Suzanne crouching on the stairs.

"Forgive me for having listened to what you said," she pleaded timidly, "I could not help it. From the look on your face when you came in, I knew that something was wrong. When you sent me out of the room I"

"Get out of the way, damn you!" he cried, in irritation, pushing the girl aside and beginning to descend the creaking steps.

"I implore you to listen to me," she entreated, catching his arm, "Monsieur, you cannot go alone"

"Let go!" he commanded.

"Only listen to me! I will be your slave, if you will but let me come. I will work for you"

"I have had enough of women," he told her, as he tried to free himself.

"You do not understand women who love. Madame your wife"

"Be quiet!"

"I heard you say that it was the pictures she loved; once, too, you told me so yourself. I—I

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love nothing but you. Let me come with you ! ”

She followed him into the courtyard and along the Impasse.

.

Philip was waiting—it was only now a question of hours before she must come to him. Of course, she had turned in hatred and disgust from the man who, by false pretences, had claimed her as his wife. Now that Stein had been compelled to go, his years of expectation were at an end ; this day would see the realization of his long cherished dreams—the woman for whom he had given his life was his.

He did not know or care how many hours had passed since Stein had left the studio, nor could he remember exactly what words had been spoken by either of them—only he knew that she had renounced the man who had deceived her and kept her from him to whom she in truth belonged. Somewhere outside a clock struck three. What could be keeping her ? The minutes dragged like days ; he felt that the years of anticipation had been far shorter than the time he had been sitting at that round wooden table, with its unlighted lamp and paints and brushes.

A step sounded on the stairs. He sprang up and threw open the door. Yes, it was she. How calm she looked—and how slowly she came. He had expected her arms to be outstretched and her eyes shining, instead her hands hung by her sides

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and her deep green eyes were hidden by the drooping lids.

"I knew you would come," he whispered. "I have been waiting for you for so many years!"

Claudia did not look at him, but passed into the studio without speaking, or even seeming to notice him. Having shut the door, he came and stood beside her, awaiting the moment when she should yield herself to him.

"I suppose," she said at last, "that my husband has been here this morning?"

"George Stein has been here," he corrected.

"I am glad," Claudia said, "I need not in that case explain to you what has happened. He has gone away and now you can enjoy all that you should have had in the past"

"Yes," he said, "but it was well worth waiting for."

She smiled at him with her eyes.

"Yes," she said, "and yet the consciousness that the pictures were your own must have been an adequate reward for all these years of obscurity."

"The pictures!" he derided, "they were only the graven images I made and worshipped while I was waiting for my deity to come to me in the flesh!"

His desire would no longer be restrained—ravenously he took her in his arms and devoured her lips.

"Don't! don't!" she pleaded. "I have come

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to you too late—we must not forget that I am the wife of another man."

"What does it matter? You are not his wife, you married an artist, is it not true?"

"You mustn't do that," she begged, struggling to escape from him. "I married the man I thought had painted the pictures, but the discovery of his deception does not set me free."

"What do the laws of convention matter to us? You married the man who painted your own face for all these years. You are mine! I have waited for you, longed for you, hungered for you, and now that I have found you I will not let you go! Listen to your own soul, it is telling you what I am telling you—the George Stein you married has never even lived, there is no artist called George Stein. You are the woman of my dreams, a woman of flesh and blood and passions and desires; you are deaf to the voice of convention and can hear only the voice of your soul."

"I entreat you to be quiet. If you knew what you are making me suffer, you would not say these things," she gasped; "let me go!"

He unloosed his hold of her and turned away.

"Oh God!" he said, "the face is the face of the woman of my desire, but the spirit is as yet unborn. Your eyes and hair and lips—I have loved them all for years, but your commonplace, conventional soul is unknown to me. Would to heaven I had never met you—you have disillusioned me."

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" You do not understand," she said.

" It is you who do not understand—perhaps some day you will. Some day you will come to me of your own free will, when your soul has begun to live. I can wait a little longer."

He opened the door for her, and watched her as she hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER XV

THE straight road, with its border of slim poplars, lay before him as far as the eye could see. The trees stood out tall and pale against the sky—heavy with rain clouds. Only the knowledge that somewhere beyond the skyline he would find Suzanne gave Gummy heart to plod on through the thick, wet mud. The rain began again, falling in large drops ; and the wind took a sharper edge. There was no shelter of any kind within sight. La Neige climbed down from Gummy's shoulder and took refuge inside his coat.

He had walked for about four miles, when he caught sight of a single, distant light, burning faintly through the rain. The wind was blowing full in his face and carried with it the sound of voices singing.

The rain fell incessantly, and began to soak through Gummy's coat, making the cat inside it mew piteously. He hurried on.

As he drew nearer, he distinguished two or three large caravans drawn up beside the road. Several wet horses were *ethered to the wheels, and beside them, under an oil lamp, sat two men.

One of them was quite young and had a pleasant sunburnt face. The other, though many years

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older, was so like him that Gummy took them for father and son.

"Good evening, messieurs," Gummy said.

At the sound of his voice, they stopped their singing and looked at him inquiringly.

"Can you tell me if there is a town of any sort near here where we can find shelter?" he went on.

"There isn't one for miles—five or six at least," the elder man told him. "You'd better go in there, my friend," he pointed to the largest caravan. "You seem to be alone, why do you say 'we'?"

In answer, Gummy unbuttoned his coat.

"A cat! Well, take the poor little devil inside. It must be half dead."

The inside was larger than Gummy had expected. Here also an oil lamp was burning and the room smelt of cooking and damp clothes. In spite of the lamp, it was so dark that at first he could see nothing. At last his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, and he found himself in the centre of a ring of eager faces.

In one corner sat an old woman, whose brown face was lined with wrinkles. She held a grimy clay pipe between her toothless gums and a baby on her knees. Two or three boys were playing cards, some silver and copper coins lying beside them. An oil stove burnt somewhere at the far end, and Gummy could smell the odour of frying fish. A young girl was holding a spluttering pan over the fire; while another girl, who looked a few years older, sat beside her, sewing what appeared

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to him like a blue cloud spangled with golden stars.

A fourth woman, with a grey shawl over her head, had her back to the door. She seemed to be watching a heap of sacks, and when Gummy came in she did not turn round.

A hole in the roof was doing its work badly, and the caravan was full of smoke.

"Good evening," Gummy said. "The gentleman outside kindly told me I might spend the night with you."

"Surely," one of the girls said, setting down her frying pan. "This is no night to be out in. *Mon Dieu*, how it rains!"

The old woman in the corner took the pipe out of her mouth and regarded him keenly.

"I hope you're honest," she said at last. "If you aren't, this is no place for you. What have you got there?"

"My cat and my violin."

The girl who had been sewing laid down her work and came and stood beside him.

"May I hold the poor little thing?" she asked.

"Don't do anything of the sort," her grandmother said, "it will scratch you."

"Is supper ready yet, *Désirée*?"

"In a moment."

"How hungry I am!"

The boys who had been playing cards when Gummy came in resumed their game. Sometimes one of them would look at the stranger and make some remark to his companion.

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The younger of the two men outside thrust his head through the door.

"Have the dogs been fed?" he asked.

"God bless you, yes!" said the old woman. "Hours ago. Do you think you are the only person with a memory? Starved dogs don't dance."

"Tell father that supper is ready," said the girl who had been cooking.

Wooden forks and plates were distributed all round and the pan, containing quantities of fried fish, was put in the middle of the company.

The woman who had been watching over the sacks got up and joined them.

"How is she to-night?" asked the man described as "father."

"Badly," she answered. "I shouldn't wonder if"

The rest of her words were spoken so low that Gummy could not catch them.

"Do you know anything about doctoring?" the man asked Gummy. "No? That's a pity, we have here a poor woman who is dying. We found her by the roadside this afternoon."

The old woman sat in her corner, eating her fish in both hands. From time to time she would cry out when a bone pricked her gums.

"Will you play to us?" The girl who spoke still held La Neige in her arms and was feeding her with little pieces of fish.

"If you like," he said.

First he played low, then high, like the voice of

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a woman answering a man. Suddenly the music changed and the family of strolling players found themselves listening to a valse—mad, wild, rapturous.

The girl set La Neige down and pulled one of the card-players to his feet. They revolved round and round in the middle of the room, hardly changing their ground by an inch.

Something stirred under the sacks. The woman beside them turned and held up a warning finger. The boy and girl stopped dancing and the valse ended suddenly.

"I am sorry, I forgot. Only it was wonderful!" she added, turning to Gummy.

"Not so bad, not so bad," said the grandmother who had been rocking the child in her arms in time to the music.

Shortly afterwards they lay down upon sacks stuffed with dry hay and went to sleep.

When Gummy awoke the sun was rising in a cloudless sky.

"I must be going" he said. "I have still a long way before me. You have been most kind to me and I shall not forget it."

He might have been gone five or six minutes, when the sick woman turned over and moaned:

"Oh George, why would you not take me with you? I would have been your slave . . . Some day you will understand."

She laughed an empty, mirthless laugh, which woke her suddenly.

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"Go to sleep again," said the woman, bending over her.

The sun was setting when Gummy reached the house by the quay. The concierge—a French-woman, with a sallow complexion and a dirty apron—opened the door a few inches and looked out.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I want to see Suzanne. Open the door, madame!"

"Suzanne is not here."

"Where is she then?"

"I do not know."

"When will she return?"

"Never!" she answered, and closed the door until Gummy could only see the glimmer of her grey apron through the crack.

"When did she go, madame?"

"About three days ago."

.
It had grown dark outside and the red-shaded lamp was burning on the table. Philip put on a long overcoat with a fur collar, and pulled a wide-brimmed hat over his eyes. As he turned down the wick, he heard the stairs creak under some one's feet and then a knock at the door.

"*Entrez!*" he called.

The concierge came in carrying letters, which she laid on the table beside him.

"There's a strange-looking man downstairs," she told him, "who won't go away."

"If he's another of these blasted reporters,

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he'll have to go," Philip said, glancing through an invitation sent him by an unknown hostess—one of the many that had been showered upon him during the past few days.

"I don't think he's one of them; besides he's asking for Monsieur Stein."

"In that case, I can't help him," he remarked.

"I hear somebody coming up now," she said, going to the door and peering down the dark steps. "Go away! Monsieur Stein is not here."

"I don't believe you," said an excited voice.

Gummy pushed past her into the studio.

"Ah! I have found you after all," he cried, striding towards Philip. "What have you done with her? Tell me where she is, or I'll kill you!"

Philip removed the lamp shade to give more light to the room. Gummy stepped back with an inarticulate ejaculation, while the concierge hovered about in expectation by the door.

"What's your trouble?" Philip asked.

"Where is he? I must find him!"

"You seem to have lost a great many people," Philip said, laughing at the odd figure with its dishevelled hair and ragged coat.

"Suzanne has gone," Gummy said, "and that man is the cause. I know it! I told her he would ruin her and she would not listen to me . . . I will find him and kill him—I swore it before and I will keep my word."

"You'll have some difficulty, I'm afraid," Philip told him, "George Stein is, I believe, on his way to America."

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" Oh God ! when did he go ? "

" Three days ago."

" Then it is true, Suzanne has gone with him," Gummy wailed. " Oh, La Neige will be lost ; madame, stop her, she has run out of the room."

Philip saw the man rush wildly to the door, making strange noises with his mouth. It was all very funny, but had this lunatic told him the truth ? Had Suzanne really followed George Stein ? Poor Suzanne, and yet why were not more women like her ? To her love was everything.

CHAPTER XVI

AS an advertisement, Philip found his five years' compact with Stein left nothing to be desired. During the winter that followed, he could not put too high a price upon his pictures, nor could he paint enough to satisfy the public demand. The social world of Paris called him a martyr, and clamoured to have him at their dinner tables. It seemed to him that in all the uproar one voice alone was silent—he had neither seen nor heard from Claudia since the day of her husband's departure. In vain he looked for her in ball-rooms and in *salons*—she was in none of them. Shortly before Christmas, he called at her flat and was told that Mrs. Stein was wintering in Rome, but had left no definite address. All January and February he worked with unceasing vigour, and in the beginning of March sent a picture to an exhibition of modern French art, which was to be opened in Rome about the middle of the month, whither he himself went some two weeks later.

In the train he heard the fragment of a conversation that passed between two women seated opposite him.

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"Ah, *ma chère*, I have met him," one said, with pride.

"Really? How very interesting! I thought he was of quite humble origin; is he received?"

"Everywhere," was the answer. "I assure you he is charming and so *distingué*."

"What is he like?"

There was a moment's pause.

"He is tall and so artistic looking," the informant said with conviction. "His hair is red—rather the shade he always paints, you know."

"Is he married?"

"I don't think he is. His pictures sell for treble what they did when the other man was supposed to have painted them."

"What was his name? Something Stein, wasn't it?"

"Yes, George Stein. He's disappeared, you know. So *bourgeois* to disappear! Why, if he'd stayed in Europe, some London music hall manager would have offered him an engagement."

Philip smiled behind his newspaper. Fame! Success! Were they, after all, worth having? Even a woman he had never seen, and who obviously had never seen him, was claiming his acquaintance. There was something rather intoxicating about it all, even a little thing like this had its significance.

On the morning after his arrival in Rome, Philip walked about the streets, and, in the afternoon, he drove on the Pincio, but under none of the women's hats did he discover the face for

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which he was looking. What did it matter? If Claudia were still in Rome—and he had every reason to believe that this was the case—he would find her the next day standing before his own picture. The exhibition was widely advertised and Claudia could not but be aware of its existence. He was convinced that she would find her way there to look again at one of the pictures, which meant so much to her. He was consciously disappointed: it should not have been necessary for him to follow her here; she should have come to him of her own free will, as he had told her she must do. He was angry with her and with himself, he should have waited for her spontaneous self-relinquishment, his presence in Rome was a confession of weakness.

Next day, soon after the exhibition opened, Philip strolled leisurely into the rooms. There were only a few people there, most of them artists, grumbling because their pictures were not hung as well as their creators imagined they deserved. "It's infamous," one of them told Philip, "it should have been placed at the very end of the room—one should look at it from a distance—near to it looks like nothing on earth."

Philip murmured his sympathy and passed on. All the morning he lounged about and again in the afternoon, but his vigil was not rewarded with success.

After luncheon on the second day, he caught sight of Claudia standing, as he had expected, before

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his own picture. He watched her from a distance, smiling at the sight of her eager, parted lips and flushed cheek. Her raised profile was turned towards him, framed by the brim of her drooping black hat. Her dress also was black, making her look extraordinarily slim. There were, of course, other people besides looking at the picture, more than had gathered round any of the others in the room—a fact which pleased him. He had not enjoyed personal success long enough to have grown accustomed to it. In the days when Stein had been the supposed painter of his pictures, Philip had lost all interest in them once they were finished; now that they were signed by his name, his feelings towards his work had changed, he was glad that the world appreciated it.

He joined the little group and stood close behind Claudia, noticing how still she was; she seemed hardly to move at all and seemed oblivious of the people round her.

"Say, what's this all about?" he heard an American voice ask. "Got a catalogue, Annabelle? Number 23."

"'Power, by Philip Lenormand,'" another American voice answered.

"My! Isn't it crazy? One of those Futurist things, I guess."

"Let's go and have a look at the Colosseum now," Annabelle suggested. "There'll just be time before tea."

For almost half-an-hour Philip waited, then he moved round Claudia and stepped between her

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and the picture. He saw her start and turn away, going in the direction of the door. He followed close behind her, allowing himself to overtake her as she reached the street.

"Aren't you going to recognize me, Mrs. Stein?" he asked.

She turned round and looked at him with frightened eyes.

"I didn't see you," she said, weakly.

"I saw you looking at the pictures and followed you," he explained. "Did you notice my contribution?"

"Oh, yes," she said.

"I hope you liked it?"

"Of course—yes."

She looked about her vaguely, murmuring something about a cab.

"There's one standing over there," he told her. "Can I take you anywhere? In which direction are you going?"

"To the Piazza di Spagna," she said. "My hotel's there. Don't trouble to come with me, if..."

"That'll suit me perfectly," Philip assured her, beckoning to the driver, who drew up beside them.

"Piazza di Spagna," he told him. "What's the name of your hotel, Mrs. Stein?"

"The *Londra*," Claudia said, and got in mechanically.

They drove for a short distance in silence, then Claudia drew a deep breath. "Why did you speak to me again?" she asked. "What is the good? It can only make us both unhappy."

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"Why did you allow me to come with you, if you did not want to speak to me?"

"I don't know—I didn't realize what was happening."

"I came to Rome on purpose to see you," he said. "Because I was tired of waiting for you to come to me."

"How dared you expect me?" There was more entreaty than anger in her voice.

"It would have been right for you to come to me—if you love me."

"No, no," she protested. "Besides how can I love you? I hardly know you. In any case, it would be impossible, and it was unkind of you to follow me."

"Do you still remember the paper boy you saw run down in Oxford Street?" he asked.

"Yes—why?"

"I was the paper boy."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?" she asked incredulously.

"It might so easily have been some one else."

"How do you think it possible," he questioned in return, "that I should have painted you all these years without having seen you?"

She did not answer for a moment.

"Did you notice me, then?" she asked, surprised.

"I don't know. I suppose I must have seen you and remembered your face in my subconscious mind. It was because of my desire to paint that

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face more perfectly that I gave my work to—to George Stein in return for an artistic education.”

“So that was the reason,” she said.

The cab was passing slowly down a steep street, jolting over the uneven cobbles.

“Yes, that was the reason. And when I met you I found that you were the wife of another man. I had longed for you for thirteen years, but . . . ”

“We are almost at the hotel,” Claudia interrupted. “You must go away now ; please do.”

“Won’t you hear what I have to say ? ”

“No, no—it wouldn’t do any good.” She hesitated a moment. “What difference would it make ? ”

“None,” he assured her. “In a month or two it will be the same whether I tell you or not.”

They passed the steps, crowded with picturesque loafers, grouped behind a foreground of bright flower-baskets, and the cab drew up at the door of the hotel. The cabman turned to see why neither of them got out. Philip, who knew no Italian, signalled to him to go on.

“*Dove dovrei andare ?* ”

“Please tell him to go a bit further,” Philip said to Claudia. “If it won’t do any good, it won’t do any harm finishing what I want to tell you.”

“*Andate avanti ancora un po’*,” Claudia said mechanically.

“I didn’t mind your being his wife,” Philip

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continued. "I'd waited so long, I felt I could wait a little longer. Besides . . ."

"Well?"

"I knew you'd realize sooner or later that he hadn't painted the pictures and . . ."

"So you thought I loved the artist, not the man?"

"Was I right?"

She did not answer his question, but sat erect with both hands leaning on the handle of her sunshade, her lower lip held between her teeth.

"I know I was right."

"I do not deny it," she said. "And if you really care for me, you will never see me again. I may be narrow-minded, but I cannot . . ."

"Now you do not understand the meaning of love," he said. "Some day you will."

There was a hint of pity in his voice; he was thinking of Louise Lenormand and of Suzanne.

"You must go now," she entreated. "Don't think about me any more; you must forget the red-haired woman of your pictures."

"And you?"

"I have nothing to forget; as I said before, I don't even know you, Mr. Lenormand."

He laughed at her as she ordered the cabman to turn round and take them back to the hotel.

"And the pictures?" he asked.

"I will never look at one of them again; I love them passionately, but the man who painted them is nothing to me."

"Still, I think you are wrong; you will find

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that you will need the painter even if you do not need the man, then you will send for me."

She flushed angrily.

"You are insulting, more than insulting, to take me for that sort of woman. Please understand that I will have nothing more to do with you."

"There are not different kinds of women," he told her quietly, as the cab again reached the hotel. "All women are human just as all men are human."

She jumped out and hurried into the hotel without another word.

A week later Philip happened to be passing the place where the modern French artists were exhibiting their pictures. It was late and the sun was half hidden behind the roof of a house. To his surprise he saw, drawn up in front of the door a cab carrying luggage on which the initials C. S. were painted in white.

He entered the outer hall and glanced into the first room. There, standing before his picture, was the slim dark figure, gazing up at it in rapt attention. He came and stood beside her.

"Good evening, Mrs. Stein."

She stared at him, with a cry of surprise.

"I'm—I'm just starting for London on business," she stammered, "and I came in here for a moment because I'm too early for my train."

"I see," he said, smiling. "I hope you'll have a pleasant journey."

He watched Claudia hurry across the polished floor and disappear into the dimness of the street.

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER XVII

ONE night, early in May, Philip sat in the darkness of the Opéra Comique, while on the stage the first Act of *Carmen* was coming to an end. He heard some one groping her way along his row of fauteuils and sit down in the vacant place beside him. As she threw back her cloak, he became conscious of the scent of lilacs, which seemed to change the stagnant air into a breath from a June garden.

The curtain fell, and the theatre was switched into brightness.

"Mr. Lenormand!" Grace Yorke exclaimed. "How very fortunate this is. I've been longing to congratulate you and have at last found an opportunity."

"It's very kind of you to want to congratulate me," he said, "I only wish I knew what I have done to deserve it."

"Haven't you excited the whole of Paris? Isn't that in itself an achievement?" she asked.

"I believe it is very easy to excite French people."

"Possibly, but there are so few of them in Paris that that does not detract from your praiseworthy performance. Really the whole

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thing was very cleverly thought out and so artistic, there was no hurry about it. You took more than five years to reach the *dénoûment*, didn't you ? "

" I assure you it was quite impromptu." He frowned and rolled the corner of his programme between his finger and thumb.

