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The Halo

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The Halo

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PROLOGUE

A straight stretch of dusty Norman road dappled with grotesque shadows of the ancient apple-trees that, bent as if in patient endurance of the weight of their thick-set scarlet fruit, edged it on both sides.

Under one of the trees, his back against its gnarled trunk, sat an old man playing a cracked fiddle.

He played horribly, wrenching discords from the poor instrument, grinning with a kind of vacant malice as it shrieked aloud in agony, and rolling in their scarred sockets his long-blind eyes.

Beside him, his tongue hanging out, his head bent, sat a yellow dog with a lead to his collar. Far and wide there was to be seen no other living thing, and in the apple-scented heat the screeching of the violin was like the resentful cries of some invisible creature being tortured.

"Papillon, *mon ami*," said the old man, ceasing playing for a moment, "we are wasting time; the shadows are coming. See the baby shadow apple-trees creeping across the road."

The yellow dog cocked an ear and said nothing.

"Time should never be lost, *petit chien jaune*---never be lost."

Then with a shrill laugh he ground his bow deep into the roughened strings, and the painful music began again.

The yellow dog closed his eyes....

Suddenly far down the road appeared a low cloud of white dust, advancing rapidly, and until it was nearly abreast of the fiddler, noiselessly, and then, with the cessation of a quick padding sound of bare feet, appeared a small, black-smocked boy, his sabots under his arm, his face white with anger.

"Stop it!" he cried, "stop it!"

The old man turned. "Stop what, little seigneur," he asked with surly amusement. "Does the high road belong to you?"

"You must stop it, I say, I cannot bear it."

The fiddler rose and danced about scraping more hideously than before. "Ho, ho," he laughed, "ho, ho, ho, ho!"

The child threw his arms over his head in a gesture of unconscious melodrama. "I cannot bear it---you are hurting it---I---I will kill you if you do not stop." And he flew at his enemy, using his close-cropped bullet-head as a battering ram.

For some seconds the absurd battle continued, and then, as unexpectedly as he had begun it, the boy gave it up, and as the fiddler laughed harshly, and the fiddle screeched, threw himself on the warm, dusty grass and cried aloud.

There was a pause, after which, in silence, the old man groped his way to the boy and knelt by him. "Hush, *mon petit*," he beseeched, "old Luc-Ange is a monster to tease you. Do not cry, do not cry."

A curious apple, leaning over to listen, fell from its bough and dropped with a thud into the grass.

The little Norman sat up. "I am not crying," he declared, turning a brown, pugnacious face towards his late foe, "see, there are no tears."

The man touched his cheeks and eyelids delicately with his dirty fingers. "True---–no tears. But---–why, why did you-----–"

"I was screaming because that noise was so horrible."

"And---–that noise gave you pain?"

Bullet-Head frowned. Like all Normans, he resented his mental privacy being intruded on by questions.

"Not pain; it gives me a horrible, hollow feeling in my inside," he admitted grudgingly, "just under the belt."

After a moment he added, his dark eyes fixed angrily on the violin, "I hate violins; they are dreadful things. M. Chalumeau had one. I broke it."

The blind man laughed gratingly. "Because it made such a horrible noise?"

"Yes."

Another pause, and then the man's expression of vacant malice turned to one pitiful to see, one of indistinct yearning. "Give it to me," he muttered, "they say I am half mad, and perhaps I am, but---–I think I could play once-----–" The yellow dog snapped at a fly, and his master turned towards him, adding, "Before your time, Papillon, long before."

The bow touched the strings once or twice gently and ineffectively, and then, his lips twitching, his eyelids as much closed as the scars on their lids allowed them to be, he began to play.

It was the playing of one who had forgotten nearly everything of his art, but it was sweet and true and strangely touching. To the boy it was a miracle. He listened with the muscles of his face drawn tight in an effort at self-control unusual in such a child, his square, brown hands digging convulsively into the dry earth under the grass beside him. And as the shadows of the trees crept over the road, and the oppressive heat began to relent a little, the plaintive music went on and on, and scant, painful tears stood on the player's face.

At last he stopped, and frowning in a puzzled way, said hoarsely, "What is the matter, Papillon, where have we got to?"

The dog's tail stirred in answer, and at the same moment the other listener burst into loud, emotional sobs, and the old man remembered. "That's it, that's it. It's the boy who made me remember---–'*Te rappelles tu, te rappelles---–tu, ma Toinon?*' Why do you cry, little boy? Why do you cry?"

The boy dried his eyes on his smock sleeve.

"It---I am ten, too big to cry," he returned, with the evasion born in him of his race, adding with the frankness peculiar to his own personality, "but I did cry. It was beautiful."

The old man rose, and took up the dog's lead.

"Beautiful. Yes. There was a time-----" He paused for a second. "What is your name, little one?"

"Victor-Marie Joyselle."

"*Eh b'en*, Victor-Marie Joyselle, listen to me. When you have learned to play the violin-----" but Bullet-Head interrupted him.

"How do you know that I mean to learn to play the violin?" he queried, drooping the outer corners of his eyelids in quick suspicion, "I did not say so."

"I know. And when you have learned, remember me. And never let anything---come here that I may put my hand on your head that you do not forget---never let anything---duty, pleasure, money, or---or a *woman*---come between you and your music."

The boy stared seriously into the strange face bent over him, the face from which so much that was bad seemed for the moment to have been swept away by the luminousness of the idea that had come to the half-idiotic brain.

"'Duty, pleasure, money or---'"

"Or a *woman*" cried the fiddler, his face contorting with anger. "God curse them all!" Muttering and frowning he jerked at his dog. "Come, Papillon, come; we must be getting on, it is late. *Petit chien jaune, petit chien jaune.*"

The dog trotting discreetly at the end of the taut lead, the old man slouched up the road, brandishing his violin aimlessly and talking aloud as he went.

"I ask myself," said the little Norman, "how he *knew*."