" Nevertheless it was most effective. You stage managed, and I took a leading part," she laughed. " From a financial point of view, you must have found it a great success, whereas I received nothing but the hisses of the audience. How long had Claudia Stein known about it all ? "

" When you told her, I suppose."

" But you must have been acquainted with her for years," Grace said, incredulously. " You painted her ever since you came to Paris, didn't you ? "

" The likeness was purely accidental," he assured her. " I have only seen Mrs. Stein three or four times in my life."

" I can hardly believe it ; when I told Mrs. Stein she seemed bewildered, but not surprised. Nevertheless, it gives the comedy an element of romance, if it is true."

" There is no romance in truth," Philip said.

" Perhaps not," she assented. " The thing I regret is that I missed the scene in which our leading lady told her mother all about it."

" Was that one of the better ones ? " he asked indifferently.

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" So it seems, I had it second-hand from Mrs. Dale herself. We have a boudoir and a stout, rigid figure sitting on the edge of her chair, sipping black coffee. Does it not strike you as humorous, Mr. Lenormand, that those who are stout and vain are condemned to lifelong discomfort in tightly laced corsets ? "

" I should rather call it pathetic," Philip answered.

" I can see no pathos in the ridiculous," she said, unbuttoning her glove and drawing it off. " But to return to our puppets—Enter Claudia, to the despair of dear mamma, who lives in deadly fear of her charming daughter."

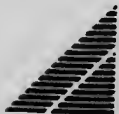
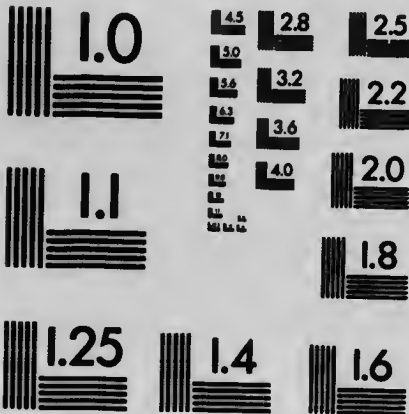
" Fear ? " he asked, surprised.

" Yes—mortal fear. Isn't it unbelievable ? All the same, I have it from Mrs. Dale's own lips. She thinks the poor child is crazy, simply because she has the sense to have a few eccentricities. Her hair would be so pointless if she were absolutely normal, don't you think so ? Instead of realizing this, the unfortunate mother lies awake at night thinking about some uncle—probably by marriage—of ' poor Anthony's ' who was more than odd ! All this, simply because Claudia, instead of breaking her news with tears and sobs, spends the first five minutes of the interview in discussing the relative merits of purple and blue velvet ! Here's the second act beginning, and I haven't finished telling you about this far more amusing and better acted one ! What does it matter ? The blue velvet having been decided



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upon, Claudia explained that George had gone away. Of course, mamma had known all the time that he was a bad lot, had, in fact, told her so, and was in no way responsible. Claudia's attitude caused her some concern, there were no tears and sobs, and Mrs. Dale is more convinced than ever that Claudia is a little mad. Of course, you have heard about her latest exploit ? "

" I don't think I have," Philip said, turning his attention from the stage to the woman beside him.

" I don't believe you've been listening to a word I've been saying to you," Grace said reproachfully. " This last development is much the most interesting and amusing. We have the bereaved wife with all the troubles of a widow and none of her advantages . . . "

" *Chut !* " came from the row behind them.

" These people are too ridiculous," Grace complained. " They seem to expect one to come to a theatre and do nothing but listen and look at the play ! Well, as I was trying to tell you, our charming, red-haired, tragedy queen has managed to add a fourth act to the comic drama. She has lost all—or nearly all—her money. Isn't it perfect ? "

" Lost nearly all her money ! " Philip repeated.

Grace watched him stoop and grope on the floor for his programme, and said :

" Yes, isn't it amusing ? Listen to those people making that ridiculous noise again ! Don't you think Claudia shows a great sense of the picturesque ? Why, I'd hardly have believed

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it of her! I think she'd look lovely selling flowers on the street, with a fascinating little red-haired boy clinging to her ragged skirts. I'm afraid she'll have to hire the child, as I've heard no rumour of her getting one more economically. The colour of the hair will be a difficulty, but what does it matter; one can get almost anything if one can pay for it, and Claudia will have a great success in the rue de Rivoli, I've no doubt. I hope she will come to Paris—I wouldn't miss seeing her for anything."

"But how did it happen?"

"That fat man in green is out of tune! And yet people expect us to sit still and listen to him. . . . How did it happen? Oh, George Stein did something—speculated, I suppose. Anyhow, he did it thoroughly, as usual. And he had only a few months to do it in, too, so like George. That really isn't the important thing. Don't you rather love the rue de Rivoli idea? I'm only afraid that, as it's Claudia, she'll take a semi-detached villa in Clapham instead." She fanned herself with her programme.

"Good God!" Philip exclaimed, oblivious of everything but the fact he had just heard.

"It is awful, isn't it?" Grace agreed, thinking of the offending toreador. "Courage, it will soon be over, that fearsome note heralded the end. . . . The curtain at last, thank God!"

She examined her left-hand neighbour through her *lorgnette*, turning to Philip a perfectly chiselled profile, of which he took not the slightest notice.

"What will she do?" he asked, more of himself than of her.

"Do? What will who do?" Grace demanded. "Oh, Claudia! Are you still thinking about that? How slowly your mind works! I had forgotten Claudia ages ago, and was speculating as to the nationality of the individual next to me. Russian, do you think? Polish, perhaps. If you are not sure which country anyone comes from it is generally Poland. So you are interested in Mrs. Stein's welfare!"

He bit his lip and said:

"You must allow that the situation is interesting."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You said so yourself," he protested.

"Amusing—yes, I was with Mrs. Dale when she heard about Claudia's financial disaster. Of course she had always expected that, too! How wonderfully prophetic some people are! My dear Mr. Lenormand, it was the most comic thing I have ever seen; in fact our leading lady's mamma did her duty, as far as supplying the 'comic relief' went. I called one afternoon last week and found Mrs. Dale just returned from her post-luncheon drive in the Bois. She was standing in the hall, studying the addresses on her letters and turning them over the greatest agitation. She talked to me for some time about shattered nerves and George Stein and begging letters and Claudia and the uncle by marriage! Then we went into her mirrored *salon* and I persuaded

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her to look at her mail. She did so, with the result that the room became a seething mass of hysterics and smelling-salts, with a crumpled letter lying about somewhere and poor me standing in the background."

"Didn't you enjoy it, then?"

"Yes—enormously. It almost made up for having missed the other scene. I tried to soothe her by explaining that there is no great difference between poverty and affluence, I even cited myself as an example. I dress as well as any woman in Paris, and deny myself nothing—all on nothing a year! My efforts were useless, and Mrs. Dale only wept the louder, without thought of consequences. Picture her with wisps of yellow hair falling on her neck and the aigrette in her hat hanging over one ear! You have never seen her? My poor friend, you have missed something. She blamed George Stein and Claudia and Halifax James . . ."

"Who is Halifax James?"

"An angel in heaven, perhaps. He *was* Claudia's godfather, I believe, who made the unforgivable mistake of leaving his money to Claudia instead of to Claudia's mother, a piece of unpardonable ingratitude considering that Mrs. Dale nursed him through his last illness and let him die after he had cut his own relations out of his will. The scene ended with a clatter of china, as Mrs. Dale fell forward among the dishes on the tea-table!"

Grace laughed merrily at the recollection.

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"Poor Mrs. Dale!" Philip said.

"Again I cannot see pathos in the ridiculous," Grace smiled. "Do you think I am unfeeling, Mr. Lenormand? I am too old to be sentimental or kind-hearted."

"Were you ever sentimental?" he asked.

"Once," she said, almost sadly. "I married a younger son for love. The coos came before the wedding, the bills afterwards—and the disillusioning. *Qu'est-ce que vous voulez?* One can only be young once. You are young, Mr. Lenormand, and, I hope, foolish enough to understand your *rôle?*"

"My *rôle?*" he asked, amused.

"Yes, as *jeune premier*."

"I thought I was only stage-manager!"

"Oh, no," she cried, "you are not to get off so easily! You must find the beautiful Claudia and, having married her, live unhappily ever after!"

"You have left George Stein out of account," Philip said, frowning.

"So I have. By the way, where is he now?"

"In America, I believe."

"Nonsense! George Stein would hate a new country. He may have said that he was going there, but I do not believe that he has gone. What would he do there?" she asked. "Of course, he should have committed suicide—I'm convinced he'd have found limbo more entertaining than America or Africa or wherever he really is. And then we could have bought new

GREEN CHALK

frocks and sung 'O Perfect Love' at your wedding, and washed our hands of you. Now I'm going home. Oh, my gloves are on the floor, as usual. Thanks. *Au revoir.*"

He watched her go out, marvelling at her cat-like movements and the skill with which she avoided the people hurrying back to their places from the foyer. As she reached the exit, an idea struck him, and he got up and followed her, overtaking her in the vestibule.

"Lady Grace!" he said.

"You again!" she exclaimed, smiling at him.

"Can you tell me Mrs. Stein's London address? I'm going there and might as well look her up. She is still in London, I suppose?"

"I don't know her address," she said, "but, as you say, she is probably still in London."

"Perhaps you would ask her mother and let me know. I'd be so much obliged if you would; that is, if it won't be a great deal of trouble."

"When are you going away?" she asked.

"On Friday."

"The day after to-morrow! If you call at my house about five to-morrow, I'll have it ready for you," she told him.

"Thanks awfully."

"Can I take you anywhere? My car's here I believe."

"I think I'll go back and hear the end of *Carmen*," he said.

"That fat green man!—how can you?"

He stood on the pavement while her car was

called and watched her get into it. When it was out of sight he went back into the theatre to fetch his hat and coat, but did not stop to see the end of the play, as he had told her he would do. On the whole, he did not like Grace Yorke very much.

Accordingly, Philip arrived at the flat in the rue Picot at five o'clock the following afternoon. Even the india-rubber mat, which lay before the outer door, seemed faintly fragrant of lilacs, and the scent grew stronger as he passed through the hall into a small, black walled room, where Grace Yorke greeted him with outstretched hands.

"I have shut myself in here because I am feeling *triste* to-day," she told him.

"Surely that is a mistake," Philip said. "You should put on a scarlet dress and go to a ball when you are depressed."

"Why?" she asked, seating herself upon a curiously shaped ebony chair.

"Because all this *triste* will only increase your chagrin."

"That is what I have to do," she said, languidly. "I do not care what mood I am in as long as it is complete. I would have dyed my hair the colour of a raven's wing after *déjeuner* this morning if I had not been afraid that to-morrow I might be in the best of spirits. Now, if I had hair like Claudia Stein's, I should have to live up to it by being in one continuous passion—think how tiring it would be!"

GREEN CHALK

"What has caused your sorrowful mood?" he asked, with a laudable attempt at seeming interested.

"My maid has given notice," she explained. "She considers herself an artist and consequently wasted upon me. Unlike you, she is not contented to spend years in obscurity—unknown and unappreciated. I assured her that in five years I should need all her skill, but she would not be persuaded." Meditatively she twisted a black pearl, set in a platinum ring, round and round her finger.

"I want to know something," she said.

"Is it something I can tell you?" he asked.

"Yes, but first tell me whether you will have tea or coffee?"

"Coffee," he said.

"Then here you are; I'm glad you said coffee because I think it is more in keeping with the room. If you are not too artistic, you may look under that dish on the other table and find a crumpet for yourself."

She gave him a cup made of black wedgwood china.

"Now I will tell you what it is I really want to know," she said, taking a cigarette and looking round for matches. "Thanks! Did you know that I visited you that night with a particular object?"

"Yes, I saw the paint on your fingers."

"You were observant, but that was no proof."

"I think it was. If it had been an accident,

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you would have asked me for a cloth to clean your hands on," he said. "You hoped I would not see, and expected me to say that Stein had not been in the studio at all that day."

"Unfortunately for George Stein, you did not know that he had been with me at the hour you mentioned. It was most unfortunate for him, but not for you. How long did you mean to keep up the pretence, Mr. Lenormand?"

"For ever," he said.

She laughed incredulously at him.

"I can't believe that," she said.

"Nevertheless, it is true."

"But what was your object? I want to know."

He did not answer, but helped himself to another sandwich.

"More coffee?" she asked, holding out her hand for his cup. He gave it to her and watched her fill it, her cigarette held between her lips.

"Aren't you going to tell me?"

"No," he said.

"You are unkind, because I am curious. If I tell you my reason for exposing George Stein, will you explain all about the strange agreement?"

"I don't think I will."

Frowning, she handed him his refilled cup.

"You are very secretive," she said.

"Perhaps I am. I hope you will forgive me."

"Never; besides you owe me something. If it hadn't been for me, you would be nobody—a nominal secretary. that's all."

GREEN CHALK

" I was quite contented to be a nobody."

" Do you not enjoy your success ? "

" I think I do, and yet I was perfectly happy without it."

" Have a cigarette ? " she suggested.

He shook his head.

" I'm afraid I must go away now. Did you remember about the address you were kind enough to promise to get for me ? "

" I remembered, of course," she said, " but unfortunately Claudia's delightful mother left Paris this morning. Must you really go ? "

" I have so much to do to-night—I, too, leave early to-morrow."

" And I will change my frock—this time it shall be red."

" I'm glad you are feeling less sad."

" I am very angry," she said, shaking hands.

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILIP spent five weeks in London, five profitless weeks during which he sought in vain for news of Claudia ; and then he returned to Paris, where for two months he tried to mitigate his impatience with hard work.

One evening in August he was standing in his bedroom, making a lather of soap in which to wash his paint brushes, when he heard some one come into the adjoining studio, banging the door.

"Who's that ?" he called.

There was no answer. Philip shook the soap-suds off his hands, and looked into the room. He saw a man's back outlined against the window. He was wearing a long, dark cloak, and had a wide-brimmed hat on his head ; but his form seemed familiar. Hearing Philip's step on the bare floor, he turned round. The upper part of his face was shaded by the drooping brim of his hat, and his chin was covered with a short, straggling beard.

"Hullo, Lenormand ! is that you ?"

"Stein !" Philip exclaimed.

"You didn't expect to see me back so soon, did you ?" Stein said, with a laugh. "The truth is I'm off to America to-morrow, and I thought I'd look in and say good-bye."

GREEN CHALK

"It's getting so dark in here I hardly recognized you," Philip said, feeling on the mantelpiece for matches.

"Yes, light the lamp and let me have a last look at the old place. I feel as if I'd been away for years, though I suppose it's really only nine or ten months since I was here."

"About that," Philip agreed.

"I haven't had my dinner," Stein said. "If you've got any brandy up here, I'll have a drink."

In silence Philip found a glass and bottle and put them on the table, then he went into the next room to look for water. When he returned, Stein was sitting across a chair, with his arms resting on the back, and his hat lying on the floor beside him.

"That's capital," he said, pouring out his drink. "How've you been getting on since I've been away?"

"All right, thanks."

"I'm glad, and not astonished. You're the sort of picturesque character that appeals to these Parisians," Stein said, and emptied his glass. "I suppose our little affair gave the sensational element that they like so much. I hope you don't think I grudge you your success, Lenormand; you mustn't remember the things I said to you last time I was in this room. I was worked up, as you can imagine, after the scenes I'd just been through. It was damned bad luck that woman guessing about everything, and the bond was useless because the law wouldn't have taken

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much notice of it, as you took care to point out ; but I'm sorry I blamed you, of course it wasn't really your fault."

He stopped talking and filled another glass. Philip stood at a little distance, watching him in silence.

" I hope you don't bear me any ill will," Stein went on. " I really came here to tell you I was sorry for what I said. Is—is Claudia in Paris just now ? "

" No, I don't think she is."

Stein looked up quickly.

" Have you seen much of her ? " he asked.

" No."

Stein licked the moisture off his lips and set his glass on the table noisily.

" I wondered if you would," he said. " Poor little Claudia ! I'm sorry she's away—I'd like to have seen her again. She was a strange little thing, but I was much fonder of her than people thought. I won't deny that I married her for her money, but I cared a lot for her, too, especially latterly."

" Yes ? " was all Philip said.

" She seems to grow on one, you know," Claudia's husband went on, turning round in his chair and crossing his legs.

" Then she is different from most wives," remarked the man who had never had one.

" I wondered, after I'd gone," Stein said, " how you two would get on. Claudia is so like the women in your pictures that I thought she might

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have attracted you, Lenormand. I was afraid you might both wish me dead as well as out of the way—Claudia never cared for me, you know, it was only the pictures."

He waited for Philip to contradict him.

"Lady Grace Yorke told me that Mrs. Stein is in London," Philip said, after a pause.

"Oh," Stein said, thoughtfully. "What's she doing there?"

The other man only raised his shoulders.

"So you've seen Grace Yorke," Stein went on.

"Yes, I found myself sitting beside her in the theatre one night."

Stein laughed into his glass.

"Some women are dangerous," he said, putting it on the table. "But I'm sorry I shan't see Claudia again; I'm going right away, and I don't think I'll ever be back."

"Where's Suzanne?" Philip asked, with seeming irrelevancy.

"How do I know?" Stein returned sharply.

Philip again shrugged his shoulders and lit another cigarette.

"Oh, well," Stein said, "I suppose I'd better be off now."

He did not move, however.

"You start to-morrow, don't you?" Philip asked, waiting for him to go.

"Yes," Stein agreed. "I hope to."

He took another drink and got up.

"I say, Lenormand," he said, "I've never told you what I've been doing since I left Paris."

GREEN CHALK

"No," Philip said, without seeming particularly interested.

"Weil, I wandered about for a bit, sort of half hoping for news from her," Stein told him. "I didn't want to go right away without—without—well, we'd parted in anger you know. You're probably laughing at me for a sentimental fool, but I don't care. When a man's fond of his wife he cannot forget about her all of a sudden. Then I drifted into France again—the south of France. I've been there ever since—at Monte Carlo and Aix. I had God's own luck, if that's the opposite from the devil's. And now I've come back for two days to make it up with Claudia and you. I say, I suppose you don't know her London address?"

"No."

"Perhaps her mother's in town. I might ask her for it—well, no, perhaps I'd better not do that."

"Look here," Philip said, losing his temper, "if you think you're going to track your wife and make up your gambling losses as well as your quarrels, you make a great mistake!"

Stein whistled.

"You're not a fool," Philip continued, "and you know I'm not, or anyhow you can take it from me, I'm not. This sudden conjugal devotion's all nonsense."

"You seem interested in my wife's welfare," Stein said, suspiciously.

"I want to see fair play, that's all."

"Well, I can't walk to America, can I?"

GREEN CHALK

They stood looking at each other, both angry, each for different reasons afraid to show the other the full measure of his anger.

"I don't know Mrs. Stein's address," Philip said, "and if I did I wouldn't tell you it. You'd be afraid to ask her mother for it, and you haven't the courage to face Lady Grace Yorke. The sooner you're out of the country the better—how much do you want?"

Stein bit his lip.

"You're treating me like a beggar," he said. "I never asked you for your money. Keep it! I've a right to my wife's money, and I'll have it if I like."

"You won't be able to find her, besides . . ."

"What? Do you think she'd see me starve?"

"If you did find her, you'd probably see her starve."

"What do you mean? Has she—has she been . . ."

"So you expected it!"

"Well, I knew the whole thing wasn't as much as people thought it was," Stein said quickly.

"Most of what there was was badly invested—I tried to put it right as soon as I married her . . ."

"You seem to have done it well," Philip said, contemptuously. "How much do you want to get to America?"

"Perhaps a hundred would see me through—pounds, of course."

CHAPTER XIX

"**M**A *belle Irène!*" the Contessa exclaimed, "I have not seen you for weeks. How are you? Fancy meeting you here—I had no idea you got your *chapeaux* from Héloïse."

Madame de Berci was not equally overjoyed. It was true that her hats had been made by Madame Héloïse for a dozen years past, but Madame Héloïse was not in the front rank of her profession, and consequently her client had no wish that the fact should be known.

With Madame de Berci economy was a passion—and one of which she was heartily ashamed. So she smiled pleasantly at the little Italian and said: "I am on a voyage of discovery. I have tried every big house in Paris, and in the *Maison Vivette* I feel as much at home as in my own boudoir, but what would you? One must have a change, and some one recommended this place to me for garden hats."

"They say it is not at all bad," the Italian assured her. "See, I have brought my little niece with me—you don't know her, do you?—she has come to spend the season with me."

GREEN CHALK

They both looked towards a tall girl with red hair, pale eyelashes and a perfect complexion.

"What do you think of her?" the Contessa whispered. "She is Venetian and quite a type."

"Charming," murmured the other, wondering that any one, however young, could be contented to have such eyelashes.

"An heiress, *ma chère*!" her friend went on, in the same tone. "Marietta"—aloud—"come and be presented to Madame de Berci."

The girl who was sitting upon a circular couch, regarding with indifference the many hats presented for her inspection, got up and came slowly towards them.

"Is this your first visit to Paris, mademoiselle?" Madame de Berci inquired pleasantly.

"Yes, madame."

"How do you like it?"

"It's quite nice," was the unenthusiastic reply.

"There is nothing good in Paris except the shops," the Frenchwoman told her, fanning herself thoughtfully. "The music is bad, the weather is bad, the men are bad and the women are worse. Of course you must not take this as an example," she added, with a depreciative shrug.

"Have you found anything you like yet?" her aunt asked.

"They aren't *luc*. It's so difficult to know what a hat is like until you have seen it on the head," the girl said.

"There is a charmingly pretty one, which

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would suit you to delirium," the Contessa cried, pointing to a creation of pink straw and roses.

Madame de Berci shuddered and suggested that it should be tried on.

"Of course," Guilia agreed. "We would like to see it on," she told the showwoman who was holding it.

"Perhaps it would be better to see it on hair more like your niece's," Madame de Berci hinted.

"If mesdames will sit down some one will come instantly," the woman said.

She vanished into an adjoining room, while Madame de Berci turned her attention to a fat, white-faced woman standing before a long mirror, contentedly contemplating the reflection of wrinkles crowned by lace and rose-buds.

"Of course I never get my own hats here," the Contessa said, also aware of the reputation of the shop in which she had been found. "I heard that they specialize in pretty things suitable for young people."

"I thought you said you always came here," Marietta said, not realizing the situation.

"No, no, *chérie*. I was speaking of Vivette's," her aunt hastened to assure her. "What a delightful place it is!—so luxurious, so extravagant! It gives more the impression of—what shall I say?—of a Palais de Glace than of a shop. Only a few superb examples of the milliner's art, dotted among the many cushioned divans, proclaim it to be a rendezvous of the fashionable world in quest of adornment. And the *mannequins*!—

GREEN CHALK

they are like beautiful, human peacocks strutting about. But here . . . " The showwoman had returned, accompanied by a slim girl in a clinging black dress, whose purple red hair was in every respect unlike that of Marietta Bugnano.

Madame de Berci regarded her keenly and allowed her lips to twist into a momentary smile. Then she said: "The hat is pretty enough in the hand but not on red hair. Why not look at something black or white, *chère* Guilia?"

They did, and finally decided to have one made to order.

"And I will come back another day," Madame de Berci said, looking at a minute watch set in a ring on her finger, "to-day I have no time. Did you recognize the *mannequin*?" she asked on the way downstairs.

"No," the Contessa said. "Who was she? Her face did seem familiar."

"It was Claudia Stein!"

"Impossible!"

"I assure you it was. What a sensation that affair made when it all came out. And now no one remembers anything about it. How soon people forget."

CHAPTER XX

A WET autumn and bitterly cold winter and spring had been followed by a month of extravagantly blue skies and breathless heat, when one evening found Philip sitting under a dusty tree in the Luxembourg Gardens, pencil and sketchbook in hand. He heard the sound of a step upon the gravel path and, looking up, caught sight of Grace Yorke coming slowly towards him. A tiny white dog was tucked under her arm, round whose neck she had tied a vast cerulean bow, matching the flowers that loaded the brim of her hat and the long-handled sunshade she carried.

Smiling, she nodded to him and sat down on the bench beside him.

"What a charming dog," he remarked, closing his book.

"Thank God, you haven't begun by speaking about the weather!" she cried. "Everywhere I go I hear nothing but 'isn't it hot?' 'How hot it is!' 'Have you ever felt anything like the heat?' I am quite hot enough, as it is, without being reminded of it. Yes, isn't Sebastian too darling for words?"

"Why Sebastian?"

GREEN CHALK

"Because he is a martyr—look at the size of the thing I have tied round his neck and the fur coat which God has given him! Isn't it cruel?"

"It is rather," Philip agreed.

"What have you been drawing—may I look?"

She took the sketchbook from him, and found the figure of a tall woman standing alone on a sheet of white paper, with only a few straight, lamp-laden trees in the background.

"I don't see her anywhere," Grace said, looking up, "nor the trees nor the Japanese lanterns—only some silly children, and a silly, smelling pond, with a silly toy boat on it, and a ridiculous-looking nurse with checked strings to her cap. Did you invent it all? I see, but what does it mean—anything or nothing?"

"It is to be called the 'Devil in the Bois de Boulogne,'" he said.

"Now I see the cloven hoof, how very odd. And are these reflections in the water between the tree trunks?" she asked, beginning to draw meaningless shapes on the gravel path with the end of her sunshade, and added: "Mr. Lenormand, I am a disappointed woman."

"I'm sorry," he said, smiling, "but why?"

"This is the first time I have walked on this side of the river, last time I only came in my car to pay a call," she laughed, "and I quite expected to see apaches and all kinds of exciting things; instead I find nothing but children and nurses."

"The Quartier is an overrated place," Philip said.

GREEN CHALK

"It is. You see I have even brought my watchdog to protect me," Grace said, pressing an unappreciated kiss upon the small black nose, her hands clasped round the unfortunate animal's neck. "By the way, I've just discovered that I possess a talent I'd never even dreamed of having. I'm a prophet!"

"How very interesting. What have you been foretelling?"

"That Claudia Stein would do the wrong thing. Do you remember what I said to you about a year ago?"

"Quite well."

"Well, instead of selling exotic flowers on the pavement, she is selling ugly hats in a rather second-rate shop in the rue St. Honoré—the kind of place that no self-respecting woman has ever even heard of."

"Have you seen her?" he asked carelessly.

"Of course not. I wish I had. It would be almost worth while being economical to have the pleasure of seeing Claudia selling hats. 'This way, madame, we have something here which would suit madame to perfection,' " she mimicked.

"Poor Claudia, she always was a fool!"

She drew an irregular semi-circle with two dots in it and looked up.

"Don't you think so?"

"Think what?"

"That Claudia is a fool. Really I think I must go and see her, I might offer to engage her as my maid—my new one isn't altogether satisfactory.

GREEN CHALK

I can't remember the number, it's somewhere over a jeweller's shop. The Bugnano woman's niece told me about it, because, of course, no one who had reached the years of discretion would confess to having been there. Why haven't you been to see me all these months? You didn't want to, I suppose. You are very ungrateful, Mr. Lenormand, in underestimating what I did for you. Have you still a lofty contempt for your own success?"

He did not answer, but began absent-mindedly to dot in a feather on his devil's hat.

"Are you sure the devil is a woman?" Grace asked, receiving no answer to her other question.

"Not a woman," he said, "Woman with a capital letter."

"Then you hate all women?"

"I did not say so, the devil is not necessarily an unlovable character."

"Some day you must tell me your theories on good and evil; now I must go."

"I'm not a theorist," Philip said, getting up.

"So much the better, I hope you have no principles either, or if you have any I hope you don't live up to them. Do you? You are an idealist, aren't you?"

"I'm afraid I am," he confessed.

"That is not so bad," she said encouragingly.

"People with theories and principles are so unpicturesque and generally wear spectacles, but when they have ideals they never live up to them and always dress so well. Now good-bye."

They shook hands, and Philip watched her walk to the gate, where she turned and waved her hand to him. When she was out of sight, he also left the Gardens and hailed a taxi.

"Place du Palais Royal," he said to the driver.

He leant back in the corner. Of course, this was quite different from his journey to Rome. This was no confession of weakness, it was only right that he should meet her half-way. She had come back to Paris because he was there—there could be no other reason. Paris was the one place she would naturally have avoided, if some invincible influence had not drawn her there. Rome! He laughed aloud as he remembered her there, standing in the dusk before his picture of "Power." The power of his pictures was the force which had brought her back to the place where she had first seen them, where she knew they were still being made. Stein, too, had realized their effect on her and had been jealous of them—the painter had no reason to envy his own work, it was a part of himself.

He took out his watch and found that it was twenty minutes to seven. At what time did hat shops close? He had not the vaguest idea. The doors in the rue de Rivoli were still open, and he noticed people passing in and out. Grace Yorke had said that the shop was over a jeweller's—that it was called Héloïse. Probably it would take some time to find it, and he was determined to see her to-night; he would not wait another day, why waste more time?

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The taxi stopped outside the Hôtel du Louvre and Philip got out, paid the driver and crossed the street. He walked along the left-hand pavement, looking up at the houses opposite. There were many jewellers' shops, and already the lights in most of the windows were being turned on, lending brilliancy to the wares displayed there.

He walked to the end of the long street, his eyes searching the first floor windows for the name Grace Yorke had mentioned. Once he caught sight of one hat set high upon a brass rod behind a vast sheet of plate glass, but the shop under it was a stationer's and there was no jeweller's near it. At the end of the street he crossed and began again on the opposite pavement. Half way along the word "Modes," printed in white on a first floor window, caused him to stop. Yes; under it were the twinkling jewels he was looking for. He hurried to the other side of the street and entered the lower shop.

"Monsieur desires? . . ." said a bland voice from behind the counter.

"To know the name of the milliner who lives over here," Philip explained.

The shopman shrugged his shoulders in disappointed contempt.

"I don't know it," he said, "you must go upstairs if you want to find it out."

"She calls herself Madame Plumage," put in a more agreeable individual who had overheard the conversation.

GREEN CHALK

"Thanks," Philip said, and found his way into the street once more.

He was looking about him, discouraged, when he saw a woman dressed in black coming towards him. She was pale and very thin and carried a large cardboard box, which looked as if it might contain a hat. Philip took her for a milliner—perhaps she might be able to direct him to the shop called Héloïse.

He watched her approaching, her eyes seemingly set on some distant object, walking slowly like the embodied spirit of Grief—pale-faced, black dressed and veiled. Through the meshes of the veil Philip caught the glimmer of red hair.

She would have passed him, had he not touched her arm.

"Mrs. Stein!" he said.

She stared at him with something like a cry and tried to hurry on, murmuring over her shoulder: "You are making some mistake, I am not Mrs. Stein, my name is"

"Come back!"

Claudia took two steps forward, hesitated and stood still with downcast eyes. He noticed that her lips were moving . . .

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"Yes," Claudia said, "I know you. Please let me go."

"Where to?"

"Home," she whispered, her eyes still fixed on the pavement.

He noticed her disengaged hand move quickly

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towards a triangular patch on her dress, which she tried to hide from him ; had he been still more observant, he would have perceived that it was the same dress she had worn on the morning of Stein's departure.

" Where do you live ? " he asked.

She hesitated and then said :

" Here, in this street. Won't you let me go ? "

" But I am not preventing you from going anywhere," he said, smiling.

She caught her breath, murmured something inarticulate and went on. He watched her until she disappeared into a house a few yards further on, and then followed her as far as the doorway, where he stopped a second to note the number and hail a passing cab.

CHAPTER XXI

PHILIP knocked twice at the door before he heard the familiar voice call to him to come in.

He found himself in a room, which had once been two small rooms joined by a door. This had been removed, but the partition was still there ; and because of it Philip could not see the woman who sat on the bed placed against the outer wall of the second room. The ceiling curved from the top of the wall, on his right, to the floor at the other side, making it impossible to stand up in the left half of either of the rooms. The three walls and the ceiling were painted a dull white, and the red tiled floors were partly covered by matting. A scarlet and gold Indian shawl cut off the low side of the first room, making the higher part into a passage leading to the room beyond. There were two windows, each about three feet square, one placed close above the bed, the other—which had two small, withered rose-trees in pots standing on a narrow shelf in front of it—was in the higher wall of the first room.

Philip noticed all these details, as he passed slowly from the door to the aperture which

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connected the two tiny chambers. Claudia was twisting pieces of wire together with the help of a pair of pincers. A guttering candle stood on the table beside her, and some crumpled paper and pieces of hat-straw lay on the floor at her feet. A curtain of yellow silk was nailed to the window-frame.

"May I come in?" Philip asked.

"Why have you come here?" Claudia cried, letting her work fall on the bed.

"You did not forbid me to," he said, "in fact you did not even ask me to stay away. I wrote almost a week ago for permission to come, but got no answer."

"I did not get your letter."

"That was not my fault—I addressed it to 'Madame Stein, 201 rue St. Honoré,' Philip explained.

"I am known as Mrs. Dale here," she told him, colouring, and added quickly: "I wish you had not come."

"I'm sorry. Shall I go away again at once, or may I sit down?" He looked round for a chair, but he found that the black-covered bed was the only thing in the room upon which it was possible to sit, so he sank down beside Claudia, leaning against the yellow curtain.

"I always take silence to mean assent—am I wrong?"

"I could not force you to go away, even if I wanted to," Claudia said.

There was a momentary silence between them,

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while Philip picked up the frame which Claudia had been making when he came in.

"What an amazing work of art," he remarked.

"I'm a *modiste*," was all Claudia said.

"It must be more amusing making hats than painting pictures," Philip said, smiling, "can a man be a *modiste*? The weak point of pictures is that one cannot walk round them and look at the other side; at least, if one does, one finds only the back of a frame."

He caught sight of a small canvas in a narrow black frame hanging on the wall which separated the two rooms. He remembered that Stein had taken it away from the studio shortly before he left Paris for Aix. He had told Stein that it was a picture of the feeling which lies between hope and realization—in a little while he would paint another picture, and this time it should not depict an intermediate state.

"I like your new apartment enormously," he said.

"Do you? The rent is not prohibitive—one hundred and sixty francs a year," she told him. "When I found it, there were two holes in the walls through which one could see daylight."

"I want to ask you so many questions," he said, "but, if you'd rather not answer them, don't do it. Why did you say you wished I had not come here?"

"I don't know," she answered, looking puzzled. "Perhaps because I am ashamed of being poor."

"What I don't know about poverty isn't

GREEN CHALK

worth knowing ; besides, I don't think that was the reason, was it ? ”

“ I don't know,” she repeated.

“ When I lived on a fifth floor in Soho I could not afford white paint for my walls. I remember once I was so hard up that I couldn't even buy a piece of green chalk to colour a woman's eyes. How long have you been here ? ”

“ About ten months, I think,” she said, reflecting. “ Or is it longer ? I spent several weeks in London after leaving Rome, and then came back here.”

“ Was it because of Rome and what I said to you there that you didn't want me to come and see you ? ”

“ Rome ? ” she repeated, looking puzzled again.

“ Yes, were you thinking of the things I said to you there ? ”

“ What did you say ? I don't remember that either.”

He did not believe her, but decided to change the subject.

“ Do you like London ? ”

“ No, I hate it, but then I hated Paris too, when I came here first.”

“ When did you discover your mistake ? ” he asked.

“ I think I realized it when I left it, it seemed to call to me and I simply had to come back.”

“ Yes.”

“ It has a great fascination for many people ; my mother, for instance, adores it. She's living

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in Geneva now. Poor mother! I'm glad there's enough money left for her. Not, of course, as much as she needs. She writes sometimes, saying how much she feels the change."

Philip had never seen Mrs. Badminton-Dale, but he had heard Stein and Grace Yorke speak of her, and could imagine well enough the kind of woman she was. He pictured her going from hotel to hotel making friends with those who might be of use to her, only to find herself dropped suddenly, and unable to understand why. What right had she to live in comparative luxury while her daughter worked in a sixth floor garret.

"Why has she not been living with you?"

Claudia laughed sadly, but offered no explanation beyond, "You do not know my mother, do you?"

She took up the pincers again and went on with her work.

"Tell me more about the call of Paris," Philip said. "What does it say? Can it be expressed in words?"

"It says different things to different people, it promises to give each one whatever he or she most wants."

"And does it keep its promises?"

"I don't know, it is hard to realize exactly what it is one does want. When I came here, I needed work and I found it in a milliner's shop along this street. The woman who keeps it said that my hair was the right colour for showing off black hats, so I do that in the day time and make

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these shapes at night when I get home. It's rather a second-rate shop, that is its chief merit as far as I am concerned, because the people I used to know don't go there; only once two women came in I'd seen before and they didn't recognize me, I think. I was very lucky to find work," she added, threading a needle close against the candle. "I suppose it's ridiculous to be ashamed of being seen. Poverty isn't a crime, is it?"

He watched her with her head bent over her work, the light from the flickering candle playing on her hair. He could not understand her: in Rome she had been furious with him; a week ago, when he had met her in the street, she had entreated him to let her go; now she was talking to him in a friendly way about things of no particular importance.

"It isn't a crime," he said, "but it's very inconvenient, especially if it comes after riches. In the days when I was a paper boy—about the time you saw me run down in Oxford Street—I didn't mind being poor, because I'd never known anything else. My mother got to know privation only when she was grown up; that and other things helped to kill her when she was twenty-five."

"Tell me about your mother."

"I don't think I will, you might not understand the 'other things' yet," he said. "Do you think you would?"

"How can I tell? I don't know what they are."

GREEN CHALK

" May I come back some day and tell you about her ? "

" Why should I understand in a week's time what I would not understand now ? "

" That is true."

" She was French, wasn't she ? " Claudia asked.

" Yes, she was born and brought up here in Paris."

" Your name is French. Did she marry one of her own countrymen ? I don't know why, but I always imagined that you were half English," she said, laying her needle on the table.

" My father was an Englishman with Jewish blood in his veins," he told her. " My mother did not marry anybody, do you blame her ? "

" Why should I ? I think she deserves pity more than blame," she answered, frowning. " Do you like the way I have arranged these mauve lilacs in that blue china vase ? "

" To mix mauve and blue is an obvious originality," he said, frowning also.

The noise of the traffic outside irritated him, and he closed the window. Had this year of poverty done nothing to educate the humanity in her ? He got up and walked across the small room and stood with his back to Claudia, gazing blindly at the name " George Stein," which was painted in long, red letters in one corner of his picture.

" . . . I don't know why it is, but I dislike the scent of lilacs," he heard Claudia saying, " only they are rather beautiful, and one can

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hardly find anything else being sold on the streets at this time of year ; roses are only to be got in the shops now."

He half turned and looked at her reflection in the mirror, fixed above the small fire-place.

"We are wasting time," Philip said, coming and standing close beside her. "Why did you come back to Paris ?"

She looked up at him, puzzled by the irrelevance of his question.

"Because I love it."

"The attraction of Paris as a town has nothing to do with it, you know that," he said. "Why did you pretend to have forgotten what I said to you in Rome ? You know that you cannot keep away from Paris because the pictures—my pictures—are here, and the man who painted them. This is the last time I shall talk to you like this."

"Now I remember about Rome," she said, frowning. "How dared you say such things to me ? How dare you come here and begin all over again ? I suppose you think, because I am poor, you can treat me as you like !"

"It is I who have reason to be angry," Philip interposed. "You are being unfair to me as well as to yourself. You are simply wasting both our lives because of . . ."

She interrupted : "Because I have a little self-respect."

"It isn't that ! It's simply madness."

"I am not mad, though you are doing your best

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to drive me to madness. Haven't I suffered enough without this ? "

" Your suffering is self-imposed," Philip said. " You will not take the one thing that would satisfy you. Why ? "

" How do you know what would satisfy me ? I don't even know myself."

Absent-mindedly she picked up her needle and began tying knots in the thread.

" I know because I have watched you," he said. " Your marriage with Stein was in itself a proof. You married the man you thought had painted the pictures you love ; when you discovered that he hadn't painted them at all you sent him away. In Rome I saw you standing before one of them, trying, I suppose, to take a final farewell of them. Why did you come back to Paris ? Again, because of the pictures—and the painter. You simply cannot keep away from them, and you cannot love them without loving me. Isn't it true ? "

" No, no ! And if it were it would make no difference. There are some things a woman cannot do, and this is one of them. If I were free . . . "

" Free ! " he echoed scornfully. " You make me very angry when you talk like that. Everyone is free to do what he knows is right."

" But this isn't right ! "

" How slowly your soul develops," Philip said. " I've waited now for fourteen years, and you still talk to me about freedom and convention and

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right and wrong. What do these things matter ?
We love each other, isn't that enough ? "

" I don't love you ; I hate you."

" You do love me," he protested, " I know it
and so do you ; I have proved it to you."

" You have not," her fingers were still busy
with the piece of thread.

" Did you love George Stein ? "

There was a long silence then Claudia said :

" When I married him I thought I loved him."

" When you thought he had painted the
pictures," he said. " In Rome you confessed that
it was the pictures you loved."

" In Rome, did I ? It seems such a long time
since I was in Rome. Everything I did and said
and heard there has grown indistinct."

" Why will you not come to me ? I painted
the pictures."

" If I came to you it would be a sin, and there
is nothing beautiful in sin."

" Love is the most beautiful thing in life," he
protested, " such love as my mother gave to my
father—love which is complete in itself."

" I won't listen to you," Claudia cried, covering
her ears with her hands.

" I have no more to say. You may come to me
or not just as you please."

" I can't hear you," she said, " it is useless to go
on talking."

He took both her hands in both of his and drew
them towards him. " I have nothing more to
say," he repeated.

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"Then go away. I, too, have finished."

"Do you understand what you are doing?" he asked sadly.

"Yes, I will never see you again; I wish I had never met you; you have insulted me. Let go my hands."

"I am glad I have insulted you," he said, freeing her and stepping back. "It is much less than you deserve. I hate your contemptible little soul almost as much as I have always loved your body. You have disappointed me most bitterly. God! if you only knew how I have loved your image all these years! I pictured you as a human being and I found a china ornament, prettily enough painted but badly finished off—a thing which one can only look at from the outside. You have spoilt my life and my art; I don't believe I shall ever paint again."

"No, no," she protested, "not that! You must not do that! Can't you think of me as you did before you knew me?"

"How can I? The woman I painted had a soul, or I believed her to have one. Now that I know she has none . . ."

"Oh God! What have I done?"

"Nothing of importance, the world won't come to an end because I shall never paint again."