Then, for he was no longer in haste, he stepped into his green sabots and started homeward, biting into the apple that had listened.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

The Earl of Kingsmead lay flat on his stomach on the warm, short grass by the carp-pond, and studied therein the ponderous manoeuvres of an ancient fish, believed by the people thereabouts to be something over two hundred years old. Carp had a great charm for Lord Kingsmead; so had electricity; so had toads; so had buns, and stable-boys, and pianolas, and armour, and curates, and chocolates.

Everything was full of interest to this interesting nobleman, and the most beautiful part of it was that there was beyond Kingsmead and the very restricted area of London that he had hitherto been allowed to investigate, a whole world full of

things strange, undreamed-of, delightful, and, best of all, dangerous, to the study of which he meant to dedicate every second of the time that spread between that moment as he lay on the grass and the horrid hour when he should be carried to the family vault surrounded by sobbing relations.

For Tommy Kingsmead was one of those most unusual persons who understand the value of life as it dribbles through their fingers in seconds, instead of, like most people, losing the vibrant present in a useless (because invariably miscalculated) study of the future.

This morning he had devoted to a keen investigation of several matters of palpitating interest.

Had Fledge, the butler, who had apparently been at Kingsmead since the beginning of the world, any teeth, or did his flexible, long lips hide only gums? Until that day the problem had never suggested itself to Fledge's master, but when it did, it roused in him a passion of curiosity that had to be satisfied, after the failure of a series of diplomatic attempts by the putting of a plain question.

"I say, Fledge."

"My lord?"

"---You never *do* really open your mouth, you know---except, I suppose, when you eat-----"

"Yes, my lord."

"You just, well---fumble with your lips. So---I say, Fledge, *have* you any teeth?"

And Fledge, possibly because he was a man of principle, but probably also because he suspected that his master's next words might take the form of an order to open his mouth, told the truth. He had three teeth only.

"And look here, Fledge, why do William's toes turn out at such a fearful angle?"

Pledge's heart was in the plate-closet at that moment, but his patience was monumental.

"I don't know, my lord---unless it's because 'e's only just left off being knife-boy---they get used to standing at the sink a-washing up, my lord, and William's feet is large, so I dessay he turned 'is toes out in order to get near and not splash."

This elucidation appeared plausible as well as interesting to Kingsmead, and he felt that in learning something of the habits of the genus knife-boy he had added to his stock of human information, which he undoubtedly had.

Then at lunch there had been the little matter of Bicky's dressmaker's bill. The mater had been her crossest, and Bicky her silentest, and the bill, discussed in French, a disgusting and superfluous language, the acquirement of which Kingsmead had used much skill in evading, lay on the table. It lay there, forgotten, after the two ladies had left the room, but Kingsmead was a gentleman. So, later he had sought out his sister and coaxed her into telling him the hair-raising sum to which amounted the "two or three frocks" she had had that summer.

He had also learned that Mr. Yelverton, the Carrons, the Newlyns, and Theo Joyselle were coming that afternoon, and what the *real* reason was that had made the Frenshaws wire they could not come. It had not at all surprised him to hear that the reason given in the wire was utterly false, for, like other people, Kingsmead was bound by his horizon.

On the whole, his day had been a busy one, and the valuable acquisitions of knowledge that I have mentioned, together with a few scraps of information on stable and garage matters, had brought him quite comfortably up to four o'clock, when, as he idled across the lawn, that rum old carp had caught, and held, his eye.

It was a very warm day in October, a day most unusual in its mellow beauty; soft sunshine lay on the lawn and lent splendour to the not very large Tudor house off to the left.

The air of gentle, self-satisfied decrepitude worn by the old place was for the moment lost, and it looked new, clean-cut and almost gaudy, as it must have done in the distant days when it was young. It was a becoming day for the ancient building, as candle-light is becoming to an old beauty and brings back a fleeting and pathetic air of youth to her still lovely features.

Above, the sky was very blue, and the ruminating silence was broken only by the honk-honk of a distant motor. The carp, impeded in his lethargic progress by the thick stem of a water-lily, had stood still (if a fish can be said to stand) for a century---nearly five minutes---his silly old nose pointing stubbornly at the obstacle.

"*It* won't move, so you'll have to," observed Kingsmead, wriggling a little nearer, "Oh, I say *do* buck up, or you'll never get there-----"

And the carp, quite as if he understood, did buck up, and slid away into the shadow of the rhododendrons.

Kingsmead rose slowly and picked up his cap. What should he do next? The puppies weren't bad, nor the new under-gardener who swore so awfully at his inferior, nor-----

"Hello, Tommy."

"Hello, Bicky."

Brigit Mead wore a short blue skirt, brown shoes, a pink wash-silk blouse made like a man's shirt, and a green felt hat that obviously belonged to someone else. She was dressed like thousands of English girls, and she looked as though the blood in her might be any in the world but English. Hers was an enigmatic, narrow, high-bred face, crowned by masses of dry black hair, and distinguished from any other face most people had ever seen by the curved line of her little nose and the colourless darkness of her very long, half-closed, heavily lashed eyes. She looked sulky, disagreeable, and secretive, but she was strangely and undeniably beautiful. Her long, thin-lipped mouth was too close shut, but it was of an exquisite satin texture, scarlet in colour, and when she said "Hello, Tommy," it melted into the most enchanting and indescribable curves, showing just a glimpse of pointed white teeth.

Kingsmead studied her gravely for a moment.

"Been crying?"

"Yes."

"That bill?"

"Yes, that bill, you horrid little boy. There's a long worm in your hair."

Kingsmead removed the worm.

"Mater been nasty?"

"Beastly."

"*H'm*. I say, Bick, I saw Ponty yesterday."

Brigit, who had turned and was gazing across the lawn, looked at him without moving her head, a trick which is not at all English.

"Did you, now?"

"I did. He is dining here, he says. He is also sending you some flowers. I told him," added the boy dreamily, "that we had lots ourselves."

After a moment, as she did not speak, he went on, "Poor old thing, why did you poggle him so awfully, Bicky? You really *are* a horrid girl, you know."