He waited almost breathlessly to see the effect of his words. He watched the quivering white lips and nervously working hands. Surely, if she believed that her presence was necessary to his art, she would not refuse to come to him.

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She said some words, which were muffled in a sob, and was silent again.

"You will?" he cried.

She shook her head.

"You said you would, I saw your lips moving."

"I can't do it," she gasped.

"You mean that you cannot spoil my art," he insisted.

"No, no, it will not be spoiled. I wish I could do what you ask. If only you understood, it isn't because I don't love you or because I haven't a soul. You are driving me mad . . ."

"In that case, there is no more to be said," he remarked, coldly. "I had better go away at once. I will not—not trouble you again."

"I can't come, I can't come," she sobbed, again and again.

"I don't think I want you to, now," he said.

"I have no use for a china ornament, I should probably break it if I had it. I want the flesh and blood woman who was the inspiration of my art. Where is she? Are you sure that she has never existed? You are so exactly like her in face and form, I can hardly realize that you are some one so totally different."

He watched the slim weeping figure bent over the table, the wonderful hair lying in disorder beside the flickering candle. Why did he not go away since all had been said that could be said? This beautiful girl was hateful to him because she was physically so like the woman he had loved. What was he waiting for? Would she even now

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say the words that would prove her to be, after all, the woman of his dreams?

"Claudia," he said.

She neither spoke nor looked at him, but went on sobbing, with her untidy hair perilously near the flame of the candle.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Stein."

For a moment longer he stood there watching her almost dispassionately. After all, this girl was nothing to him, he was merely wasting time standing there listening to her vain sobs. All the same, he was glad that her face with its deep green eyes was hidden from him.

Claudia heard him pass into the other room and go out. She heard the door close and his step on the stairs.

"Wait," she called, "I do want to make you understand. Philip! Philip!"

The footsteps died away.

"Philip!"

She called his name many times . . .

"I am glad he did not come back," she told herself, "I do not want to see him again. It is finished, absolutely. How dared he say such things to me? How dared he!"

Nevertheless, she opened the door. There was nothing but silence in the house. She peered through the dusty window, over the sink which was on the landing, but in the darkness outside there was nothing to be seen.

She re-entered her room and sat down again on the low bed, leaning her head against the yellow

GREEN CHALK

curtain. How hot it was ! Why had the window been shut ? She opened it and leant out for a moment over the sill, grateful for the cool night wind.

She felt ashamed, because she knew herself how hard it had been for her to refuse, how nearly she had yielded. Everything he had said to her had been true : she had married an artist ; she had loved the painter of the " Woman Who Might Have Been " since the day she had first seen it. And yet she was George Stein's wife ; this was the fact which Philip had ignored but which she could not forget.

She was glad that she had not gone . . .

The candle sputtered and went out. Sitting in the darkness, a great fear took possession of her : she felt that there was some one in the room, close beside her, some one who was drawing her away . . .

Something soft touched her hand. Claudia shrank further in to the corner, terrified. She felt it again and gave a cry.

" I won't come ! I won't come ! "

There was no answer. The yellow silk curtain, which the draught from the window had blown against her hand, was quite still now. For a long time the girl crouched in the darkness, holding her breath. At last she summoned enough courage to reach for the matches, and striking one held it up. After all, she was alone in the room.

She lit another candle, which stood on the mantelpiece, and caught sight of her own white

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face in the glass—an extravagance bought in the Louvre for sixty-one francs. For a moment she fancied she saw something moving in the room behind her, and again felt that something was drawing her, urging her to come away with it. She glanced over her shoulder, half expecting to see Philip; but there was no one there. Had she in truth wronged both herself and the man who loved her? Should she have gone? Was it too late? A great longing seized her to go to him, to tell him that after all she had the passionate soul of the woman of his dreams, to whom love was everything in the world. Involuntarily she turned towards the door. She felt that the invisible presence in the room was smiling.

She caught the mantelpiece with both hands.

"No, I won't come, I won't . . ."

The sound of her own voice startled her. She stood rigid before the reflection of her face, framed in a mass of disordered hair, gazing into her own terrified green eyes.

She felt that she was losing time, that she should be doing something, going somewhere. Some one had told her she was wasting time.

She found her hat, which she had hidden with the rest of her clothes behind the red and gold curtain. Putting it on, she blew out the candle, and groped her way to the door.

The stairs seemed endless.

The strains of a popular waltz came to her, now loud, now soft, as the swing-doors of a brightly lighted *café* at the end of the street opened and

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closed. Men and women were sipping their coffee and absinth round small tables on the pavement outside.

She crossed the Place du Palais Royal and turned into the rue de Rivoli. A man on the edge of the pavement jostled her and threw her a mocking smile.

"Where are you going?" he called after her.

She hurried on, trying to forget another mocking smile, which grew clearer with each step.

Where *was* she going? She found herself crossing the street and entering the Louvre.

As she passed a group of loiterers, she heard one say: "Listen to that woman talking to herself! *Tiens!* she must be mad!"

Claudia stood looking into the depths of the still, silent river, with its reflections of lamps and a yellow full moon.

There was something enticing about the gold spot—it moved a little as the wind caught the surface of the water.

She knew that she wanted to go down to it and hold it still, and that by so doing she would die, and afterwards there would be no more hunger and poverty and sorrow. The force which was dragging her somewhere against her will would lose its strength. She had only to go down to the full, yellow moon and the water with the reflections of lamps, and afterwards nothing would matter . . . Besides, he didn't want her now, he had said so, and she had no soul. She was very glad she had no soul, because it meant that

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the closing of the spangled water over her head would be the end of everything. She wondered if the water would be very cold . . .

She crossed to the other bank of the river. To the left, some stone steps led down to the water's edge.

GREEN CHALK

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Philip reached the studio, he found a woman sitting in an arm-chair smoking a cigarette. Her feet were on the table and when he came in she did not change her position—she only turned her head and smiled at him over her shoulder. It was Suzanne.

"Ah, Monsieur Philip, *comment ça va* ? You see I have come back."

"I do," he said dryly.

"I have a little time at my disposal. You still paint, yes ?"

"No."

"No ? You surprise me. I was going to offer you my services."

"As I no longer paint, I also have no need for a model."

Philip took off his hat and coat and threw them on the couch.

"What a pity," she said in English.

"I did not know you were a linguist."

She gave a little sigh and untied a red cotton handkerchief.

"Have a cigarette ?"

Philip took it and offered her one of his.

GREEN CHALK

"So you never paint now," she mused. "How very odd. And yet the studio looks the same—the very same. When did you stop?"

"This afternoon."

"Then you were only joking," she laughed.

"I don't know, perhaps I shall paint again, after all. It is good to have something to do."

"And the woman with the red hair, what of her?" Suzanne asked gravely.

"I may paint again, but not the woman with the red hair."

"You do not love her now?"

He did not answer, but turned round for matches.

"I'm sorry for her," she said. "It was not her fault. Have you had news from—from him?"

"George Stein?" Philip asked, lighting a match.

"Yes, where is he?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"That is what I said."

"Has he left Paris?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"I begged him to take me with him, and when he refused I thought my grief would kill me," she told him, untying the handkerchief again. "But now I think perhaps I am glad I didn't go. Once I loved him very dearly, now I'm not sure whether I love him or not. After all, what is love?"

GREEN CHALK

Nothing but a shadow, and yet people call it immortal! One cannot have a shadow without sunshine—there is no real love in the world."

"I wish there were none," Philip said.

"So you still think that you love your green-eyed one, you are just the same as you were more than a year ago. Why do you not paint her now?"

"The world was beginning to doubt my power of versatility," Philip said.

"I don't believe that that is the reason," Suzanne cried.

"I cannot help your incredulity."

"Do you think I have changed?"

"Not much."

"In character, I mean."

"I haven't had much chance of finding that out. Perhaps you have become more philosophical."

"Perhaps I have," she blew out a cloud of smoke through her nose. "Still, I wonder if a man who loved me a year and a half ago would love me now?"

"I expect he would."

"Do you know where Gummy is?"

"I don't even know who he is."

"Nor you do, I forgot that. He's a tall, dark man, with a cat and a fiddle and a great heart."

"Then I do know him—slightly," Philip said, smiling.

"You do!" she exclaimed, surprised.

"He came here one night after you'd gone. He seemed to be thirsting for George Stein's blood."

GREEN CHALK

"The poor Gummy! He is jealous like the rest of us, except you."

"You think it is not one of my faults then?"

"It is not a fault. Do you think, monsieur; that if I put a notice in the *Matin* he would see it?"

"How do I know?"

"You know nothing, nothing, nothing!" she complained. "And to-night you are in a bad temper."

"My idol has feet of clay," he said. "It is enough to make anyone in a bad temper."

"What does it mean?"

"It is a platitude; it means that the woman has still red hair but not yet a soul—that she never will have a soul."

"Ah!" Suzanne said thoughtfully. "Is that why you no longer paint her?"

"That is the reason."

"I am sorry for her, and yet I hate her!"

"Still, why?"

"You men never understand anything! I said that now I did not want my Englishman, but does that mean that I want her to have him?"

"She has not got him. She has nothing but a conscience."

"True, she has not got him now, but once she had him and it was then that I wanted him. You comprehend nothing except your painting of the red-haired woman."

"I will never paint her again, she is dead."

GREEN CFALK

"Dead!" she exclaimed in astonishment.

"Why did you not tell me that before?"

"When I say that she is dead, I mean that she has never lived."

"How funny you are! Now you talk in riddles. What does it matter? If you do not want to paint her again, you must paint me as you did before. The day you painted me for the first and last time. *Mon Dieu!* Shall I ever forget it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if you did."

"Tell me, shall I come again?"

"If you like."

"And Vanda, do you know what happened to Vanda?"

"Yes, she got an engagement to dance on Montmartre."

"I know, but after?"

"I don't know."

"I do. The proprietor of the *café* on Montparnasse became a widower and married her. Now she has twins and is as fat as that!" She blew out her cheeks. "Now I do not hate her any more—now that she cannot dance. Like Gummy, I am jealous!"

She gazed dreamily in front of her, through a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"What have you been doing all this time?" Philip asked, sitting down on the table.

"I have had a long illness since I saw you."

"What—another touch of fever?"

"You are thinking of the day I found Vanda

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here! No, it was not only fever. It was just a great longing to die, which was not quite strong enough to kill me. I listened outside the door that morning when he came and told you that the green-eyed woman had sent him away. I have not posed for English and American students all these years without learning to understand something of their languages, you see. When he came out I begged him not to go alone, I could not bear the thought. I would have done anything, gone anywhere, because I loved him. But he would not take me with him. I wonder if he is sorry now."

"So you loved him as much as that?"

"More than that! As I told you, when he refused to take me I only wanted to die. I went away from Paris, and it rained and rained and I became very ill. Then some play-acting people found me and took me in and nursed me. I was angry afterwards, because I had so much wanted to die."

"And then?"

"Then I didn't seem to mind so much about anything, I was very happy with the players. I used to take the money at the doors when they had their performances," she said, "then when the old grandmother died I came away. How I hate death!"

She blew out long puffs of smoke and watched them vanishing into air.

"It is like that—this life of ours. When we live we are very white and beautiful, and after-

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wards we are nothing—sometimes not even a memory.”

She got up and stretched herself.

“And yet you wanted to die because of George Stein!”

“It was because I loved him so—more than I hated death.”

“And now you are going to advertise in the *Matin* for a man with a cat and a fiddle and a great heart! I wish I were a woman.”

“To-morrow I will come again,” she said, ignoring his remark. “Shall it be at nine as before?”

“All right.”

“There is one thing I cannot understand, that I want you to explain to me,” she said, lingering in the doorway. “Will you?”

“Perhaps.”

“Why does the red-haired woman not come to you if you have loved her all these years?”

“I do not understand that myself,” Philip said.

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CHAPTER XXIII

"**W**HY did you bring me here ? I wanted to die."

Claudia and Suzanne sat facing each other in the room overlooking the quay. The fire threw great black shadows on to the ceiling and walls.

"How could I stand by and see another woman take her own life ? " the model asked.

"You need not have seen me."

"I could not help seeing you. From the way you glanced over your shoulder as you ran down the steps, I knew what was in your mind. My own mother drowned herself in the same river, madame."

Holding out her slim hands to the fire, Claudia said :

"My life is my own and I hate it ; I have a right to die."

"In a week's time you will think differently," Suzanne said. "Now you are ill."

"You called me by my name a little while ago. How do you know it ? I don't remember having seen you before."

Suzanne lighted a cigarette in the flame of the candle on the mantelpiece, and sat down on the floor at Claudia's feet. She did not speak at once,

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but pulled the large gold ring in her ear thoughtfully, while she blew little clouds of smoke towards the fire.

"I'm not surprised that you do not know me," she said at last, "because I don't think you ever saw me before."

"But you have seen me?"

"Only once. It was about a year and a half ago."

"Yet you recognized me, and I thought I was so changed."

"But not the colour of your hair. One does not easily forget that," she said smiling, as she looked at Claudia's hair shining in the fire-light.

As Suzanne looked at the pale-faced woman in her worn black dress, she wondered how she had once envied her. Even the thin hands with their needle-pricked fingers were pathetic.

"A year and a half ago," Claudia repeated. "How different things were then! I have nothing to live for now. Why did you not let me die?"

She threw the question angrily at Suzanne. Who was this girl who had dragged her back to the hideous world? She thought of the yellow moon moving a little on the surface of the water. She wondered if it were still there . . .

"Once I, too, wanted to die," Suzanne said gently. "But now I am contented."

"Who are you?"

"I am an artist's model," the girl told her. "My name is Suzanne."

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The name meant nothing to Claudia, nor did she feel any particular interest in the woman who sat at her feet blowing out clouds of cigarette smoke, which vanished in the smoke of the fire. Only she knew that she disliked her intensely, because she had brought her there. She wanted to get up and go away, but for some reason she sat still; it was less trouble to sit there watching the flames which leapt up and down and the girl's monotonous movements as she raised the cigarette to her mouth. To-morrow night the moon would still be there . . .

"Is it not strange that your head should so often have appeared on my shoulders?" she heard her saying. "I was quite jealous of you once because Monsieur Lenormand preferred your head to mine."

"You know him!"

Suzanne's resentment and hate and jealousy were dead. She did not grudge Claudia her few months of happiness. If she could have taken Stein away from her now, she would not have done it. She longed to comfort her, to persuade her that, after all, there was something in her life worth having. She drew a little nearer to Claudia and laid her hand on her knee.

"I know him well, madame," she said earnestly, "I have been his model for years. I have watched him painting the woman he adores; with every stroke of the brush he gives her his love. His work is himself and he has given it all to her. I once thought that to love was every-

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thing, to be loved, nothing. Madame, believe me, it is not so. Love such as he gives you and has always given you is worth living for. His pictures are the outpouring of his soul, but for you they would never have been. His work is passion! Let him love you! Such love is worth having. If you have loved some one else forget about him—I, too, have done that . . . ”

She felt the knee under her hand grow rigid. The languor had gone out of Claudia's eyes and she held her lower lip tightly between her teeth. The model only smiled, her words were having effect.

“Go to him, madame,” she went on, “let him fill your life with his wonderful love. Perhaps he has never even spoken to you of it—he is so strange, I cannot understand him sometimes—but, believe me, he adores you with all his soul. He has told me so, so many times. He is only . . . ”

The expression on Claudia's face made her break off suddenly. Her eyes were staring straight in front of her, green and glassy. Hoarse words came between the slightly parted lips:

“After all I am dead and yet it is not finished, after all I had a soul and now it is in torment. Why did he say I had no soul? Don't touch me. Don't touch me! Your fingers are burning me! . . . Why did you say he loves me? He told me himself that . . . ”

She stood up, swayed, and fell at Suzanne's feet.

CHAPTER XXIV

NINE o'clock struck, and ten and eleven, but Suzanne did not come. Philip did not care, in fact he was glad of her absence: the model reminded him too much of the things he was determined to forget; besides he could get on well enough without her. He tore a page out of his sketch book, pinned it to the canvas propped on an easel, and began to draw. He liked the subject: the she-devil expressed in long straight lines, the jewelled dress open at one side showing the cloven hoof, the great hat with its enormous plume, and the raised, claw-like hand with its immense rings.

Art for art's sake! He repeated the words aloud, laughing at their futility. And once he had been contented to work in obscurity, in order that another man might become rich and famous, his only compensation being the perfecting of his art. Even now, but for five finger marks on a wet canvas and a blundering explanation, he would have been signing his pictures with another man's name. He knew now that Steer's wife would never have guessed, had she lived with her husband for half a century. He had estimated her wrongly—had given her credit for discernment, which she did not possess.

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Having finished his drawing he took up his brushes and began to paint, making a background of dark trees, with a vague, lighted building reflected in water seen between the straight, slim trunks.

In future art should be to him a means to an end—nothing more. The pictures should go to the highest bidder. He would leave the Impasse du Maine and take a studio somewhere else, a large studio, which should be filled with beautiful things. He would paint beautiful pictures, which would become world famous, and other pictures of women with red hair and lustful, hideous green eyes. Perhaps Stein's wife would see the soulless beings who had hair the colour of her own. He hoped she would: he wanted to hurt her, to make her suffer the disillusionment which she had made him suffer; he wanted her to see that she was not indispensable to his art. Had she come to him at that moment, he would have told her so.

He splashed some crimson on to the canvas and shaded it with a bluish colour—a parody on Claudia's hair. The narrowed eyes leered from under the brim of the hat. The lips, disgustingly red, were parted in an ugly smile . . .

That afternoon, Philip called, unbidden, at the flat in the rue Picot. Yes, he was told, Lady Grace Yorke was at home. Would he come in? He did, and was left in a large room darkened by sun-blinds, while the servant went in search of his mistress.

He looked about him critically, liking the colour

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effect, but condemning the scent of lilacs as being overdone. Books by Oscar Wilde stood on a shelf beside the poems of Ernest Dowson and W. E. Henley ; on the shelf below he found Byron sandwiched between yellow-backed French novels and a copy of the Koran. He heard the door open and Grace come in.

"Have I kept you waiting long? I am so sorry," she said, shaking hands.

"Not a bit," he assured her. "I've been looking at your books. How is Sebastian?"

He dropped her hand, and watched her settle herself comfortably in a low arm-chair. Then she said :

"I don't know, I expect he's dead by this time. He got ill, so I gave him to my maid to do what she liked with as long as she did it anywhere but in my apartment. I hate things when they are ill. It is as well I had no children—I would have made a present of them to anybody as each one developed its first tooth. How is the devil in the Bois de Boulogne getting on?"

"I've been working on her all day," he told her, "She has at present got a head but nothing besides."

"That is the way with all self-respecting she-devils," Grace said, wondering why Philip had called. "Has she red hair?"

"Of course."

"We have a new red-haired *débutante* here just now—the Bugnano girl who told me of Claudia's whereabouts. Would you like to meet her?"

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He offered her a cigarette, and answered in the affirmative.

"She has white eyelashes, does that matter?"

Grace took a cigarette and tapped it on the arm of her chair.

"That can always be remedied," he said.

"Yes, and she has some good qualities too—her complexion and her banking account."

"She sounds most attractive."

"Yes, for practical purposes but not as an ornament."

"I'm looking for a . . ."

"For a match? You'll find a box in the bowl on the mantelpiece."

"No, not matches, I've got some," Philip said, producing one from his pocket and striking it on the sole of his boot. "I'm looking for a wife."

There was a pause in the conversation, which lasted for the fraction of a minute, then Grace said:

"What are the necessary qualifications?"

She smiled up at him.

"Physically she must be striking," he said, sitting down, "either strikingly beautiful or strikingly ugly, it does not matter which. In character she must be . . . well, she simply mustn't have any character at all. I want her to be rich, because it is more satisfactory to take what other people want than to take what nobody wants, *not* because I particularly need money."

Grace half closed her eyes, and lay back as if considering the matter.

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"And your heart, does that come into the question at all?" she asked.

"If she is as I have described, I shall adore her passionately."

"Any age limit?"

"None," he said, "in particular, that is, if her age doesn't interfere with the other rules of the game. If she were very old, no one would covet her."

She asked languidly:

"Are widows disqualified?"

"Certainly not."

"Whatever her name is, Bugnano has red hair, a good complexion and, as I said before, white eyelashes. Her figure is—nothing in particular. She is rich, but, as far as I know, has not filled anyone with burning desire. Does she sound out of the question?"

"I don't know, the absence of character is so important."

"You ask a lot," she said. "Besides you would have to live with the woman for half a lifetime before you were sure that she had no personality—and that isn't done."

"It certainly won't be done in my case, because I want to marry the lady as soon as possible."

"Then she will have to be ready-made, with the price plainly marked. By the way, how much are you going to pay?"

"A life-long devotion and as much money as she wants—within reason," he said.

They both seemed perfectly serious: Philip

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because he really was in earnest ; Grace because she always made a point of adapting her moods to suit those of the people she was talking to.

" I cannot choose for you," she said, " you are asking so much."

" I am ambitious."

" O-oh ! "

She filled the drawn out exclamation with meaning, and watched him keenly. His remark was a confession of his obligation to her, was the rest of his conversation a preface to a settlement of the debt ? He was famous, she was notorious ; he could ask any price he liked for his pictures, she could not afford to pay for one half of the jewels she was wearing at that moment ; he had a future, she had a past. She lay back in her chair, and smiled at him through her half-closed eyelids.