"I didn't poggle him."

She did not turn, she did not smile, and the sombreness that was the dominant expression of her face was strange to see in a girl of her age.

"Well-----–" Kingsmead's small countenance, so different from hers in its look of palpitating interest and curiosity, suddenly flushed a deep and a beautiful red. "I say, old girl," he broke out, "*are* you going to?"

And she, silent and unresponsive as she was, could not avoid answering him.

"Well, Tommy dear---–I don't know, but I suppose I shall."

"I don't like him, poor thing, and I wish you---–mustn't."

"That's exactly the word. I fear I must." Her eyes nearly closed as she refused to frown. "This kind of thing can't go on for ever."

"You mean the mater. Well, look here, Bicky, she'll be better when Carron is here---–she always is."

"Oh, Tommy-----–"

"But she *is*. She obeys him rather, don't you think? I suppose because he was a friend of father's. Is she really very bad to-day?"

"Yes."

"Well, why don't you ask him to tell her to chuck it? I say, dear old thing, I wish I were nine years older!"

"If you were, I should be thirty-four!"

"I meant about the beastly money."

She laughed. "Funny little kiddie! *You* aren't going to have any money either. If we lived within our means we'd be enjoying life in a villa in some horrible suburb. We are hideously poor, Kingsmead."

She so rarely called him by his name that the boy felt alarmed. Pontefract, with his red neck and his short legs, seemed suddenly very near.

"Isn't there anyone else?" he blurted out, as she led the way towards the house. "I mean, any other chap with money?"

"No one with as much. And then, he isn't so very bad, Tommy. He's good-natured. Think of Clandon, or---Negroponte!" Her shudder was perfectly genuine.

"But Pontefract is so thundering old!"

She made no reply, and after a minute he went on: "What about Theo Joyselle?"

"My dear child, he is three years younger than I, even counting in bare years! And in reality I am twenty years too old for him. Silly little boy, don't bother about me." And her face, as she smiled down at her brother, was very pleasant as well as very beautiful.

"But he has money-----"

She nodded.

"And-----"

"How did you know that, imp?"

"Having eyes to see, I saw. And I'd like to be an In-law to Victor Joyselle. I'd make him play to me all day. I say, I suppose she wouldn't let us run up to hear him to-morrow?"

"Not she."

He sighed, and it was a grown-up sigh issuing from a child's throat, for he loved music and had read the programme.

"How glorious the last one was! Upon my word, if I were you, I'd marry Theo just to be that man's daughter-in-law."

Again she laughed and laid her hand on his head.

"Good old Thomas. He's a Norman peasant, remember---probably eats with his knife. Oh, here's a motor---and it is Theo himself."

"Yes, speak of an angel and you hear his horn."

"Shall I tell him of your plan?" she teased as the motor slowed up.

But Tommy had disappeared, and in his place, small, freckled, and untidy, it is true, but a gentlemanly host welcoming his mother's guest, stood Lord Kingsmead.

CHAPTER TWO

Lady Kingsmead was one of those piteous beings, a middle-aged young woman. She was forty-six, but across a considerably-lighted room looked thirty-six. The shock, when one approached her, was so much the greater. Her plentiful, grey-streaked hair dwelt in disgrace behind a glossy transformation, and her face had, from constant massage and make-up, a curious air of not belonging to her any more than did the wavy hair above it.

The lines that the mercifully deliberate on-coming of age draws on all of us were, it is true, nearly obliterated, but in their place was a certain blankness that was very unbeautiful indeed.

However, she liked herself as she made herself, and most people thought her wonderfully young-looking.

The question of age, real and apparent, is a curious one that gives furiously to think, as the French say. No one on earth could consider it an advantage for a child of twelve to wear the facial aspect of a baby of two, nor for a girl of twenty to look like a child of ten, but later on this equation apparently fails to hold good, and Lady Kingsmead in appearing (at a little distance) nearly ten years her own junior, was as vastly pleased with herself as, considering the time and the care she devoted to the subject, she deserved to be.

As she came downstairs the evening of the day of her daughter's unusually confidential conversation with her son, Brigit joined her.

"Ugh, mother, you have too much scent," observed the girl, curling her upper lip rather unpleasantly. "It's horrid."

"Never mind, ducky, I've only just put it on; it will go off after a bit. It's the very newest thing in Paris. Gerald brought it to me---*Souvenir de Jeunesse*."

Brigit looked at her for a moment, but said nothing.

Lady Kingsmead's unconsciousness was, as it always was when she was in a good humour, both amusing and disarming. So the two women descended the dark, panelled staircase in silence, crossed the hall and went into the drawing-room. A man sat over the fire, his long, white hands held up to the blaze.

"H'are you, Brigit?"

"How d'you do, Gerald?"

Carron turned without rising, and stared thoughtfully at the girl. He was a big, bony man who had once been very handsome, and the conquering air had remained true to him long after the desertion of his beauty. This, too, "gives to think," and is a warning to all people who have made their worldly successes solely by force of looks, and these are many. Carron pulled his moustache and narrowed his tired-looking blue eyes in a way that had been very fetching fifteen years before.

"You look pretty fit," he observed after a pause, as she gazed absently over his head at the carvings of the mantelpiece.

"I'm---ripping, thanks," she answered with a bored air.

"You'll have to look out, Tony," he went on, frowning as he caught the expression in Lady Kingsmead's eyes, "she is confoundly good-looking. Beauties' daughters ought always to be plain."

Lady Kingsmead flushed angrily, and was about to speak, when her daughter interrupted in a perfunctory voice: "Oh, don't, Gerald, you know she loathes being teased. Besides, your praise doesn't in the least interest me."

His smile was not good to see. "I think, my dear Brigit, that you are about the handsomest woman I ever saw---that is, the handsomest *dark* woman; but you look so damned ill-tempered that you will be hideous in ten years' time."