" Yes," he said, lighting another cigarette, "and now I am grateful to you for having dirtied your fingers on a wet canvas. I came here to tell you so."

" So you have found that the cup of success is sweet after all," Grace said, holding out her hand for a match.

He got up and brought it to her lighted, while she put the cigarette between her lips and leaned forward. She touched his hand with her cool, pink-tipped fingers.

" Yes," he said, " but with me it was an acquired taste."

" Now will you tell me your object in letting

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George Stein get the credit of painting your pictures all those years ? " she asked.

" It was a bargain," he told her. " When I was a boy, I was a fool and thought that the perfecting of my art would satisfy me. He got me trained as a painter—the other part of the compact you already know."

" But you took so long to realize that art alone did not satisfy you ! How was it possible, or was it only a pose ? "

" I only realized it fully last night," was his only explanation.

" Then you did not waste much time in coming to acknowledge your obligation," she said, smiling.

" So your discovery has brought with it a generous desire to share your success with some striking-looking, coveted nonentity ? " she added.

" Yes," he said, smiling back at her. " Are you going to help me ? "

" God made me beautiful," she said, stretching out her white, jewelled hand towards him, " but he gave me a personality too."

There was another silence between them ; this time it lasted for fully a minute, then Philip said :

" He is an unjust God, and gives one woman nothing and the next a beautiful face, a perfect form, an irresistible personality and the most subtle of temperaments. If He had treated you with justice, dear lady, he would have stopped when he had moulded your perfect feet. As I do not hold with the theory ' a man has a right to

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take his own life,' and as I am not good enough to die young, I must content myself with cursing God."

He took the outstretched hand in his and got up.

"Must you really go now?" she added, the smile—slightly stiffened—still on her lips. "Won't you stay and have tea with me?"

"I wish I could, but really I haven't time," he said, "I'm going to look for a new studio."

"An *atelier* too?"

"Yes; as you say, the Quartier is dull and very overrated. I'm going to try to get one within reasonable distance of the Champs-Élysées. There is something fascinating about the Champs-Élysées at night time, with its two converging belts of lights. Don't you think so?"

"Take my advice," she said, gaily, "and find your wife first and your house afterwards. If not, you will have all your trouble over again—she is sure to prefer a house in the next street or even the one next door."

"My wife will have no character, and consequently no opinions or preferences," he corrected.

"I had forgotten," she laughed, "what a model wife yours was going to be."

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Two nights later Philip again saw Grace, this time a vision in emerald green which floated past him to the lilt of the "Eternal Valse." He stood at the entrance to the marquee watching the dancers with interest and intent, with the

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exception of the men who for the moment did not matter to him.

The music stopped and he found himself lost in a crowd of people bound for the cool lamp-lit garden. A green *suède* glove touched his arm and Grace said :

" I didn't expect to see you here to-night."

" I don't often come to this sort of thing," he said, " but I had nothing in particular to do."

" So you came to hunt. Have you marked your prey yet ? I have sent my partner to look for a fan which never existed, so I will give you good advice. In the first place, if any one offers you champagne, refuse it—it's quite the worst I ever tasted. What did you think of the girl in pink who passed us just now, is she ugly enough ? "

" No, she is merely plain and fat. Besides, my mind is practically made up."

" Already ? " she cried, in mock surprise. " Do point her out to me."

" She is standing at the door on the other side of the tent, talking to a fair man with red eyes," he said.

She raised her *lorgnette* for a moment, and dropped it again with a little scream.

" Mademoiselle Bartkowska ! She's thirty if she's a day ! "

" All the same, her face is the most perfectly ugly one I have ever seen, it pleases me enormously. Only I am afraid that she must have character." , " She has the reputation of being the ugliest

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woman and the best dancer in Paris," Grace said.

"She dances on air."

"And I dance on my partners' toes, so that will not be a bond of union."

"You speak as if the thing were already decided," she laughed.

"She has the most remarkable face I have ever seen," Philip said. "Have you noticed it from the side? Most jaws are more or less at right angles to the profile—hers is at an angle of 60°. It's like a cat's. And her eyes are like a cat's too—amazingly far apart and sometimes narrow and sometimes round. Look at the length of her mouth, and there is a quarter of an inch between her front teeth. Her face is as white as paper! And the hideousness of the whole is emphasized by the tightly swathed black hair. She is grotesque!"

"Is it the kind of face which would look well across the breakfast table?" she questioned.

"People with no character always get up in time for breakfast."

"I will train her to have it in bed," he said, perfectly seriously. "The thing that pleases me most," he went on, "is that Mademoiselle—what did you say her name was?"

"Bartkowska."

"... is that Mademoiselle Bartkowska combines the sublimest ugliness of face with the most diabolic beauty of form. When I am in the mood for beauty, I will drop my eyes to her body; when perfection palls, I will raise them again."

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"And she fills men with a passionate desire," Grace put in, "to see the last of her."

"I can quite believe it. I, too, want to see the last of her—that face in its death agony would be worth painting."

"You are getting tedious," she complained. "I will go and tell my partner that I am cool again and that a fan is no longer necessary."

"Will you not introduce me first?"

"I do not give unlimited credit," she said over her shoulder.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE Boulevard Montparnasse was bathed in evening sunlight. Vanda could see it from her seat behind the bar, where she was knitting a stocking.

There was little resemblance between the stout wife of the proprietor of the *café* and the aerial dancing-girl. The thick red hair, which formerly stood out round the plain face, was tucked up and tied with a cherry coloured ribbon. The fat red arms, once so white and snake-like, emerged from the rolled back sleeves of the blue blouse.

Vanda never lamented the change; her easy-going, good-natured husband, her healthy sons and her well-lined purse were dearer to her than the ecstasy of perfect motion had ever been.

She heard the door swing open and saw a tall man come in. He walked across the room and stood in front of her.

"Good day, monsieur. What can I do for you?"

"Good day, madame."

"Heaven above, it is Gummy!"

"Vanda! Is it really you?"

"How you have changed!" th

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exclaimed at once, shaking hands across the counter.

"How well you are dressed!" Vanda said, looking him up and down in undisguised admiration.

"I have had some good luck since I saw you last. And you also, it appears?"

"And I also, as you say."

"You are married?"

"Surely. The *café* is mine and my husband's."

"My congratulations!"

"Thanks. What will you drink?"

"Anything you will give me."

She poured something into a glass and handed it to him, saying:

"I see you still carry the old cat."

La Neige, older, dirtier, but still the friend and companion of her master, was sitting on the counter washing herself. She was always washing herself, without the slightest result.

"So you have come back to Paris?"

"Yes, I arrived this morning. Now I must seek Suzanne. Can you give me news of her?"

"Still Suzanne! *Mon Dieu*, how faithful you are! Yes, I can give you news of her. She also is in Paris again."

"In Paris? God and the Holy Angels be thanked! Where is she, madame?"

"How can I tell? She still lives in the same old house by the river. What she does in the daytime I don't know."

Gu... had not listened to the last sentence.

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The spot on the counter where La Neige had sat was bare and Vanda saw the door swing behind them.

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"At last! at last! after all these centuries—or years, is it?—I have found you, my little Suzanne!"

They were standing together on the stairs, which led to Suzanne's room, he with his arm slipped boldly round her waist, she leaning against the balusters, her eyes shining with laughter and tears.

"Not so loud! You will awake the sick woman who is asleep."

"In my world there is only one woman," he protested, "and she is neither sick nor asleep."

"Then let us go outside."

"A kiss first, Suzanne, just one long kiss!"

"Enough, enough!" she cried, struggling.

"Your kisses are long and loud enough to awake the dead and kill the dying!"

"Tell me everything you have felt and done, and thought, since I saw you last," he pleaded, when they had reached the street.

"No, rather tell me first where you have been."

"I went to Aix after you sent me away."

"Oh, do not talk of that, let us forget it! I was mad then, or I could never have done it," she said, passionately. "But go on and tell me what you did in Aix."

"I played in the streets there," Gummy told

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her, "and one day I saw—will it hurt you, my little one, if I speak of your Englishman?"

"No, no, tell me about him. Did you see him there?"

"Yes, outside a church door. He was with a lady with red hair."

"I know. Go on."

"I hoped perhaps it was not their marriage, I hoped it might not be so for your sake, *chérie*."

"And then?"

"When the season was over, I started for Paris to look for you, and ask you if I might come back. I had earned very little in Aix, so I had to walk most of the way on foot. Very little happened to me on the way, only, I remember, one night it was raining and I took shelter with some players who had pitched their tent by the roadside. They were very kind to me."

"Tell me, what sort of people they were, was it a large company?" she questioned, excitedly.

"Not very. There was a father and mother and a grandmother, and some younger people, perhaps their children."

"Was that all? Try to remember, Gummy, if there was no one else."

"What a woman you are for detail! Yes, there was one other, a sick person who lay under some sacks. When I played to them, she was disturbed and I had to stop."

"Gummy!"

"What is it, *petite*?"

"I was the sick person under the sacks."

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"You? Oh, *Mon Dieu*, and I did not know it!"

"How cruel fate has been to us!"

"Do not say that, since fate has brought us together again."

"You are right. Go on with your story."

"When I reached Paris, I went to your house and asked for you, and they told me that you had gone away and would never come back again. Then I went mad, I think. I was mad with rage at your Englishman, because I thought it was because of him and his red-haired girl that you had gone away, no one knew whither."

"You were right, it was for that I ran away from Paris."

"I was so angry that I determined, come what might, I would kill him. I went to the studio in the Impasse du Maine where you had told me you had seen him. I wanted to shoot him dead, I . . ."

"I know, Monsieur Lenormand told me."

"And I found the wrong man, Suzanne, where was your Englishman?"

"I do not know. Let me hear the end of your tale."

"Then I went away a second time, and wandered for about three months. One night I was playing on my violin, and a man heard me and asked me to come into his house and let his family hear me. He was, he told me, the conductor of a large orchestra of a theatre in Lyons. He offered me much money if I would join it. I did not care about the money or anything else. Why not

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Lyons as well as any other place? I asked myself. I went with him and stayed until I had earned enough money to take a holiday—and here I am. Tell me now about yourself."

"I have nothing to tell. I was a model when you left me and I am a model now. Give me a cigarette, Gummy."

He gave her one, seizing the hand which put it in her mouth.

"Let my hand go!" she commanded, laughing in spite of herself.

"Not until you have promised that you will be a model no longer—that you will be my wife instead."

"In that capacity you would certainly not find me a model," she teased.

"Promise!"

"What shall I promise?"

"To be my wife."

"Don't be ridiculous! Every one is staring at you."

"Let them stare! Suzanne, don't be unkind," he pleaded, "say you will marry me to-morrow."

"The law does not permit," she laughed.

"Then as soon as we can," he begged.

"Perhaps."

"No, promise!"

"Perhaps is enough for to-day. To-morrow . . . Gummy, where have we wandered to?"

"I do not know—I do not care."

"The night is beautiful! Let us go to Montparnasse, as we used to do."

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"Yes, let us go there. You must be tired, my angel, we must take a *fiacre*."

He hailed one with conscious pride, and they got in. As they jolted along, they sat in silence, Gummy contented to hold her hand. Suzanne leaning back, reflectively smoking her cigarette. If he could afford to drive . . .

They stopped outside the brilliantly lighted *café*, and Suzanne stood on the pavement while Gummy paid the cab. She noticed that he gave the man silver and waited for no change; and the taximeter had only registered 75 centimes . . .

Vanda nodded at them from her high seat on the other side of the bar.

"So you have found each other at last! My congratulations to you both."

"She is uglier than ever," Gummy said, in Suzanne's ear.

"Do you think so? I find something very nice and good about her face—sometimes I fancy her expression is almost beautiful."

Gummy laughed.

"You are amused?"

"Women are strange things," he said. "See, here is a table."

"I believe it is the very one we sat at last time we were here."

"So it is. What will you have?"

"Coffee and cigarettes."

"And something else—something in a bottle?"

The same red-coated band was playing in the far corner of the room, but another girl was

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standing on the table where Vanda used to dance. She had a pretty face and masses of curly yellow hair, but the figure under the pink spangled dress had not the same exquisite curves, the quick movements, the grace, that had made Vanda the dancing queen of Bohemian Paris.

"What do you think of her?" Gummy asked.

"She can't dance to save her life!"

"But her face is pretty?"

"Not bad, but of what use is a face to a *danseuse*? It is the body that counts," at which Gummy laughed again. "I am so glad you have come back," she went on.

"And I was so afraid you would not want me!"

The waiter had put the coffee and cigarettes and the bottle on the table before them, and was moving away when Suzanne called him back.

"Will you ask the band to play 'Sole Mio'?"

"If you like, mademoiselle."

"Thanks."

She lighted a cigarette and sipped her coffee in silence, until the first notes of the well-known valse sounded through the smoke-dimmed room. Then she bent forward and touched Gummy's arm.

"I want to tell you about the Englishman I— I used to love," she said.

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CHAPTER XXVI

"**T**O-MORROW I must go back to my work," Claudia said to the girl who was sitting on the edge of the bed combing her hair.

"Somehow it does not seem to me right that you should work," Suzanne mused. "You are too beautiful to be of use in the world, leave that to the ugly. You should be an ornament, nothing more."

Claudia forced a smile and said:

"All the same, if one is to live, one must have something to eat. After all, it is your fault that I have to go on working, Suzanne."

"I am going to be married in three weeks," the girl said abruptly.

"I am so glad."

"Why are you glad?" She lay back across Claudia's feet, leaning on her elbow.

"Because you have been so kind to me, I want you to be happy."

"How do you know I shall be happy?" she demanded, plucking at the sheet petulantly.

"If you love him . . ."

"Oh, I shall be happy enough, no doubt," Suzanne said indifferently. "Not because I

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love him, or anything of that kind, but because he loves me. He adores me to delirium, you know, and always has done. It is a good thing to be worshipped, and I like him well enough."

"Is that enough?" Claudia asked.

"Why not? I am tired of loving, madame. Once I loved with all my soul, and what good did it do me?" She sat up again, and went on drawing the comb through her thick hair. "It did me no good at all—none. Now I shall content myself with being loved; and make myself forget about the other man, only taking the remembrance out of my heart and looking at it on rare occasions, like something very precious."

"But if the other man came into your life again what would you do?"

"He won't," she said rather bitterly. "If I met him in the street to-morrow, he probably wouldn't recognize me. He never loved me, it was just a passing fancy he had for white skin and pink heels."

"Was he an artist?" Claudia asked.

"No, madame, he was your husband."

"My husband!"

The two women looked at each other for a moment across the white sheet, then Claudia laughed.

"You have had your revenge, Suzanne, by saving my life."

"It was a subtle revenge, madame, but an unintentional one," Suzanne said. "I did not blame you, it was not your fault that I loved

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George Stein. Nor can you blame me for loving him, since you did the same yourself."

"I never loved George Stein," Claudia said slowly.

"Then you took from me what you did not want," the model said. "And I have slept for seven nights on the floor so that you might have my bed! If you had loved him as I did, I could have forgiven you, almost."

An angry red crept into her cheeks, and the comb broke in her tightly clenched fingers.

"Now you have made me break my new comb," she said, in childish indignation.

"I'm so sorry," Claudia said, "please forgive me. Suzanne, how could I have known that I was breaking some one's heart when I married George Stein? I didn't even know that you existed."

"My heart may mend, but my comb never will," Suzanne laughed, her good-humour almost restored by her own *bon mot*; besides were not Gummy's kisses all but wet upon her lips? "Madame," she went on, "I think the fault was yours for marrying without love."

"Just now you confessed that in three weeks' time you were going to marry without love."

"I had forgotten!" She gave a rippling laugh and sank back on the bed. "But seriously, madame, I have a certain affection for Gummy. It is not the *grande passion*. What would you?—that can only come once in a lifetime."

She looked at Claudia, with tears of self-pity

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and regret mingling with the tears of laughter in her eyes.

"When I married him, I thought I loved him," Claudia said.

"Then you must have been glad when he went away, and it nearly broke my heart," Suzanne sighed. "Is it not strange that the same man should in different ways have ruined both our lives? Is it not strange that one man should so often have painted your head on my body? And in the end we shall both seek consolation from the men who love us. You will tire of work and hunger one of these days, madame."

"I can't," Claudia cried, "don't speak to me about—about him."

"But if you do not—did not—love George Stein, what is to prevent you going to Monsieur Lenormand?" Suzanne persisted. "You will make him happy, he will make you happy—and enough."

Claudia turned on her side, and took a morsel of the pillow between her teeth.

"Do you love nobody?" Suzanne went on. "Does the love that he has thrown at your feet mean nothing to you? Do not trample on it, madame. Take it."

"He doesn't love me," Claudia said, "now I have disappointed him."

"He does, he does!" Suzanne protested, "and I hate to think of his passion going to waste. He loves like a great artist, madame, with every part of himself . . ."

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"Don't," the other woman pleaded. "He did love me, but now he despises me, because, like you, he thinks me a useless ornament. He told me I had no soul, because I cannot live with a man who is not my husband. He could not understand."

"I do not wonder," Suzanne said. "Why should you not live with a man who is not your husband? Did he ask you and did you refuse?"

"Yes."

"So that was what he meant when he told me his beautiful red-haired woman had never lived!"

"How could I do what he asked?" Her voice was muffled in the pillow. "It would have been wrong."

There was contempt in Suzanne's voice when she said, "I suppose it is not wrong to ruin a man's life and work! How can his art live without its inspiration? What difference can it make having a few words spoken to you by a priest and ever after wearing a ring on your left hand? I asked that question once of a little Sister of the Poor and she said that God had said it was to be so. Who cares? I do not believe there is a God at all. If one is free, as I am, it does not matter whether one marries one's children's father or not—it is of no importance. I shall do it because Gummy wants me to; he thinks, I suppose, that the ring on my finger will bind me to him. Poor Gummy! If love will not bind, the strongest ring will not. But you, madame, you cannot marry the man who loves

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you, but surely that is no reason for ruining one life, perhaps two. Do you love him, madame ? "

" The man who expresses himself in those pictures is all I love in the world," Claudia said.

" It was for that you married George Stein ? "

" It was for that."

" Then Monsieur Lenormand is your husband, madame, I am only a poor, uneducated girl, and I cannot express myself as I want to do, only . . . "

" Only you are driving me mad," Claudia said.

" I wanted to drown myself to escape from the temptation which you are trying to persuade me to yield to."

" I do not care whether you yield or not," Suzanne said. " I have spoken as a human being for the sake of another human being, that is all. The river is still outside the window, madame, if you like to take the easiest way, and, as far as I know, Monsieur Lenormand is still in the *atelier*, in the Impasse du Maine, if you wish to do what is right. After all, it does not particularly matter to me if you sell your soul and his for a whim. Only I have suffered myself for love which went astray and it has made me very human."

She blew out the candle and groped her way to the mattress in the corner. She heard a sigh in the darkness and Claudia say :

" Suzanne, why did you not let me die ? "

" It is not too late," she told her, in a matter of fact tone, " only you make me smile, madame, when you speak of free love as immoral and of suicide as a matter of no importance."

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"There is no right and no wrong," Claudia said hopelessly. "Only I cannot go."

"Nor can I go to sleep," Suzanne murmured, with her head on the pillow.

"Suzanne!"

"Madame?" she yawned.

"Next time you see him will you make him understand how much I love him?" Claudia entreated.

CHAPTER XXVII

"WHAT a beautiful woman!" Suzanne said, standing before the half-finished portrait of two white shoulders surmounted by a pair of mysterious almond-shaped eyes, set far apart in a tapering face.

"The original is the ugliest being God ever made," Philip told her.

"But you have shown her as a creature in a dream," she said. "Who is she?"

"I did it on purpose, to see what she would say, and—she said what I had expected."

"That being? . . ."

"That I had a wonderful faculty for catching likenesses—only it made her look rather old, didn't I think?"

"Then she is only a child?"

"Of thirty-three."

"Who is she?" Suzanne asked again, laughing.

"My future wife."

"Your *fiancée*!" Her voice was horrified.

"Not yet. To-night I shall supplicate and she will yield; up till the present it has only been a case of two clandestine sittings, resulting in a flattering picture and a word or two of flattery spoken by a painter to a fool. The end will come

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within a month, and then year after year of married happiness. You will see."

Suzanne gazed at him a moment in silence.

"Do you want me to pose?" she asked then.

"It is not necessary. See, I am putting the finishing touches to another picture," he said, rolling an easel into the centre of the room. "Why did you not come last week, Suzanne?"

"I am sorry; I was doing other things."

"Tell me about the things while I work."

He began to decorate the converging train of his she-devil's gown, which stretched behind her towards the trees and the little groups of men and women sitting under them. He painted great, many-coloured jewels and vague blots full of meaning.

"There were only two," Suzanne said, "beyond sleeping and eating, I promised to marry a man in three weeks' time and saved a woman's life."

"I congratulate them both."

"I am not sure that either is a case for congratulations—certainly not the woman's. She wanted to die, poor thing, and I prevented her, not knowing how much she had to die for—how little to live for. She was going to throw herself into the arms of a beautiful, moonlit river and I brought her away and find . . ."

"What?"

"That the river's arms were the only ones willing to receive her. I thought—fool that I was—to be doing her a kindness; I was sorry for her and—her hair was so wonderfully red."

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"Yes?" The word was spoken with complete indifference, while a square green emerald was carefully placed on the hem of the devil's dress.

"She was very ill," Suzanne went on, "so I took her home and nursed her in her delirium. I should have done better if I had let her die."

"She sounds a depressing subject for conversation," he said. "Tell me instead about your husband-to-be."

"He's only the man with the cat and the fiddle," she told him, without enthusiasm.

"And the great heart. I remember your speaking about him; you were all in favour of finding him again, weren't you? How did you manage it in the end?"

"He came last night to my house."

"I hope he'll make you happy," Philip said, almost tenderly, because he liked the little model.

"He's all right," she remarked. "But, monsieur, I want to tell you more about the woman."

"For God's sake, don't begin about the woman again!" he pleaded.

"I will," she cried.

"In that case, I won't waste my breath in asking you not to."

"I sometimes think you have quite a lot of sense! She had strange green eyes, this woman, and a pale, beautiful face. She wanted to die because the man she loved was not her husband, and because she knew that by death alone she could resist temptation. Monsieur, she is not dead . . ."

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He had stopped painting, and stood with his back to her, lighting a cigarette.

"When will she come?" he asked.

"To-night or never—to-night she must choose between love and death."

"And to-night I shall be asking Mademoiselle Paola Bartkowska to be my wife. Did she say she would come?"

"She only said: 'make him understand how much I love him,' but I think she will come or die."

"Perhaps she will do both, I shall not be there to see."

"You do not mean it."

"Why not?"

"Because you have loved her for so many years; it is not possible that you have changed."

"I have not changed," he said, "only I am very angry with her because . . ."

"Because she has what is called a conscience, monsieur; it is her misfortune, not her fault. Give her another chance to distinguish between right and wrong; if she comes to-night be waiting for her."

"To-night Mademoiselle Bartkowska will be waiting at a ball for me to ask her to be my wife."

All the same both he and Mademoiselle Paola Bartkowska waited in vain that night—Philip did not go to the ball nor did Claudia visit the studio in the Impasse du Maine.

The day following was a Wednesday, and, as usual, at ten o'clock at night the doors of the

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Contessa Bugnano's flat were thrown open, to admit the ever swelling torrent of fashionable humanity which weekly flooded her *salon*.

"That's he coming into the room now," Marietta's aunt whispered in her ear, as Philip appeared in the doorway. "I will introduce him at once."

"I don't think much of him," the *débutante* remarked in a much louder voice. "He's got a face like a good-looking girl's."

The Contessa hurried to greet him, holding out two plump hands, and said:

"Is it actually you?"

"You didn't expect me, then?"

"I wasn't sure. You have been known to forget engagements, haven't you? But, of course, an artistic temperament has the same effect as charity."

"What is that?"

"It covereth a multitude of sins," Giulia said, being fond of platitudes. "It's in Shakespeare or the Bible or somewhere. Don't you read that kind of thing?"

"Not often, I'm afraid."

"Don't you? You really should. It's becoming quite the thing to do. At one time it was very old-fashioned to read the Bible, and then some bright people thought they'd be original and simply filled their houses with them. Madame de Mendi—do you know her?—has fifty in different coloured bindings to match her gowns, and carries one about with her everywhere, even

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to race meetings. I think the craze really came in when people got tired of toy dogs and Omar. I wonder what the next thing will be. I want to introduce you to my neice Marietta, this is . . . She's disappeared. Never mind, later on I will present you."

Madame de Berci took temporary possession of him with :

"Do you notice the number of red-haired women in the room ? "

"I do."

"That's all your fault. Two years ago Claudia Badminton-Dale, or Stein, or whatever her name was then, was the only one in Paris ! And these women are not all newcomers. I wish you'd start painting brunettes and save me the trouble of dyeing mine."

"I'll start to-morrow."

"That's simply sweet of you, and next spring I'll be in the fashion. Hairdressers will be offering you fortunes after that to do some blondes. I believe it is rather difficult to make black hair yellow, but women who wouldn't take the trouble to walk from here to the end of the street would learn to stand on their heads if the right people were doing it.

She left him standing in the middle of the room ; and Mademoiselle Bartkowska wriggled her way through the crowd and stopped beside him.

"At this moment, I want only two things in the world to make me perfectly happy," he said to her.

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"They are ? . . . "

"Your forgiveness, mademoiselle, for having failed to keep my appointment last night, and a cool conservatory."

"I love conservatories, too," she agreed, "they always have such lots of palms in them."

"I'm afraid we'll have great difficulty in finding one here—third floor apartments don't often have them. Still, I shall be contented if I get one of my desires. Will you give me absolution ? "

"If you like," she said, magnanimously.

"I've got excellent excuses," he told her, "but I won't bore you with them, since I have been acquitted without a trial. Shall we go and look for a palm ? There may be one here even if there is no hot-house."

They found one in an adjoining room and he made her sit down under it, without so much as a smile.

"I've finished your portrait," he said.

"Have you ? Are you going to exhibit it ? "

"Yes, in the Autumn Salon—on one condition."

"What is the condition ? "

"That the name given in the catalogue shall not be 'Mademoiselle Paola Bartkowska.' "

His eyes looked into the nondescript coloured eyes in which there was no intelligence.

"What name must there be in the catalogue ? "

"'Madame Philip Lenormand,' " he said.

"Will you marry me before the end of the summer, mademoiselle ? "

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He saw two narrow eyes glitter in astonishment.

"Marry you?" she echoed.

"Yes. I love you, that is my only excuse for asking you to marry me."

The long mouth quivered in a smile, and then Mademoiselle Paola told him that there was no reason why her portrait should not be exhibited.

.
"How do you do, Mr. Lenormand?"

He turned round and saw Grace Yorke, a study in pale, shimmering gold, from her elaborately dressed hair to the toe of her shoe.

They shook hands and then Grace said:

"I'm going away from Paris."

"Are you?"

"Yes, aren't you going to ask me where to? It simplifies the art of conversation enormously, if people take an intelligent interest in their neighbours."

"Where are you going to?"

"To Egypt, and then somewhere else, I haven't made up my mind yet about the other place—Italy perhaps. I'm going in search of something which may amuse a bored woman. If I find it, I shall feel like Lancelot or Galahad or whoever the gentleman was who found the Holy Grail."

"Then you have sucked the orange of Paris dry?"

"Quite, and I have realized now that it is finished that I don't like oranges much."

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"Why? Did it leave a nasty smell on your fingers?"

She was not sure as to the meaning of his question, so left it unanswered, saying instead:

"Is there any particular reason why we should stand up all the time?"

"None, except that there is nothing to sit down on, at least within sight. I will go and look . . ."

"Don't trouble, I am a wicked woman and must accept my restless punishment."

"I am going to be married," Philip said.

"So you told me last week," she remarked, stifling a yawn.

"Now it is all arranged, even as to whom the bride is to be."

"The lady's name is? . . ."

"Mademoiselle Bartkowska."

"Of course! I'd forgotten about the love at first sight. Mademoiselle's parents have given their consent?"

"So far they have not been asked for it."

"Naturally—she is of age and can speak for herself."

He did not comment on her remark, because he did not hear it: he was listening to the conversation of two women who were sitting a little way off.

"It's in this evening's paper," one of them was saying.

"What did he die of?" asked the other, a fat, short woman, whose hair was daily becoming more obviously red.

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"Fever of some sort."

"He went to Africa, didn't he?"

"South America, *ma chère*, I forget the name of the place."

"Poor George Stein! People were beginning to forget about him. I suppose dying was the only thing he could do to remind the world of his existence!"

Then he remembered the woman who had been standing beside him, and wondered if she, too, had heard. When he turned his head, he found her gone.

"Good-bye," Philip said to the Contessa.

"Surely you aren't going? Why, I haven't introduced you to Marietta yet."

"I'm afraid I must go and that my acquaintance with Mademoiselle Bugnano must still be a thing to look forward to."

"But you've only just arrived," she said reproachfully. "You have not my permission to go away."

"I should hate to disobey you."

"Then why do it? Life is so short that it is a mistake to do what one hates doing."

"It is also too short to do only what pleases one."

"You take it too seriously."

"I am not ashamed of the fact!"

"Then you are original—very few people are unashamed of being serious."

He met Grace in the hall, her golden coloured gown covered by a long black cloak.

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" I've been congratulating Mademoiselle Paola," she said sweetly.

" Yes ? "

They went downstairs in silence. As he shut the door of her car he said :

" George Stein is dead. Had you heard ? "

He told her with his eyes on her face, and was certain for the first time that Lady Grace wore rouge, because the pale pink bloom was the only thing in the face that did not change ; even the delicate nostrils quivered as she said :

" Please tell the chauffeur to take me home ; I shall not go to the Ponsonby's ball to-night."

.

It was next morning. The last jewel had been dabbed on to the she-devil's dress, when the concierge brought Philip a *pneumatique*.

" Monsieur," he read, " a side-light cast upon your character by a mutual friend makes it impossible . . . "

Philip made up his mind to accept Mademoiselle Bartkowska's decision as final.

Then Suzanne came to see him, breathless and with shining eyes.

" You waited," she said, " and she did not come."

" She did not come," he agreed ; " but how do you know I waited ? "

" Because you are you. Monsieur, she did not come because a telegram summoned her to Geneva, her mother is dying there."

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"That may not have been the reason."

She put her hand on his arm entreatingly and said:

"I think it was."

"I shall never know, because now everything is changed."

He lit her cigarette and his own, and turned his back on her.

"Then you have promised to marry the other woman; is that why everything is changed?"

"If she had come to me that night," he said, speaking with the cigarette in his mouth, "it would have meant that her love for me was too strong for human resistance; if she were to come to-day or to-morrow or next week it might mean anything, that she wanted a popular painter for a husband, for instance."

"I don't understand . . ."

All the same she sat very still on the edge of the model-throne, and let her cigarette go out.

He turned round and went and sat beside her, putting his hand over her hand which had suddenly become cold.

"I'm a brute," he said, "and think of nothing but myself. Suzanne, I am so sorry, dear."

"Then . . ."

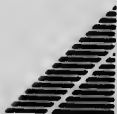
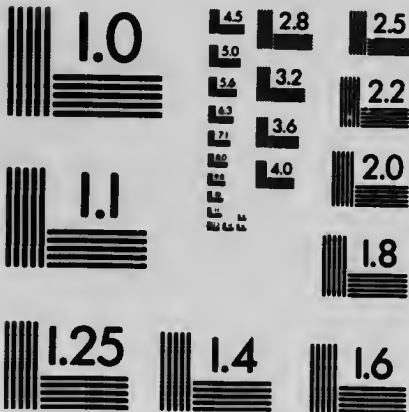
"He died in South America. I heard last night."

He let her cry with her head on his shoulder, and because they were both artists in their different ways he kissed her and she found comfort in his kisses.



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"I'm not crying because I'm sorry," she said brokenly. "It's the best thing that could have happened for all our sakes—his own, hers and yours, Gummy's—and mine. Only, somehow I can't help crying just a little."

"I think you are right, *petite*, in four cases out of the five anyhow."

"Which is the fifth?" she asked, looking up at him with her great, brimming eyes. "Not his."

"No, not his—mine."

"But how . . ."

"It does not matter," he said, "she may not have heard. I will follow her to Geneva to-day."

"And the other woman?"

"She's all right—there was nothing doing there."

Suzanne smiled through her tears.

"In fact, she refused to marry you," she said, "in spite of your assurance."

"Yes, thank God."

The smile vanished and Suzanne asked:

"How did he die?"

"I don't know."

"I think he must have looked very beautiful in death. Do you know, Monsieur Philip, sometimes your face reminds me of his—something in the expression."

"We had the same father," he told her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. BADMINTON-DALE was lying in bed, her head propped up with pillows, against which her swollen face looked very red. Her hoarse breathing was the only sound in the small, dark room, except the monotonous clicking of bone knitting needles, which came from the direction of the window. Her right arm lay stiffly on the red cotton coverlet, and the right side of her face was drawn upwards, lending it an odd, unsymmetrical appearance.

"Hasn't she come yet?" she asked in a low, discordant voice.

The nurse, a brusque, capable Swiss, looked up from her work and said:

"They'll bring her up as soon as she arrives."

"But it's time she was here. I have been calculating and I know."

"The train may be late."

Mrs. Badminton-Dale sighed heavily.

"I wish she would come."

"Don't talk so much," the nurse said and went on knitting.

.

Claudia was looking at her mother's face for the first time. A mask of powder and paint had covered it until now, but since she had had the apoplectic fit this, of necessity, had been laid aside.

She ran towards the bed and, with her arms round the swollen neck, kissed the repulsive-looking, contracted face.

"How glad I am you have come."

"I wish I could have been with you sooner, mother darling, only it is a long way from Paris."

The nurse looked up again and saw the slim girl in black sitting on the edge of the bed, with her white cheek pressed against the swollen red one.

"How can she do it! And she can't expect the old woman to leave her any money when she's only paying four francs for her room, and she's getting me dirt cheap, too."

She picked up the ball of black wool from the floor and went out.

"Have they been kind to you, dear?"

"So, so. Only they wouldn't let me put my—my extra piece of hair on, and I hated the doctor seeing me like this. Claudia, did you know that my hair wasn't all my very own?"

"No, darling, it always looked beautifully natural."

She saw her mother's left hand go up to arrange the strands of nondescript coloured hair.

"So much of it has come out since I've been ill. I used to have wonderful masses of it before," Mrs. Badon-Dale said apologetically.

"Of course you had. It will all grow again when you are better."

"I wonder if that will ever be. Do you know,

Claudia, I have been thinking that, perhaps I haven't been as kind to you as I should have been, since your marriage. Really I had plenty of excuses, your conduct on one occasion in particular was very alarming; and you married your husband against my will, I couldn't be held responsible for his actions. All the same, if I have been a little selfish . . . if I die . . . I hope that you will forgive me, Claudia."

"Don't talk like that, dear. Of course, you're not going to die."

The pale red lips were pressed against the thick blue ones.

"If I get better," her mother said, "I will keep you with me always. I'll need some one to take care of me. You won't go away and leave me again, will you?"

"Of course, I won't."

"I want to know something," she paused for breath and then went on speaking in her thick voice, "I want you to tell me if I have changed much, Claudia, I didn't ask for a glass because I was afraid. Tell me the truth."

She caught Claudia's arm almost fiercely.

"No, dear, you aren't changed at all."

Claudia got up and went to the window. Before her lay the lake, incomparably blue in the light of the midday sun. In the distance, purple mountains rose clear against the cloudless sky. Then she went back to the pitiful, repulsive-looking figure on the bed.

That night Claudia was drinking her coffee on

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the verandah of the hotel, when the nurse came out and touched her on the arm.

"Will you come to Mrs. Badminton-Dale, please?"

"Does she want me? Is she worse?"

"She has had another fit. The doctor says she cannot live more than a few minutes—her pulse is very low."

Claudia ran upstairs. At the door of her mother's room, the doctor, a young Frenchman, with a clever, ugly face and kind eyes, was waiting for her.

"Is it true that she is dying?" she whispered.

"I am afraid so. I have done all I can for her," he said. "I think I had better leave her with you, mademoiselle. I'm very sorry."

Claudia went in. The doctor noiselessly closed the door behind her.

"Claudia, is that you?"

"Yes, darling."

"The maid who brought me my supper . . . I asked her to give me . . ."

"What, dear?"

"A looking glass, and . . ."

"Not now, mother darling, afterwards . . ."

"Don't interrupt me! She gave it to me . . . and . . . and Claudia, I am glad . . . I am going to . . . die."

Mrs. Badminton-Dale spoke with difficulty, and Claudia had to put her ear very close to her mouth to distinguish the hoarse words.

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"Claudia," her mother went on, "I want . . . you to promise me something."

"Yes, dear, anything. What do you want?"

"Claudia, don't let them . . . bury me like this . . . will you put on . . . my . . . other . . . hair . . . and . . ."

"Yes, yes, darling, but you mustn't try to talk now."

"Listen to me, Claudia, you must. See that . . . that my . . . cheeks have just . . . a little . . . colour on them. You'll find it . . . in the right . . ."

Mrs. Badminton-Dale was dead.

The next morning about ten o'clock, a waiter appeared in Claudia's bedroom, carrying rolls and coffee on a tray.

"Good morning, madame," he said, setting it down on the writing-table. "There is a gentleman downstairs who wishes to see you. He told me to tell you that he was in no hurry, and would wait till you came."

"What is his name?"

"He did not tell me it, madame."

Philip Lenormand was sitting in a low, wicker chair, reflectively smoking a cigarette, when Claudia appeared in the French window.

"I heard you had come here and followed you," he said, getting up. "I hope you don't mind."

Without answering, she shook hands and walked past him, going to the edge of the verandah, where she stood with her back to him, her eyes turned towards the lake.

"Then you are angry?" she heard him say.

"I suppose you have a perfect right to come to Geneva if you want to," she said, without looking at him.

"You are with your mother, aren't you?" he asked, noticing that the creepers, which covered the post beside her, matched her hair.

"My mother is dead."

"Dead? I am so sorry."

"I am sorry too," she said, "because—because I am not sorry. It is a dreadful thing not to care when your own mother dies. I could not love her when she lived and I can't make myself feel sorry now that she is dead."

"I think I understand," he told her, watching a loose strand of hair which the wind from the lake had blown across her cheek. "It is impossible to make oneself love."

"And to make oneself not love," she added.

"Why have you come here, Mr. Lenormand?"

"To hear you say that."

She turned her head towards him, and he found himself looking into the eyes that were so strangely green.

"I tried to love instead," she said.

"I know."

"Suzanne told you?"

"Yes, that and something else," he said.

"She gave me your message. Would you have come to me that night if they hadn't sent for you to come here? I waited for you, would you have come?"

GREEN CHALK

"Yes, at the risk of being rejected as a soulless thing. I tried to die instead, but God would not let me die and sent Suzanne, or the devil sent her, I don't know which it was and I don't care."

"It doesn't matter in the least," he agreed, and, because there was no one within sight, or because he didn't care about that either, he bent down and kissed her on the coils of her purple red hair, on her pale red mouth and on the blue shadows of her closed eyelids. "Nothing in the world matters—not even that George Stein is dead."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I CALL it indecent," Madame de Berci said to her dinner partner, a short, red-faced man with a monocle half buried in his flabby cheek. "She might have waited until her first husband was cold in his grave."

"And her mother too, for that matter," he agreed. "Poor woman—she was damned keen on me at one time."

"Surely George Stein didn't take more than a calendar month to cool," Grace Yorke interposed, her exquisite arched eyebrows raised protestingly. "Have they come back to Paris?"

"Yes, and have been greeted with shrugs."

"We should applaud at the happy ending of a romance—not shrug," Grace said, the sweetness of her tone a little overdone. "Only Philip Lenormand did spoil it slightly by proposing to Paola Bartkowska three weeks ago."

Chairs scraped upon the polished floor, silks rustled, and the men were left alone, with the impression that Grace Yorke was as feline as they had imagined her to be—which was not exactly the impression Grace Yorke had meant to leave behind her.

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Philip Lenormand did not care. Though the

GREEN CHALK

Parisiennes did shrug their dazzling white shoulders, they were willing to pay exorbitant prices to have them painted by the husband of the woman they censured, enabling him to enshrine his goddess in an apartment in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées; to surround her with things curious and beautiful; to dress her in strange shades of purplish red, the colour of her hair, in greens, vivid as her eyes, in gowns of luminous white, matching the ivory of her skin; to give her jewels set in strange designs of his own invention. He painted her in every attitude and in every mood, and was himself perfectly contented with everything except the expression in Claudia's eyes. During the first half year after their marriage, he made beautiful pictures of beautiful subjects, until the critics began to ask each other why the expression in the green, painted eyes never altered according to the subject of the picture; it wasn't an ugly expression, it wasn't even sad or beautiful or inhuman, it was simply strange.

"I don't know, you must ask Lenormand himself," was the invariable answer.

One day some one asked Lenormand himself.

"I do it on purpose," Philip said carelessly.

"Of course, but why?"

Philip told the man that he did it because he wanted to do it, and the man believed him. Philip also told himself that the strange, unaltering expression in the green painted eyes was put there with intention and because he wanted to

put it there ; but, although he was convinced that this was the truth, he changed the subjects of his pictures to suit the expression in the eyes, not the expression to suit the subjects. Claudia was not pleased, and as it was the first time she had felt displeasure since her second marriage it was all the more acute. She said that the great human-headed snakes, with which her husband had decorated the hemispherical ceiling of his new circular studio, haunted her and she openly disliked the " Modern Madonna " he sent to the Spring Salon.

" Why do you paint these things ? " she asked, one night.

" People like them," he said, " and one must pander to their tastes."

" What do people matter ? " she protested. " Art should beautify the world, not gratify the taste of the unhealthy minded."

" If we're going to be as lofty as all that, we'll have to live in the Impasse du Maine," he laughed.

A kiss or two and the thing was forgotten, and next morning Philip set to work on a picture which he called " Love Asleep." When it was finished, it was neither ugly nor decadent, only as Love was asleep the eyes of Love were necessarily closed.

" I'm so happy," Claudia said dreamily, " I think I'd be perfectly, perfectly happy if . . . "

" If what ? " Philip asked, looking across at his wife stretched upon a heap of cushions.