The girl drew a deep sigh of indifference, and turning, walked slowly away. She wore a rather shabby frock of tomato-coloured chiffon, and as she went down the room one of her greatest charms appeared to striking advantage---the lazy, muscular grace of her movements. She walked like an American Indian youth of some superior tribe, and every curve of her body indicated remarkable physical strength and endurance.

Gerald Carron watched her, his face paling, and as Lady Kingsmead studied him, her own slowly reddened under its mask of paint and powder. The situation was an old one---a woman, too late reciprocating the passion which she had toyed with for many years, suddenly brought face to face with the realisation that this love had been transferred to a younger woman, and that woman her own daughter. The little scene enacted so quietly in the pretty, conventional drawing-room, with its pale walls and beflowered furniture, was of great tenseness.

Before anyone had spoken the door opened and the Newlyns and Pat Yelverton came in, Mrs. Newlyn hastily clasping the last of the myriad bracelets that were so peculiarly unbecoming to her thin red arms. She and her husband both were bird-like in eye and gesture, and their nicknames among their intimates were, though neither of them knew it, the Cassowary and the Sparrow, she being the Cassowary. Besides being bird-like, they were both bores of the deepest dye.

Pat Yelverton was a blond giant with a very bad reputation, a genius for Bridge, and the softest, most caressing voice that ever issued from a man's throat.

Meeting the new-comers at the door, Brigit shook hands with them and returned, with an aimless air peculiar to her, to the fire.

She knew them all so well, and they all bored her to tears, except Carron, whom she strongly hated. Everybody bored her, and everything. With the utmost sincerity she wondered for the thousandth time why she had ever been born.

As the others chattered, she went to a window and stood looking out over the moonlit lawn.

"Lady Brigit!"

She turned, and seeing the smile of delight on the boyish face before her, smiled back. "Monsieur Joyselle!"

Theo, who was twenty-two, and who adored her, flushed to the roots of his curly hair---and who was it who decided that blushes stop there, and do not continue up over the skull, down the back and out at one's heels?

"Yes, yes," he cried, holding her hand tightly in his. "Let us speak French, I---I love to speak my own tongue to you."

He himself had a delightful little fault in his speech, being quite incapable of pronouncing the English "r," rolling it in his throat in a way that always amused Brigit.

As he talked, her smile deepened in character, and from one of mere friendly greeting became one of real affection. He was nice, this boy; she liked his honest dark eyes and the expression of his handsome young mouth.

"Tell me," she began presently, "how is your father?"

"He is well, my father, but very nervous. Poor mother!"

"Poor *mother*?"

"But yes. The concert is to be to-morrow, and he is always in a furious state of nerves before he plays. He has been terrific all day."

Brigit sat down. "How curious. One would think that he of all people would be used to playing in public by now," she commented, observing with a tinge of impatience the effect on him of her head outlined against the pale moonlight.

He stood for a moment, unconsciously and irresistibly admiring her. Then, with a little shake of his head, answered her remark. "No, no, he is most nervous always. It is your amateur who knows no stage-fright. Papa," he went on, using the name that to English ears sounds so strangely on grown-up lips, "says he invariably feels as though the audience were wild beasts going to rush at him and tear him to pieces---until he has played one number."

"And after the concert?"

As she spoke dinner was announced, and while they went down the passage to the dining-room at the tail of the little procession, he answered with a laugh, "Oh, *afterwards* a child could eat out of his hand. He is honey and milk, nectar and---*ambrrrrosia*!"

The dinner was noisy. Lady Kingsmead always shrieked, as did Mrs. Newlyn, and her other guests either bellowed or screamed, with the exception of Yelverton, who was hungry and said little.

Brigit sat between him and young Joyselle. It was nice to have the boy next her, but his adoration was too obvious to be altogether comfortable.

Freddy Newlyn told some new stories, all delightfully vulgar; Carron gave a realistic *resume* of a recent French play.

"Awful rot, isn't it?" queried Yelverton suddenly under cover of a roar of laughter. "Why the dickens can't they talk quietly?"

"If you dislike it," she inquired unresentfully, "why do you come?"

"I beg pardon, Lady Brigit, I forgot that you belonged here; I always do forget."

Then Joyselle turned to her, his face so eloquent that she felt like warning him not to betray his secret. "I---I am so happy to be here," he stammered.

Her very black, very well-drawn eyebrows drew a trifle closer together, and with the quickness of his race he saw it.

"Forgive me, Lady Brigit," he said hastily in English. "I am sorry. And---I will not say it again! Only-----"

"Only---you *are* glad? Well, I'm glad, too," she answered slowly. The noisier the others grew as dinner progressed, the closer she and this quiet-voiced boy seemed to draw together.

"Poor old Ponty, too bad he couldn't come," cried Mr. Newlyn, pecking, sparrow-like, at a scrap of food on his plate. "Anything wrong, Lady Kingsmead?"

"No, I don't think so. He telephoned just before dinner---*oh*!"

She broke off, and everyone turned towards the door as it opened noisily to admit a stout, red-faced man, who stood hesitating on the threshold, not as much apparently from shyness as from a kind of bodily stammer of movement.

"Ponty!"

"Awfully sorry, Tony," explained Lord Pontefract, advancing towards his hostess, "awfully sorry, but that idiot Hendricks got a telephone message wrong, and I thought I couldn't come. So when I found out, I thought 'better late than never,' though I *had* dined. Please say 'better late than never.'"

"Better late than never," chanted the whole party dissonantly, and room was made for the new-comer between Brigit and Yelverton.

"That fool Shover nearly broke my neck, too," he confided, sitting down and lowering his voice confidentially. "I---I thought for a second I should never see you again."

She looked at him out of the corners of her eyes. He had been drinking. No one had ever seen Oscar Pontefract drunk, but as time went on the honourable body of those who had ever seen him perfectly sober diminished rapidly.

"Haven't seen you for ten days. Damnedest ten days I ever lived through," he continued, helping himself to whisky and soda, "and most infernal ten nights, too. Can't sleep for thinking of you," he added hastily, as she at last turned and looked full at him.

She was twenty-five, and had lived in this *milieu* for the past seven years. It had begun by disgusting her, then for a time she had been indifferent to it, and now for the last year it had been growing steadily unbearable.

"*Dites donc*, Lady Brigit," began Joyselle in her left ear, and as she listened to him she instinctively drew away from Pontefract, closer to him. At dessert Kingsmead came sauntering in, less with the air of a little boy allowed to appear with the fruit than of a gently interested gentleman come to take a look at the strange beasts it amused him to keep in a remote corner of his park.

He ate fruit in, to the unaccustomed eye, alarming quantities, and his mother's guests discussed him exactly as if he had not been there.

A very plain little boy, Kingsmead, with stiff fair hair and many freckles. But for his mouth a most unremarkable-looking person, for his eyes, quick as those of a lizard, were pale blue in colour, and small. But his mouth turned up at the corners in a peculiar and faun-like way, and gave much character to his face, which was otherwise impassive as well as ugly.

"Boy ought to go to school," growled Lord Pontefract.

Lady Kingsmead shrugged her shoulders. "Of course he ought," she assented shrilly, "but what am I to do? He simply won't go, will you, Tommy?"

"No, I believe in self-education. The intelligent child gleans more from the company and conversation of his elders-----–" Gravely he paused and gazed round the table at the meaningless faces of most of those present.

The Cassowary burst into a scream of laughter. "Oh, Tommy, you *are* such a quaint little being," she cried; "isn't he, Gerald?"

"Beastly child. Kingsmead always was an ass, but no one would have believed that even *he* could be such an imbecile as to leave that boy entirely in his wife's hands."

"*So* ducky, I always think him, though not pretty," returned the Cassowary.

As they left the dining-room Kingsmead whispered to his sister, "I say, Bicky, look out for Ponty. He's a bit boiled."

CHAPTER THREE

"If I do, they will say that I am in love with some man who either won't have me, or is already married, or that I am forced to, by my debts. If I don't---then this will go on indefinitely, and some fine day I shall jump into the carp-pond and drown in four feet of nasty, slimy water."

Brigit Mead stood behind the heavy curtains by an open window and whispered the above reflections to herself. It was a trick she had in moments of intense concentration, and the sharp, hissing sound of the last words was so distinct that she involuntarily turned to see that she had not been overheard.

No, it was all right, everyone was busy with the preparations for the evening's work, except Joyselle, who sat at the piano and was playing, very softly, a little thing of Grieg's.

The great hall looked almost empty in spite of its nine occupants, and the electric lamps threw little pools of light on the polished floor.

It might have been a cheerless place enough, for one unintelligent Georgian Kingsmead had added to its austerity of church-like painted windows a very awful row of glossy marble pillars, that stood as if aware of their own ugliness, holding up a quite unnecessary and appallingly hideous gallery.

Luckily, however, the late Lord Kingsmead, while not possessing enough initiative to do away with the horrors perpetuated by his ancestors, was a man of some taste, and had, by the means of gorgeous Eastern carpets, skilful overhead lighting, and some fine hangings, transformed the place into a very comfortable and livable one.

A huge fire burned under the splendid carved chimney-piece, and Brigit, turning from the cool moonlight to the interior, watched it with a certain sense of artistic pleasure. It was a dear old house, Kingsmead, and with money---oh, yes, oh, yes, money! When Tommy was grown, what kind of a man would he be? She shuddered.

And there, staring at her across a table on which he was leaning to perfect his not quite faultless balance, stood Pontefract, money, so far as she was concerned, personified.

He owned mines in Cornwall, a highly successful motor-factory, a big London newspaper, a house in Grosvenor Square, and Pomfret Abbey.

Also he owned an ever-thirsting palate, a fat red neck, red-rimmed eyes, and a bald head.

She looked at him with the absent-minded deliberation that so annoyed many people. He was rather awful in many ways, but he was a kind man, his temper was good, and he would doubtless be an amiable, manageable husband.

"Brigit,---let's go out, I,---there is something I want to tell you." His voice shook a little with real emotion, and though he had undoubtedly drunk more than was good for him, there was about the man a certain dignity, compounded of his breeding, his respect for her, and his sincerity.

She did not move, and her small, narrow face went white. He would take her---wherever she asked him; she would be able to fly away from her mother and her mother's friends. After a long pause, which he bore well, she bowed her head slowly. "Yes, I will get a scarf," and leaving him she left the room. Her face was set and a little sullen as she came back with a long silk scarf on her arm. Carron met her near the door. "Made up your mind, have you?" he asked, with deliberate insolence. "Better wait till to-morrow, my dear---he's half drunk."

She hated Carron. Hated him with an intensity that few women know. At that moment she would have liked to kill him. But knowing a better weapon, and rejoicing in her cruelty, she used it. "Poor old Gerald," she said, smiling at him, "no man over fifty can afford the luxury of jealousy."

Then she joined Pontefract.

He made his proposal succinctly and well, and without any confusion she accepted him. "No---you may not kiss me to-night," she added. "You may come for that---to-morrow. Now would you mind going? I---I want to be alone."

Quite humbly, hardly daring to believe in his good fortune, he left her, and she wandered aimlessly over the grass towards the carp-pond. "Nasty, slimy water," she said aloud, "you have lost me!"

Joyselle had stopped playing, and through the open windows only a very subdued murmur of voices came. Even Bridge has its uses. The night was perfect, and the serene moon sailed high under a scrap of cloud like a wing. The old house, most beautiful, looked, among its surrounding trees, secluded and protected.

"It looks like a home," thought the girl bitterly.

And then young Joyselle joined her.

"May I come? Shall I bother you?"

"You may come; and you never bother me."

His youthful face was pleasant to look at; the dominating expression of it was one of sunny sweetness. Would Tommy grow to be as nice a young man?

Tommy, that old person, was, she knew, perched astride a chair near the Bridge table, picking up, with uncanny shrewdness, all sorts of tips about the great game, as he picked up knowledge about everything that came his way. Up to this, his varied stock of information had not hurt him. Later---who could tell?