" If I weren't afraid of growing old. I inherited the feeling from my mother, only she wanted to preserve her youth till she was a hundred, whereas I should like to die just before I get my first grey hair. I feel as if I were walking along a road, which is very beautiful for the first forty miles and then gets suddenly ugly and steep. And, as I may not turn back and walk over the first half of the road again, I want to die when I get to the fortieth mile-stone."

" I like your mother's plan best," he said, frowning.

" You wouldn't if I put it into practice," she told him, with a little crooked smile.

" Anyhow, you aren't walking along a road of that kind."

He put down his palette and went and sat on the floor beside her.

" I hate any kind of road," she said. " I'd like to stay just as I am with you just as you are ; the other people can walk along their roads as fast as they like."

" If you don't like roads, I'd better take you to Venice."

" A figurative or a literal Venice ? " she asked. " Do you mean that my life is to be spent floating down a canal, instead of walking down a road for forty years and up a road for the rest of my life ? "

" Both, if you like."

" Why not ? I'll take Suzanne to the literal Venice with me—dear little Suzanne ! "

GREEN CHALK

"You can ask her, but I don't think you'll be able to persuade her to come with us," he said. " 'Dear little Suzanne' is both dear and little, but sentimental too, and her sentimentality takes the form of an unbounded affection for the Quartier."

Claudia found Suzanne sitting by the window with something black and undefinable lying in her lap. When she got up it fell in pieces on the floor.

"Madame Lenormand! How glad I am to see you!" she cried, and then noticing the direction of Claudia's eyes added, "Does Monsieur Philip make holes in his socks, madame?"

"I don't know," Claudia laughed, "I've never asked him whether he does or not."

"Neither did I ask Gummy—I simply saw. The pile grows bigger every week, and every week I take it out and look at it and put it away in despair."

"I want you to leave Gummy and Gummy's socks for a month or two," Claudia said, "and come to Venice with me and Monsieur Philip. Will you, Suzanne?"

"Where is Venice?" she asked, doubtfully.

"In Italy. It's a beautiful town without streets where people go about in gondolas. I want you to come so much."

The girl shook her head.

"I don't think I can."

"Don't you want to?"

"It isn't that I don't want to," she exclaimed, "it's simply that I can't."

GREEN CHALK

"Wouldn't Gummy like you to leave him?"

Suzanne laughed and said: "Of course he wouldn't, but that isn't the reason. I'd leave Gummy and his socks and his cat and his fiddle to-morrow if I wanted to, only I was born here in this quarter, madame, and somehow I feel as if I'd die if I left it."

"You wouldn't die," Claudia protested, "in fact, it would do you good to get away from it for a little while."

"Madame, I tried once and I couldn't do it," Suzanne said. "I promised to go to Lyons with Gummy—his work was there, you know—and the day we were to start I realized that he'd have to go without me or not at all. I am tied to Paris by my heartstrings, I think."

"So Gummy decided not to go to Lyons rather than go without you," Claudia said.

"Yes—unfortunately."

"You don't mean that."

"Perhaps I do—perhaps I don't. I hardly know myself," Suzanne said, with a little sigh.

"But surely you are happy, Suzanne, you must be happy," the other woman pleaded.

"I am not," Suzanne told her, kicking an offending sock out of her way and going to the window again, "and I'm not unhappy either. I'm nothing on earth except a born model: I want to lie again on a model-throne and dream beautiful daydreams; it was for that that I was sent into the world, not to cook and scrub and mend."

"Then you must come and sit for my husband."

GREEN CHALK

Come to Italy with us, and you shall pose and dream all day long."

"It's no good," Suzanne said, "Monsieur Philip has already a model with whom he is completely satisfied. No, madame, for me, day-dreams are things of the past. What does it matter? I shall grow accustomed to sitting with a cat at my feet, listening to a man playing a fiddle. I know he plays beautifully, only I don't think I like music much, and I know I hate cats."

"I wish you would come with us," Claudia insisted.

"You are very kind, madame, but I'd rather not."

They stood in silence for a few moments looking into the street, then Suzanne said:

"And you, madame, you are happy?"

"Yes, yes," Claudia assured her eagerly, "I can't tell you how happy I am."

"That is good. I am not surprised, Monsieur Philip is so . . ." Susanne hesitated. "It's the expression in his face," she said, "that I like so much."

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"I'm late and thou hast been kept waiting," Gummy said. "Wilt thou forgive me, little one?"

"Waiting for what?"

"Supper," he said, tentatively looking round the room.

GREEN CHALK

" Oh ! I forgot about supper. Madame Lenormand has been here, Gummy."

" Yes ? "

" Her lips smile all the time," Suzanne said, " but her eyes never. They have a strange look in them, her beautiful green eyes. Lips can lie, eyes cannot. I wonder if she has really found happiness at last. I should like to believe that she has, only . . . "

" What do I care whose eyes look strange so long as thine eyes laugh, Suzette ? "

" Thou art a fool, Gummy. There is a difference between laughter and smiles—the one shows mirth, the other happiness."

" I don't understand . . . "

" No one expected thee to understand."

CHAPTER XXX

"IT'S wonderful," Claudia said.

"Don't you want any breakfast?"

Philip asked, setting the coffee-pot on the table.

"I'm having it now—I'm simply eating the blueness of it all! Why did I live in the world for twenty-one years without coming to Venice?"

Before her, a sheet of still blue water sparkled, in the light of the September morning, dotted with white yachts and bronze sails and here and there a sombre black gondola. In the distance, the Giudecca divided sky and water.

"I don't know—I wasn't responsible for your actions during the first twenty of them," he said.

"Claudia darling, I am sorry for you at this moment."

"Why?" she asked, without looking round.

"Because you can't see your own hair against the blue sky. It's perfect; for evermore you must dress in blue."

"I don't care," she said, "I can see a red brick campanile against the very same sky, which is much more beautiful than any hair. Philip, I must get into a gondola at once."

"But you got out of one only half-an-hour ago.

GREEN CHALK

Antoinette has already filled your bath with crystals and here have I almost finished my breakfast."

She turned round.

"I wish Suzanne would have come with us instead of, or as well as Antoinette. Poor little Suzanne! I think she finds herself out of her picture, with her lap full of socks."

"I have never in my life met a woman who was not too good for her husband."

"I'll go immediately. What a hurry you are always in," Claudia said, ignoring his remark and sitting down opposite him.

Philip took out his cigarette case.

"Do you think that Suzanne is really unhappy, Claudia, or does she enjoy her troubles?" he said.

"You mustn't laugh at Suzanne."

"I don't—I'm very fond of her."

"And she of you, she told me so last time I saw her. She said that it was the expression on your face she liked so much."

"That's because . . ."

He broke off suddenly and flicked the ash off the end of his cigarette into his cup, where it touched the dregs of coffee with a little, hissing sound.

"Because of what?" Claudia demanded.

"Because I remind her of some one she used to know."

"Of George?" she questioned, carelessly. "Are you like him?"

"So she says. I'm his half-brother, you know."

GREEN CHALK

"How strange that you never should have told me that before."

"I thought perhaps you didn't . . . " he began, rather perplexed.

" . . . didn't like talking about George ? " she finished his sentence for him. "Why should you have thought that? As far as I can remember, I was quite happy with the George Stein I imagined him to be. When I discovered that I had made a mistake, I sent him away."

"Madame's bath is ready," the maid said, from the door.

"Then *au revoir*," Claudia smiled over her shoulder at Philip and disappeared into the next room.

Still perplexed, Philip finished his cigarette and lit another. Standing before the open window, his eyes wandered unobservantly across sea and boats and small, crowded steamers to where the red brick campanile of San Giorgio was reflected in the clear blue water. How strange Claudia sometimes seemed! How was it possible that she should feel no resentment against the man who had so nearly ruined both their lives? She had spoken of him indifferently, of having been quite happy in her life with him. He told himself that it was her perfect contentment in the present that made her unconcerned about the past; and, having come to this satisfactory conclusion, he turned his back upon the view and found his way downstairs.

As he reached the first floor, he came face to face

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with a woman dressed in white, wearing a large scarlet hat, scarlet shoes and stockings, and carrying a parasol of the same colour.

"Monsieur Lenormand! Heaven loves me after all!" she cried. "I have just been gargling."

"What has that to do with heaven loving you?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"Because I can speak to you in French which I adore doing after my morning gargle—it is the one time in the day at which I speak it really well. Don't you love doing the things you do well? Listen to the way I am pronouncing my r's, and forgive me if I am justly proud of them."

"I do," he said. "They are magnificent."

"Are you surprised to see me here?" she asked, slipping her hand through his arm and leading him down the flight of stairs.

"I am rather," he confessed. "You said you were going to Egypt, didn't you?"

"Plans are made to be altered, just as laws are made to be broken. I shall perhaps find myself in Egypt later on. What are you doing here? Having a belated honeymoon?"

"Something of the kind," he agreed, "though it is almost a year late."

"Dear Claudia," Grace cooed, "she and I have always been such friends. I was quite hurt because she didn't once come to see me in Paris. Shall I tell you what I really think of your wife? I think," she went on, without waiting for an answer, "that the man or god or whoever it was

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made her had only a certain quantity of colour left in his paint box and used it all on her hair and eyes and dazzling skin, leaving none for her character. I know you hate character, Monsieur Lenormand, or I wouldn't have told you this."

The friendliness of her smile turned the words into a joke.

"And what do you think of me?" Philip asked. "Have you taken the trouble to sum up Claudia's husband as well as Claudia herself?"

Grace was still smiling when she answered:

"Of course, I have, both of them in fact. Which will you have first—the living or the dead? Life comes before death in every case, so I'll tell you about yourself. I think you are a genius, Monsieur Lenormand. Not an artistic genius, don't, please, imagine that I consider you that for a moment. I think your genius lies in the fact that you are a painter without the slightest versatility who has the impertinence and skill to show a more or less intelligent public the same—or practically the same—picture over and over again without boring it. That is genius. How do you induce people in general to think you a great painter?"

"The question is too difficult for me."

"Do you want to know what I thought of George Stein?" she asked, the smile becoming a trifle less amused. "I thought and still think that he was a bad mathematician who, when he calculated, forgot the most important factor. I thought and still think that he was the most

GREEN CHALK

selfish, unscrupulous, adorable man I have ever known. Let us go to the Piazza and feed pigeons."

"I wish I could, only my duty calls me to take Claudia with me in a gondola. This is our first day in Venice and . . ."

"And you are a devoted husband," Grace interrupted. "Of course you are! Monsieur Lenormand, I am an old woman of twenty-seven, and it is the privilege of old women to give little boys and devoted husbands good advice. You must do one thing without delay, my dear friend, and that is to persuade your wife that she is as fragile as she is beautiful. When you have done that, more than half of your future troubles will be removed long before they arrive. On any occasion you will only have to tell her that she looks tired and must rest, and you will be a bachelor again. I knew a man who had a healthy, boring wife and a passion for travelling. Half a year after their marriage he had convinced her that, considering the precariousness of her health, at least a week's rest was necessary after a railway journey; and the remainder of their married life was spent in travelling about—never, of course, staying for more than eight days in one place. Don't you dislike people who tell you anecdotes? I promise faithfully not to tell you another while we feed pigeons. Your coming shall be my indemnity."

"Your indemnity? What damage have I done you?"

GREEN CHALK

"You have consistently forgotten to pay me my wages," she said. "You owe it to me that you are a fashionable painter, that you have a beautiful, red-haired wife, and that a certain unbeautiful woman in Paris has the pleasure of telling the world with perfect truth that, had she so wanted, your wife would not have had red hair. Is the debt too great to pay in ready money? If you like, I'll give you a little more time, only it must really be a short time. *A bientôt*, then."

She threw him a smile before she turned her back on him.

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They spent the greater part of the first day in gondolas, the second in sight-seeing, and on the next Claudia insisted on Philip taking life seriously with a paint brush in hand.

When he got back to the hotel he found her already dressed for dinner, holding a string of green glass beads up to the electric light.

"How did you get on?" she asked, laying them on the table and taking the book out of his hands, "How blue it all is!"

"Don't you like it?"

"Of course I do."

"Then why don't you say so?" he asked, laughing.

"I'm too modest to praise the things that belong to me," she smiled. "Your art is as much mine as yours now."

"It always has been much more yours than mine. What have you been doing all this time?"

GREEN CHALK

"Some one came to see me—a beautiful woman with sky blue eyes, who gave me these beads."

She picked up the green string off the table and again looked through it at the light.

"Grace Yorke, in fact," Philip said.

"Grace Yorke," Claudia repeated vaguely.

"What had she to say for herself?"

"She talked a great deal about marriages and deaths and lutes with rifts and lutes without rifts," Claudia told him. "She told me I looked pale and gave me these beads because they match my eyes. I didn't remember her name at the time; only, as she didn't know, it didn't matter."

"Didn't remember Grace Yorke's name!"

"Wasn't it dreadful of me? And I used to know her quite well at one time. Let me look at the sketch again, Geor-Philip. I do really love it, you know."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE concierge heard her husband cough and get up. She lifted her eyes from her knitting and frowned at him.

"What a noise !"

"Some day my bronchitis will kill me, and then thou wilt be sorry that thou didst reproach me so often for disturbing thee."

"It won't do anything of the sort ; besides, *would* I be sorry ? I'm not so sure. Art thou going out to-night ?"

"Yes, and in such rain !"

"Can we expect anything else after the summer we have had ? What would become of us if it were always fine weather ?"

"If I get wet it will surely be the death of me," he said, gloomily.

"Why go ?"

"The voice of duty calls me and I must obey."

"Still quarrelling ?" asked Suzanne from the door, where she stood holding a dripping umbrella, which was making little pools of water on the floor.

"Leave that thing outside, for the love of heaven," the concierge scolded, "or we shall have a flood in here. Yes, we are still quarrelling, as you say, so ~~will~~ you be when you have been

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married for forty-two years ! From all accounts, you're doing it now. Come in and shut the door or go out and shut the door. It's bitterly cold."

"I've brought you the key of the studio," Suzanne said.

"And what sort of mess have you been making up there, I'd like to know ? It's twice as untidy as it was when you started on it, I should not wonder."

A few steps along the street a taxi passed the concierge's husband. He turned and watched it stop outside the courtyard, and saw a tall man get out.

"I'm sorry for you," the concierge called to Suzanne, who had gone into the adjoining room to take off her wet shawl. "Never yet has a girl lived that didn't want to be a wife or a wife that didn't want to be a widow. Men are all the same. Good evening, monsieur, what can I do for you ?"

The man addressed had opened the glass door and was peering into the room.

"Can you tell me at what time Monsieur Lenormand will be back ?" he asked. "I've been to his studio and found the door locked."

"He won't be back," she said. "He's left the Impasse for good."

"Do you know where he is now ?"

"I don't know exactly—somewhere near the Etoile, I think."

"How can I find out where he lives ?" the man persisted.

GREEN CHALK

"Suzanne!" the concierge called.

"What is it?" came from the other room.

"There's a gentleman here asking for Monsieur Lenormand; do you know his new address?"

"He isn't in Paris just now," Suzanne called back. "He's . . ."

"I am not going to break my lungs to save you the trouble of walking two steps," the concierge announced. "If you've anything to say, come in here and say it."

It was time to have lighted the lamp in the semi-dark room, but because she could knit equally well without it the concierge had saved herself the trouble of getting up to look for matches. For this reason Suzanne could only see the vague shape of a man silhouetted in the doorway. She came into the room saying:

"Monsieur Lenormand is in Venice."

"Do you know the name of his hotel?" the man asked.

There was dead silence except for the clock ticking on the mantelpiece. At last Suzanne said:

"George!" and caught the edge of the table to steady herself.

"Is that Suzanne?" Stein asked, though the tone of his voice did not sound particularly full of interest. "I want to find out the address of . . ."

"You have come back from . . ."

"From the United States," Stein said. "Are you surprised to see me? Did you expect me

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to stay away all my life? I've been to my wife's flat and to her mother's, and each time I was told that they had left Paris. Now I want Lenormand's address, as he's the most likely person to know her whereabouts."

"He isn't dead, he isn't dead," Suzanne told herself over and over again. She knew that the concierge was grumbling in her corner and that the man in the doorway was asking questions about Philip Lenormand and Philip Lenormand's wife. How could she tell him that his own wife and Philip Lenormand's wife were one and the same person. If he went to Venice, there would be an end to Claudia's newborn happiness—to Philip Lenormand's . . .

"You say he's in Venice," Stein went on, "do you know the name of his hotel too?"

"It's so dark in here," she said irrelevantly. "Where are the matches, Madame Durand?"

"Can't you speak in the dark? You're keeping monsieur waiting."

"I don't remember the name of the hotel; I don't think I ever knew it," she said, hopelessly.

"Oh, well," said the slightly irritated voice from the door, "it doesn't matter much. I'll go to Venice and find out; there can only be a limited number of hotels in one town."

Suzanne heard the door shut noisily, and a moment later she was following George Stein down the Impasse du Maine for a second time.

"Monsieur!"

GREEN CHALK

Stein turned round and waited for her to overtake him.

"Well," he said, "have you remembered the name?"

She put an hand on his arm and said beseechingly:

"Don't go to Venice, monsieur, you won't find him there."

"Hullo! still jealous, Suzanne?" he laughed.

"It isn't that—only . . ."

He caught sight of her hand in the light of the street lamp.

"I see you're married."

She was glad of any diversion from the subject of Venice, and said:

"I've been married for over a year now. They call my husband Gummy. He plays a fiddle and—and—he has a cat."

"So you are too wise to be constant," said the man who loved to be loved. "I hope you like your fiddling husband," he added.

"I don't—I don't," she broke out passionately, "and I will not let you go to Venice. George, you won't find your wife, she—she's dead."

It came to her as an inspiration and seemed to open out a whole world of hope and possibility—if he believed her . . .

"She's dead," Suzanne repeated.

Unfortunately he did not believe her; instead he laughed and said:

"And Lenormand—is he dead too?"

"Oh no! he's in Venice," she told him airily.

GREEN CHALK

"He's staying at the hotel—hotel—what is the name? I did know it once . . . the Hotel Danieli," she concluded triumphantly.

"So it's no good going to see him if I want to find my wife," he mocked. "I'd better inquire at the gates of Heaven."

"You don't believe me, then?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But it is true. George, she drowned herself because she was too poor to live. She drowned herself only a few yards from the window of my room."

She looked very beautiful, with her pale, upturned face and dark eyes shining in the light of the street lamp; besides, she loved him. So George Stein suppressed his laugh and said:

"In that case, the night is yours, Suzanne."

"Mine?" she echoed faintly.

"Yes."

"But . . ."

"I'd forgotten the fiddler," he sneered.

Suzanne bit her lip and said:

"It doesn't matter about him . . . he's only a . . ."

"A fiddler with a cat, who deserves no consideration. Shall we go and have dinner somewhere? I suppose l'Avenue is still in existence. Shall we go there?"

"If you like."

"Why did you marry the fiddler, Suzanne?" he asked, as they walked on.

"Because I needed love," she said sadly.

GREEN CHALK

"Does he love you more than you love him?"

She nodded and murmured something that sounded like:

"I hate him! I hate him!"

"What did you say?"

"If you could see him," she ejaculated miserably; "he's awful!"

"You weren't born to be a wife," he said. "Poor Suzanne!"

"But I was born to be loved; I can't live without it. Because I couldn't have the love I wanted I took his. Don't you understand, George?"

"I do," he said, in a voice almost as tender as her own. "I understand that it was all my fault. Was it, little one?"

"Yes, why wouldn't you take me with you? I'd have done anything for you. It's different with Gummy."

"Your heart isn't in the work, is that it?" he asked, with a sudden laugh in which there was no amusement.

"I tried to die when you went away."

"Without Claudia's success."

"She didn't die because she loved you," she told him hurriedly. "She died because she hated poverty. No one loved you as I did."

"I believe you are right," he said.

"Don't you feel the need of love as I do?"

"Here we are at l'Avenue," he said, catching her arm.

GREEN CHALK

They went in and sat down side by side at a small table.

" 'Matrimonial devotion

' Doesn't seem to suit her notion,

' Here's a state of things,' "

Stein hummed, and then turned his attention to the menu. "What will you have?" he asked.

"What did you say?"

"I asked you what you wanted to eat."

"Anything—nothing," she said vaguely.

He gave his order to a white-aproned waiter and then said:

"So Claudia's lost all her money?"

"I don't want to speak about her now," Suzanne complained.

"Then you shan't, *ma petite*. You shall talk to me about yourself."

"I've told you all there is to tell about myself," she said, in a voice that was not quite steady.

"Is it as bad as all that? Poor little Suzanne. Don't you think you'll get accustomed to it in time?"

"To cooking and scrubbing and mending?" she asked. "Never!"

"It certainly doesn't sound much like you to cook and scrub and mend," he agreed. "I'd like to see you again lying in your naked loveliness doing nothing useful."

"Don't!" she pleaded.

"Can't you give this fellow the 'right about' and go back to your old life?"

"I can't do anything other than leave Gummy,"

GREEN CHALK

she said ; " but it's impossible to make life just what it was before. If you hadn't come back, I believe I'd have struggled on somehow with him ; only now it's no good even trying ; I'd kill him ! Why did you come back ? I wasn't happy or anything of that kind, I was simply nothing, only it didn't seem to matter much. Now that you've come back, I'll have to begin forgetting all over again, and I'm too tired to do that. What are you going to do now, George ? "

They sat in silence until the waiter had put the food on the table, then Stein said :

" I don't know. Why should we think about to-morrow ? Aren't you happy now, dear ? "

He took the hand with the bright gold ring and held it in his.