"Where is Tommy?" she asked miserably.

"Watching the Bridge. Why are you unhappy?" His dark eyes were bent imploringly on hers. "I---I can't bear to see you suffer."

"Oh, *mon Dieu, je ne souffre pas*! That is saying far too much. I-----–"

"Was it Pontefract?"

"No, oh, no. Ponty and I are very good friends," she returned absently. And then she remembered. She was going to marry Ponty!

"Let's walk to the sun-dial and see what time it is by the moon," she suggested abruptly.

But at the sun-dial he insisted further, always gentle and apologetic, but always bent on having an answer to his question.

"You are not going to marry him?" he asked.

"Who told you I was?"

"No one."

"Oh!"

"Well, *are* you?"

His head fairly swam as he looked at her in the full moonlight. "What made you think of it?" she returned.

"Tommy---–told me not to interrupt you---–and him."

"Well---–it's true."

He was young, and French, and she was beautiful and he was desperately in love with her. Kneeling suddenly on the damp grass, he buried his face in his arms as they lay limply across the sun-dial. There was a long pause. He did not sob, he was quite still, but every line of him proclaimed unspeakable agony.

"Poor boy," she said gently.

Then he rose. "I am not a boy," he declared, his chin twitching but his voice firm, "and I love you. He is old and---–*c'est un vieux roue*. I at least am young and I have lived a clean life."

He asked her no question, but she paused to consider. "I know, I understand," he continued, "you hate this life, you are bored and sick of it all; you do not love your mother. *Mon Dieu, ne pas pouvoir aimer sa mere!* And you want to get away. Then---–marry me instead. I am not so rich, but I am rich. And, ah, I love you---–*je t'aime*."

Poor Pontefract, leaning back in his big Mercedes trying to realise his bliss, was jilted before Brigit had spoken a word. Like a flash, his image seemed to stand before her, beside the delightful boy-man whose youth and niceness pleaded so strongly to her. She did not consider that breaking her word was not fair play, she had no thought of pity for Pontefract. She loved nobody, and therefore thought solely of herself. This boy was right. She would be happier with him than with poor, old, fat Ponty. So poor, old, fat Ponty went to the wall, and putting her hands into Joyselle's, she said slowly:

"Very well---–I will. I will marry you. Only---–you must know that I am an odious person, selfish and moody, and-----–"

But she could not finish her sentence, because Joyselle had her in his arms and was kissing her.

"I will be your servant and your slave," he told her, with very bad judgment but much sincerity. "I will serve you on my knees."

"Now you must---buck up---and not let them see to-night. Mother will be cross at first. And---I must write Ponty before we tell."

Her practical tone struck chill on Joyselle's glowing young ear, but he followed her obediently to the house. As they reached the door the opening bar of Mendelssohn's Wedding March rang out, played with a mastery of the pianola that, in that house, only Kingsmead was capable of.

On entering, Brigit's face was scarlet. She knew that her brother was welcoming the wrong bridegroom. And it suddenly occurred to her that it was awkward to be engaged to two men at once.

"I say-----" began Tommy as he saw Joyselle, and she interrupted him hastily. "Play something of Sinding's, dear," she said, and the boy complied. But his eye was horribly knowing, and hard to bear.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lady Brigit leaned back in her corner and surveyed the otherwise empty compartment with a sigh of relief. She knew that her face still bore signs of the anger roused by her mother in their recent interview, and she felt the necessity of looking as savage as she felt.

And she felt very savage indeed. If an American Indian---an idealised, poeticised American Indian---could be invested with the beauty that does not belong to the red races and yet which, if perfected on the lines of beauty suggested by some of the nobler specimens of the nobler tribes, she might look like Brigit Mead. The girl had a clean-cutness of feature, a thin compactness of build, a stag-like carriage of her small head that, together with her almost bronze skin and coal-black hair, gave her an air remarkably and arrestingly un-English. The picture in the Luxembourg gallery, a typically French, subtle, secretive face, gives the expression of her face and the strange gleam in the long eyes. But it, the face in the picture, is overcivilised, whereas Brigit looked untamed and resentful.

She wore, for the weather had changed with the unpleasant capriciousness of an elderly coquette, a warm, close-fitting black coat and skirt and a small black toque. Round her neck clung to its own tail, as if in a despairing attempt to find out what had happened to its own anatomy, a little sable boa. She had a dressing-case and an umbrella, both of them characteristically uncumbersome and light, and several newspapers and a book.

Her journey was not to be a long one. She was going to change trains in London and go half an hour into Surrey to spend a few days with a friend. Lady Kingsmead, when told of the speedy jilting of the desirable Pontefract, and the subsequent acceptance of young Joyselle, had been disagreeable.

"It is ridiculous, and everyone will say you are cradle-snatching," she had said. "When you are forty he will be thirty-seven---almost a boy still."

"Dearest mamma," returned the girl with a very unfilial lift of her upper lip, "forty is---*youth*!"

"And for you to marry a nobody; the son of nobody knows whom!"

"But everybody knows who his father is---which is rather distinguished nowadays!"

Then Lady Kingsmead, as was natural, quite lost her temper and stormed. Brigit was an idiot, a fool, a beastly little creature to do such a thing. Ponty was a gentleman, at least, whereas-----

"Whereas Theo is a delightful, nice, perfectly presentable young man, and the son of the greatest violinist of the century."

"Ah, bah! of the last ten years, yes."

"Of the century. As to Ponty---why don't you marry him yourself? Anyone could marry Ponty!"

Then, suddenly ashamed of herself, the girl had begged her mother's pardon, but Lady Kingsmead was not of those to whom the crowning charm of graceful forgiveness has been vouchsafed, and the battle went on. To end it, Brigit announced her intention of going to stop with her friend Pam de Lensky, and without more ado, or a word of good-bye, had left the house.

Now, though ashamed, or possibly because she was ashamed, her anger against her mother refused to subside, but grew stronger and bitterer as the train rushed through the dull afternoon Londonwards.

"Why shouldn't I marry whom I choose? What has she ever done for me that gives her a right to dictate to me? And I could *kill* Gerald." A dark flush crept up her cheeks and her mouth twisted furiously. For Carron had dared to waylay her in the passage on her way to her room, and his remarks had not been of a kind calculated to quiet her. Women who have loved are sorry for men who love them, but women who do not know what the word means are either amused or irritated by it. The conversation, carried on in a careful undertone, and lasting only about five minutes, was one that the girl would never, she knew, be able to forget, and one that neither she nor the man could ever make even a pretence of forgiving.

Far too excited and annoyed to read, she watched with unseeing eyes the swift flight of the familiar landscape, and then suddenly, as the train stopped, came to herself with a start. Victoria!

Mechanically, her thick chiffon veil over her face, she looked after her luggage, took a hansom, and drove down Victoria Street, past the Abbey, over Westminster Bridge, and so to Waterloo Station.

London was dull, but its dulness, grey and soft, was being mitigated by a gradual and beautiful blossoming of lights---lights reddish, golden, and clear white. People hurried along the streets, hansoms jingled and passed by, buses and vans blocked the view and then, with elephantine deliberateness, ambled on. Motors of all kinds grunted and jingled, from the opulent, throaty-voiced ones, that chuckle as if they were fed on turtle-soup, to the cheap variety, that sound as they pass like an old-fashioned tinsmith's waggon.

And the combined effect of all these varied sounds was so different from the sound of Paris, or New York, or Berlin, that an intelligent blind man would have known where he was, if softly and undisturbingly dropped from a balloon to a safe street corner.

Brigit Mead had no particular love for the old town, just as she had no particular love for her little brother's country-house. She was too bored to care in the least where she was, and only a few people in the world could soothe her vexed and discontented mind to a sense of calm. The woman to visit whom she was on her way was one of these, and as she bought her ticket and made her way to the train a little of her ill-temper died away. "Good old Pam," she whispered under her veil, "*she* will be glad I didn't take Ponty!"

Then there would be the children---six-years-old Pammy, the De Lenskys' adopted child, and their own little Eliza and Thaddy---the latter a delicious, roundabout person of eighteen months, the very feel of whom was comforting.

"An empty carriage, if there is one, please," she asked the guard, and he opened a door and helped her into a still unlit compartment. She closed the door and, letting down the glass, leaned her head on her hand and watched, through the veil she always wore when travelling as a protection against impertinent and boring admiration, the little crowd on the platform.

Most of them looked, thank Heaven, second class---she would be alone. And then, just at the last, three men, all apparently very much excited and speaking French very loudly, rushed at her door and tore it open. "*Adieu donc, cher maitre*"---"*Bon voyage*"---"*Au 'voir, mes enfants---merci infiniment*"---"*Mille tendresses a Eugenie!*"

And the train had started, leaving Brigit alone in the dusk with a very big man in a fur-collared overcoat and a long box, that he deposited with much care on the seat, humming to himself as he did so. Then he sat down and, taking off his broad-brimmed felt hat, wiped his forehead and face with a handkerchief that smelt strongly of violets.

Lady Brigit shrank fastidiously into her corner. Another thing to bore her. She was of those women who always hate their fellow-travellers and resent their existence. And this man was too big, there was too much fur on his coat, too much scent on his handkerchief. "*Salut demeure chaste et pure*," he began singing, suddenly, apparently quite unconscious of his companion's presence. "*Salut demeure*-----" It was a high baritone voice, sweet and round, and his r's were like Theo Joyselle's. Brigit smiled. Dear Theo! Her mother could be as nasty as she liked, but they would be happy in spite of her. And then, as in the beginning of the world, it was light, and the girl recognised in her suddenly silent *vis-a-vis* the man who was to be her father-in-law, Victor Joyselle.

He had taken off his hat, and his dark, handsome, excited face was distinctly visible under the untidy, slightly curly mass of peculiarly silky, silver-grey hair. Brigit drew a deep breath. Victor Joyselle! She had often heard him play. Those were the hands, in the brown dogskin gloves, that worked such witchery with his violin. That was the violin in the shabby box beside him. His dark eyes, over which the lids dropped at the outer corners, were now fixed on hers, he was trying to see through her veil. He was a magnificent creature, even now, with his youth behind him: his big nose had fine cut, sensitive nostrils, his mouth under a big moustache was well-cut and serene, and his strong chin was softened by a dimple. And he was to be---her father-in-law.

For the first time for months the girl felt the youth and sense of fun stir in her. Then he spoke---irrepressibly, as if he could not help it.

"I beg your pardon, madame, for singing," he burst out, "I---forgot that I was not alone."

She bowed without speaking. Madame!

"May I open the other window?" he pursued, rising restlessly and tearing off his gloves as if they hurt him, thereby revealing a large diamond on the little finger of his right---the bow-hand.

"Yes."

He did so, and then sat down, and taking an open telegram from his pocket, read it through several times, his nostrils quivering, his mouth dimpling in an uncontrollable and enchanting smile. Then again, as if impelled by some superior force, he turned to her and said: "I am not a lunatic, madame. I am Victor Joyselle. I have played---my very best this afternoon, and my son, *mon bebe*---is engaged to the most beautiful woman in England!"

Inspired to a dramatic act totally foreign to her nature, impelled by his sheer strength of imagination and his buoyant personality, Lady Brigit Mead threw back her veil.

"Theo is engaged---to me," she answered.

CHAPTER FIVE

Joyselle stared at her, his eyes like two lamps. Then rushing at her, he took her hands in his and bent over her. "Good God! Good God!" he cried rapidly in French, "*you* are Lady Brigit Mead? You---you Diana---you *splendeur de femme*? But I dream---I dream!"

"Indeed, no, I am Brigit Mead, M. Joyselle,"---she was laughing, laughing with delightful amusement. He was too delicious! Then she added hastily, "You are crushing my hands!"