" I want to think about to-morrow," she said. " Tell me, will you spend it with or without me ? "

" I'm not a prophet, so I can't tell you anything about the future," he said, pressing the hand a little tighter. " To-night I am yours and you are mine, and . . . enough."

" It isn't enough. I want—I want to be with you always and always. George, we won't come back to earth a second time. Why should we waste our lives ? "

" Don't let's talk about serious things now," he begged, raising her hand to his lips and holding the little cigarette-stained finger between his teeth.

" We must. George, tell me what you mean to do."

GREEN CHALK

"The soup's getting cold, Suzanne."

"Tell me!" she insisted.

"If you must know," he said, "I'm going to spend to-night in Paris, and to-morrow I go to Venice to look for my half-brother, Philip Lenormand."

She wrenched her fingers out of his and drummed them on the table. "You are a devil," she said slowly.

"Thanks!"

"Why do you want to trample on the fragments of the heart that you have broken?"

"I don't. The fault is yours for putting them under my feet."

"You threw them there. Why won't you kill me? I'm afraid to kill myself."

"And I am afraid of being hanged."

"Oh, you devil!" she said again. "If you only knew how I love you."

She got up and stood still a moment, vaguely looking about her.

"Are you going away?" he asked.

"What's the use of waiting?" she cried.

"What is there to wait for?"

"Your dinner," he said, trying to laugh.

She moved away from the table and stood still again, her fingers twisted together.

"Don't go to Venice," she said, without looking round. "I've just remembered that—that Monsieur Philip went on to—to somewhere else last week."

"Did he?"

GREEN CHALK

" Yes, I forget the name of the place."

" You know a lot about his movements. I think the fiddler's a long-suffering man ! "

" Good-bye."

" Aren't you going to give me a kiss, Suzanne ? "

" No."

" Not one ? "

She turned round and said :

" Why are you so cruel ? "

" Because I love you much, Suzanne, only—I love myself more."

" I cannot blame you," she said, and placed a long passionate kiss upon his lips and another on the round black mole on his left cheek.

CHAPTER XXXII

STEIN looked at his watch by the light of his glowing cigarette, and found that it was nearly ten o'clock. As the gondola carried him slowly forward between the solid walls of old, still palaces, and under the Rialto bridge, he lay back luxuriously, and watched the white clouds chasing each other across the deep blue sky and pale crescent moon. Only the cry of the gondoliers and the lapping of the water, as the boats went to and fro, broke the silence of the September night.

He had not been in Venice since he was a boy, too young to feel the spirit of the place or understand its silent, wonderful beauty, but to-night it seemed to enter into him, to fill him with confidence in the future, contentment with the present, and to obliterate the memory of the last two years—years spent in hard work and disappointment in a new and, to him, uncongenial country. He wondered that he had put up with it for that length of time. He'd had damned bad luck from first to last until he'd met a fool in the shape of a farmer's wife who had lent him the money to come home with; of course he'd

GREEN CHALK

pay her back all right ; that would be easy enough when he'd found Claudia.

He smiled when he thought of Claudia, dear little Claudia with her wonderful hair and deep green eyes. Dead indeed ! Suzanne was as foolish as she was jealous ; all the same he forgave her because she loved him so faithfully. Where had she gone to after she had left l'Avenue, what was she doing now ? He put the question out of his mind deliberately, and finally and with equal deliberation conjured up again the vision of his wife. Of course she loved him, had always loved him—her very anger had been the proof—and she would not send him away a second time. If the rumours he had heard were true—which he did not believe—there was always his half-brother, Philip Lenormand, who'd give him money to get rid of him, if for no other reason.

He had left his luggage at a small hotel overlooking the Grand Canal, where he engaged a room, and then directed the gondolier to take him to the *Daniele*.

As he entered the hall, the sound of mingled talking and music came to him. People of all ages, classes and nationalities were standing about in groups of twos and threes, or lounging in arm-chairs, some smoking, some drinking coffee.

Stein looked in vain among the crowd for the familiar face of the man he had come to find.

" Is Mr. Lenormand staying at this hotel ? " he asked the porter.

GREEN CHALK

" Yes, sir."

" Is he in ? "

" No, sir, Mr. Lenormand went out soon after dinner and has not yet returned."

" I think I'll wait for him."

" Certainly, sir. You will find the English papers on all the tables. The waiters will bring you anything you want."

" Thanks."

Acting on his advice, Stein found a chair in a quiet part of the hall and ordered a whisky and soda. The scene before him refreshed him after his years of solitude: the laughter, the gay dresses and jewels of the women, the faces of the men—some dissipated, some merely fatuous, a few clever—were all significant, and spoke to him of the world of pleasure from which he had been exiled. As his eyes travelled round the room they were arrested by the startling dress of a woman sitting a little apart from the rest, in the corner nearest him, apparently listening intently to the music, because her head was turned towards the band and her hands lay idly in her lap.

She was wearing a gown of vivid green, without sleeves, a single row of large artificial emeralds across each shoulder preventing it from falling off. The upper part fell to her ankles in straight lines, and was cut up the right side to above the knee, showing the leg of a wide trouser made of some shimmering gold material and fastened into an anklet of emeralds at the foot. Her fair hair was partly covered by a bird of paradise,

GREEN CHALK

from which the long tail feathers, tipped with jewels, hung down, nearly reaching to her shoulders.

A feeling of pity stirred Stein as he looked at her. She seemed to him pathetic in her foolish vanity and loneliness—a would-be idol without worshippers; a human being seeking for admiration, and receiving only a scornful glance from the eyes of women less daring than herself, a smile of ridicule from the lips of men.

As Stein looked at her, she got up slowly, yawned and came towards him, with her eyes on the ground.

When she was quite close to him he recognized her.

The colour on her cheeks and lips was still skilfully applied, and the cloud of yellow hair about her face was slightly, very slightly, paler than it had been when he had last seen her. The mouth, once passionate, had become voluptuous; and he noticed that the eyes were large pupilled and glittering as she cast him a side-long glance, half challenging him to notice her, half in careless curiosity. Then she stood still.

Stein saw a look of terror come into her eyes, as if she had seen something supernatural; and, because there seemed to be nothing else to be done, he stood up and held out his hand.

"I did not expect to meet you here," he said, "and from your face I gather that you too are surprised to see me."

"Perhaps it is not astonishing that I am

GREEN CHALK

surprised ; until you spoke I thought you were a ghost."

She had recovered her self-possession and was smiling at him, holding his hand.

" Why is every one so amazed to see me ? Did they expect me to live and die in North America ? "

" No, they thought you had already done so," she said.

" So you mean that they thought I was dead ? "

" Yes, because they read it in the newspaper. That is enough to convince some people."

" And you are one of them ? "

She held out her arms the better to display her dress to him and asked :

" Does this look as if I were in mourning ? "

" Is that an answer to my question ? Would you after all have mourned over my death ? "

" It is not an answer to your question, because for once I have obeyed the Bible : I have rent my heart and not my garments, and—I might have saved myself the trouble."

" I cannot understand it, it must have been some one else of the same name who died."

" You should have left your address—the George Stein who died, died in South America. All the same, I am very glad you did not leave your address and that the man who died was called George Stein."

" Why ? "

" You will soon understand. I am not going to tell you now," she said, sitting down and beginning to touch her hair. " I want to talk

to you. Shall we stay here? A crowd is the most private place on earth if people only knew it."

"Yes, let us stay here. I am waiting for some one and he may come in at any moment. But what can you have to talk to me about, Grace?"

"Many things; about the man you have come here to see, for instance, if it is a man."

"I'm waiting for Philip Lenormand."

"What have you to say to him?"

"You are inquisitive."

"My curiosity is idle because I know the answer to my own question."

"What is it then?"

"You have two things to say to Philip Lenormand: Where is my wife? I want some..."

"I have only one thing to say to him," he interrupted, "and you have guessed it."

"You will probably succeed in finding her—with his help."

"What do you mean?"

She raised her bare shoulders.

"That he will be able to tell you where she is, *bien entendu*."

"Thank God! And you, do you know where my wife is?"

She did not answer, but again her shoulders went up.

"Have you seen her since I left?" he asked.

"Have you got a cigarette? Thanks. Yes, I have seen Claudia once and heard about her many times. There are matches on the table in

GREEN CHALK

front of you ; you needn't rummage in your pockets like that."

"And do you know where Claudia is now? Where did you see her?" he asked, lighting her cigarette.

"What I have heard is much more interesting than what I have seen."

"Is it true that she has lost her money?"

"I don't know whether it was she who lost it or not—the fact remains that it is lost."

"Surely not all of it?"

"Your questions are a little unpoetical, considering that you have not seen your wife for all this time!"

"It's because I can't bear to think of her in need."

"Of course it is; how stupid of me not to have realized that at once!" she laughed. "Do not distress yourself, *cher ami*, Claudia sold hats most charmingly, I have no doubt."

She leant back in her chair and began blowing little rings of smoke.

"Claudia sold hats!" he repeated in horror.

"Why not?"

"Good God! Is she doing it still?"

"Oh, no!"

"Where is she now? Is she in Paris?"

"Her mother died, I believe, and she left Paris in order to attend the sad event, or at least we'll call it that. I've seen Claudia since that and she really looked remarkably happy, if rather *distracte*."

GREEN CHALK

"Where was she when you saw her?"

"The interest you take in your wife does you great credit. Claudia was in Venice when I saw her," she said in a slow, careless voice, as if the conversation bored her.

"In Venice! Is she still here?" he asked. "Can you tell me where she is staying?"

"So that you may avoid the hotel?" she laughed.

He got up, biting his lips.

"So that I may go to her at once," he said.

"Did you discover in the wilds of America that after all you were, and always had been, a devoted husband?"

"Won't you tell me where she is staying?"

"If I tell you, will you go away at once? Devoted husbands bore me rather, you know."

"I will."

"Mrs. Lenormand is staying in this hotel."

"What! Is Lenormand married? But Claudia—tell me where she is staying."

"Oh, George!" she said, making her voice sound sad, "this *rôle* doesn't suit you one little bit—besides, you're acting abominably."

"I'm not acting."

"Yes, you are. Please, please consider that the curtain has fallen and go away."

"I will, as soon as you have told me where I can find my wife."

"George, dear, I have told you once already; only I don't want you to wait here till she comes in because you are boring me so unmercifully."

GREEN CHALK

If you didn't hear what I said I'll repeat it quite slowly and clearly: Claudia Lenormand is staying in this hotel, but unfortunately she is out at this moment, probably floating in a gondola under the moon; her husband is with her, I believe. Now I've told you all I know."

She raised her hand to hide a yawn and at the same time flicked the ash off the end of her cigarette. Then she looked up and said:

"Haven't you gone yet? Oh, I see, you've still got your whisky to finish. Well, I'll allow you two minutes more to do that in, and you may also tell me about your future plans. Are you going to shatter the hopes and happiness of the two love-birds?"

"No."

"I thought not—a penniless wife wouldn't be of much use to you, would she?"

"If she is happy with him, I'll thank God and go back to America," he said, anger driving the blood from his face.

"How heroic you are nowadays, Enoch dear! I remember the last time you went to America you were rather frightened about something. What was it? Now I remember—you didn't like the idea of going all alone. Are you going alone this time?"

He didn't answer her, but stood quite still, biting his white lips.

"If you ask me to come with you this time, George, I'll come," she said, in an altered voice.

"I mean it. Only you must give me a little

GREEN CHALK

time—a week or less will do. I've got a business transaction to make with a certain fashionable painter. Do you understand ? ”

“ No, I don't.”

“ I think you do,” she said gently.

“ Be quiet ! ”

“ Don't you need money ? Of course you do ! Philip Lenormand's got more than he needs. George, are you going alone this time ? ”

“ You're the worst woman God ever made,” he told her.

“ And the most loving,” she added. “ I was very angry with you last time we met, now I'm only sorry for you. Won't you take me with you ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because I hate you. I don't want to go through life with a serpent wound round my neck.”

“ Your simile isn't good—I'm not cold blooded and I have got arms to wind round your neck. Are you quite sure you want to go alone ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then before you go away alone for the second time, will you give me another cigarette ? ”

He held out his open case to her.

“ I didn't like the last one much,” she said.

“ Are these brown ones Russian ? ”

“ Yes.”

She took one daintily and put it between her lips saying :

GREEN CHALK

"You were always fond of Russian things, weren't you? Will you light it for me, please?"

He struck a match and, as he bent down to hold it to her cigarette, she lifted her head and kissed him on the chin.

"You need not grudge it to me since it has to last me through Eternity," she said.

After which, George Stein went out with the knowledge that, although he had failed in other respects, he had at least succeeded in making one good woman and one bad woman love him.

A man and a woman met on a flight of steps leading down to the water.

The man was hatless and the woman noticed that his eyebrows were unusually arched and dark, that his eyes were blue, and that there was a round black mole on his left cheek near her eye.

The woman was dressed in black, and her cloak was thrown open so that the man could see her bare white bosom. He also saw that her hair was reddish bronze, with purple lights in it, and that the eyes which met his were strangely green and her skin like alabaster.

They recognized each other by the light of the crescent moon. He stood quite still; she looked at him and passed up the steps. At the top she did not turn round. He watched her cross the street and disappear through the door of an hotel.

"Thank God she didn't know me," he said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

PHILIP was standing before Grace, with his hands deep in his trousers pockets.

"You should feel very flattered," she said, "that I thought it worth copying."

"I do," he assured her, "and I think it looks charming in the flesh, if I may use the expression."

"I should have said that the flesh was in it ; however, that doesn't matter. As you see, I haven't imitated the colour of your she-devil's dress, only the design, and being a wise she-devil myself I do not show my cloven hoof to the world."

"Are you a she-devil ? " he asked, in simulated surprise.

"According to you, we are all devils ; even Claudia, since Claudia is a woman."

"I'm going to amend my sweeping assertion—all women are diabolic except those who are divine."

"And I forgot to put on my halo to-night—*quel dommage !*" she said languidly.

"So far, your travels don't seem to have been successful."

"Why do you think that ? "

GREEN CHALK

" You seem as bored as ever."

" To-night I have not been bored at all. And you, what have you been doing? Did you drift down shadowy canals under a silvery moon with Claudia at your side? "

" Yes."

" Where have you left her? "

" In a gondola. I walked back part of the way because I wanted to look for a paint-box I left in a hole in a wall this morning."

" Did you find it? "

" No, some one else had been there before me."

" Naturally."

" Has Claudia come in yet? "

" I don't know, she may have passed without my noticing her. Why will you always talk to me about Claudia? . . . Yes, I am in a bad temper, I confess to it even before I am accused. Tell me, Mr. Lenormand, how it was that you painted Claudia so long before you saw her? "

" I didn't."

" Then you knew her before she married George Stein? "

" No, only I'd seen her once years ago in London."

" " I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die.' "

" Something of that kind," he agreed.

" I thought so. I can imagine a man seeing Claudia's wonderful face and falling head over ears in love with it—please notice that I use the

GREEN CHALK

word 'it' not 'her.' I can forgive him for marrying the face; I can pity him when he discovers that the woman behind the face isn't exactly to match. Don't interrupt me. Probably you haven't begun to discover about the woman yet, because the face has dazzled your eyes. Your mind is so imbued with the Claudia you imagined her to be after your eyes had seen her face that it cannot realize its mistake. Are you very angry with me for telling you this?"

"Yes."

"I don't care! Why don't you go away if I'm making you so angry?"

"Because I'm waiting for Claudia."

"Of course you are, I'd forgotten. Dear, beautiful, stupid Claudia! She's probably in bed by this time."

"I don't think so. Gondoliers generally take their passengers by the longest possible ways; you see, they charge more for long distances than for short ones."

"Naturally."

"I'm having a new experience," Philip remarked, because it seemed as well to speak about things of no importance, considering Grace's mood.

"Are you?"

"I've been ten minutes in your company without seeing you smoke. Have one?"

He held out his case.

"No, thanks."

GREEN CHALK

"Do you mean it?"

"I do. I've smoked my last cigarette."

"I don't believe you."

"You needn't, but it's quite true all the same. Half an hour ago I smoked an exquisite Russian cigarette, and it was my very last."

"Are you developing principles?"

"Why not add 'in your old age'? I know you thought it."

"I didn't, because I'm elemental enough to judge a woman's age by her appearance. Won't you tell why you have made this sudden and extraordinary resolution? If it isn't that you are developing principles, what is it?"

"Sentimentality, which is the chief characteristic of a fool," she said, lying back and idly regarding her green satin toe.

"But what has sentimentality to do with an 'exquisite Russian cigarette'?"

"The Russian cigarette was tipped with gold, only it ended in plain brown paper."

"Your riddle is too difficult for me," Philip said, his eyes on the door. "Won't you explain it?"

"It wasn't a riddle, it was a metaphor. I won't explain it, because it wasn't a very good metaphor and won't bear analysis. Mr. Lenormand, I have only loved twice in my life: The first time it was a younger son, who began by bewitching me, then bored me, and ended by divorcing me; the second time it was a man who tried to make a fool of me, and succeeded in

GREEN CHALK

making a fool of himself, and gave me an exquisite gold-tipped Russian cigarette."

"You mean George Stein?"

"I do."

"You kept the cigarette a long time."

Philip's eyes were still turned towards the door.

"I didn't; I smoked it as soon as he gave it to me."

"I have seen you smoke since Stein went to South America."

"But not since he returned from North America."

"George Stein is dead!"

"How can he be dead? I tell you he is alive and that he left this hotel ten minutes before you got back. He was so sorry to miss you because he came to Venice on purpose to see you."

"Stein in Venice! you're laughing at me, Lady Grace."

All the same, he turned as white as paper and held his breath.

"If I were, the joke would be in the worst of taste. I'm not laughing when I tell you that George Stein is in Venice to-night. I can't make you believe me, can I? After all, the name George Stein isn't by any means uncommon," she added.

"Good God!"

"You needn't look like that," Grace said, laughing a little. "The situation isn't as hopeless as you think."

"Does he—does he know that we're married?"

GREEN CHALK

" Yes, I told him."

" Oh, God ! "

" It's all right," she said soothingly, " he knows something else too. He knows that Claudia's really lost all her money and that he's not likely to get any out of you. In fact, I don't think that George Stein will trouble you again."

" Claudia mustn't know ! Where is she ? Why hasn't she come back ? "

" She has come back. I didn't tell you, because I wanted to talk to you—I was feeling so bored."

" Did she see him ? Don't tell me she saw him ! "

" I'm not going to, because as far as I know she didn't."

" She must never know," he said again.

" There is no reason why she should."

Philip got up and began to go towards the stairs.

" Mr. Lenormand ! "

" Yes ? "

He came back.

" I haven't quite finished what I've got to say. Will you sit down again, please ? "

He sank into the chair and asked :

" Are you sure Stein's gone away for good ? "

" I'm sure he has ; I don't think he wants to put himself before the public again."

" Then there is no reason why Claudia should find out," Philip said, relieved.

GREEN CHALK

"There is only one way in which she could possibly find out."

"What's that?"

"If I were to tell her."

"You! Surely you wouldn't . . ."

"I might. Would it make any difference, do you think, if she knew that George Stein were still in the land of the living? I mean, would she go back to him?"

"Never!" he said angrily. "Only it would make her unhappy, and I don't want that."

"Of course not," she agreed. "*La mignonne* mustn't be made sad whatever else happens. I promise faithfully not to breathe a word about it to her, only . . ."

"What?"

"Only I'd rather like to tell everybody except Claudia," she said, pleasantly. "Don't you think it would amuse them, Mr. Lenormand? It seems unkind to deprive them of their laughter."

"Are you mad?" he demanded.

"Far from it, only I'm . . . I'm . . ."

"What are you?" he cried impatiently.

"My needs are greater than my income, Mr. Lenormand, and I find it very inconvenient sometimes."

"Are you blackmailing me?"

"You use such ugly words," she complained.

.

"Madame's bath is prepared."

GREEN CHALK

"Then you may go to bed, Antoinette."

"Good night, madame."

"Good night," Claudia said.

She did not dry herself after she had had her bath—it would have been ridiculous to have tried to dry a wet canvas with a bath-towel, besides the picture would have become smudged—instead she ran dripping into the adjoining bedroom, laughing a little because she was so beautiful. A long string of green glass beads lay among the brushes and bottles and boxes on the toilet table. This Claudia held up for a moment to the electric light, and then, having smiled at the clear transparency of its colour, she wound it into the hair which lay like a red purple cloud against the snowy whiteness of her skin.

She sat on the floor in front of a high, narrow mirror, hanging on the wall. Bending forward, she kissed the reflected lips and laughed again because she was so beautiful.

She sat like this for a long time, only her own spasmodic laughter breaking the silence in the room, until a step sounded outside and Philip came in.

"Don't touch me—I'm wet!"

Philip stood still in the centre of the room and exclaimed:

"Wet! Why on earth don't you dry yourself? You'll catch cold."

He saw that his wife's naked back was shaking with laughter, and heard her say:

"Don't be silly! How can a picture catch

GREEN CHALK

cold? Don't you think I should be framed in a black, oval frame? . . . Go away, dear, go away! . . . Can't you see I'm still wet? You'll spoil me if you touch me and get your hands all covered with paint."

She turned her head, and laughed at him over her shoulder with her lips and mad, green eyes.

THE END

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