Sitting down by her, he patted her reddened fingers tenderly. "*Chere enfant, chere enfant*, forgive an old papa---*qui t'a fait bobo*---and you are actually going to marry my Theo?"

"I am."

"Then," with a solemnity that was as overwhelming as his joy, he returned, bowing his head as if in church, "*il a une sacree chance*. He is---the luckiest boy in the world."

Brigit had forgotten what boredom meant. This spontaneous, warm-hearted person with---oh, horror,---a white satin tie, and a low, turned-down collar, filled her with the gentlest and most affectionate amusement. And as he was to be her father-in-law, why not enjoy him? "It is kind of you to be so pleased," she said, "it is very interesting, our meeting like this-----"

"Interesting! It is---romance, my dear, romance, of the most unusual. And you are so beautiful that I cannot look away from you. He told me you were beautiful---yes---but I had pictured to myself a pink and white miss with a head as big as a pumpkin---and, just Heaven---a 'drawing-room voice.' Tell me, oh, tell me, *fille adoree*, that you do not sing!"

His anxiety was perfectly sincere, and she hastened to reassure him. "Indeed, I do not."

"Nor play---not even 'simple little things,' and 'coon-songs'?"

"Nothing."

"God be praised!" he returned with a sort of whimsical reverence, in French. "Then you are perfect."

"Indeed I am not. Oh, I *really* am not!" Before she knew what he was about to do, he had kissed her forehead, and then, as the train stopped, he rushed at the window.

"But where are you going?" he cried, so rapidly that she hardly understood him. "Why are you---why are we both---going away from London? We must go *home*---to my house---to my wife."

"I am going to make a visit-----"

"*Mais non, mais non, mais non*---–come, there is a train going to London---–hurry, we will go back. You will telegraph your friends. This evening---–the betrothal evening, you must spend with us. Come, hurry, or we shall be too late."

"But I cannot, it is impossible," she protested weakly, as, he took her dressing-case and umbrella from the seat, after scrambling into his furry coat. "My friend is expecting me!"

"Ta, ta, ta, ta, ta! Come, *ma fille, bella signorina*, the train is just there---–I will telegraph your friend. Let me help you, *comme ca, ca y est*!"

And almost before she knew what had happened, they were in the other train speeding back to town.

"Theo is at home---–he went to tell his mother," Joyselle said, nearly braining an old lady with his violin-case as he swung round to speak. "And they will be sitting by the fire, and I---–who was going to spend the night at the Duke of Cumberland's---–will appear, and after we have embraced, hey, presto---–I produce you---–Diana---–his *adoree*---–my daughter."

The old lady, who was engaged to nobody (and who, what was much worse, never had been), resented his loud voice and his way of handling his violin-case as if it had been a baby. "Sir," she said, "you are crowding me."

"*Sacre nom d'une pipe*---–I beg your pardon, madame, but you must not push that box. You must not *touch* it," he returned, all his smiles gone and a ferocious frown joining his big black eyebrows. "It contains my violin, madame, my Amati!"

Brigit, convulsed with laughter, laid her hand on his arm as if she had known him for years, and he became like a lamb at her touch.

"I beg your pardon, madame," he added, smiling angelically (and an angelic smile on a dark, middle-aged face is a very winning thing), "I will put it over here."

Then, his beloved fiddle safe from profane touch, he again turned to Brigit.

CHAPTER SIX

Number 57 Golden Square was dark when Joyselle's cab stopped in front of it, and he, after tenderly depositing his violin-case under the little portico, assisted Brigit to alight. "They are, of course, in the kitchen," he remarked as he paid the cabby. "Come, *ma belle*."

She followed him as if she were in a dream, watching him open the door with a latchkey, after a frantic search for that object in all his pockets, tiptoeing after him as, a finger to his lips, a delighted, boyish smile crinkling his eyelids, he led her down the narrow, oilclothed passage.

"Why are they in the kitchen?" she asked, as excited as he.

"It is nearly eight; she is busy with supper."

Even in the dim light of the single gas burner Brigit caught at once the predominating note of the house: its intense and wonderful cleanliness. The walls, painted white, were snowy, the chequered oilcloth under her feet as spotless as if it had that moment come from the shop, and the slender handrail of the steep staircase glanced with polish, drawing an

arrow of light through the dusk.

Putting his violin-case on the table, Joyselle took off his hat and with some difficulty pulled his arms out of his greatcoat sleeves. Then, taking his guest by the arm, he very softly opened the door leading to the basement, and started down the stairs, soft-footed as a great cat. Could it possibly be she, Brigit Mead, creeping stealthily down a basement staircase, her arm firmly held by a man to whom she had never spoken until that afternoon?

The stairs turned sharply to the left half-way down, and at the turning a flood of warm light met them, together with a smell of cooking.

"Ah, little mother, little mother," Theo's voice was saying, "just wait till you *see* her."

Joyselle's delight in the artistic timeliness of the speech found vent in his putting his arm round his companion's slim waist and giving her a hearty, paternal hug. Her whole face, in the darkness, quivered with amusement. She had never in her whole life been so thoroughly and satisfactorily amused. Then, having gone forward as far as his now simply restraining hold would let her, she looked down into the kitchen.

It was a large room, snowy with whitewash as to walls and ceiling, spotless as to floor. At the far end of it, opposite a pagoda-like and beautiful but apparently unlighted modern English stove, was a huge, deep, cavernous fireplace, unlike any the girl had ever seen. It was, in fact, a perfect copy of a Norman fireplace, with stone seats at the sides, an old-fashioned spit, and the fire burning lustily on the floor of it, unhemmed by dogs or grate. On a long, sand-scoured table in the middle of the room sat Theo, in his shirt-sleeves, deftly breaking eggs into a big, green-lined bowl, while before the fire, gently swinging to and fro over the flames a saucepan with an abnormally long handle---Madame Joyselle. Her short, dark-clad figure, half-covered with a blue apron, showed all its too-generous curves as she bent forward, and when, at Theo's remark, she turned to him with a smile, she showed a round, wrinkled, rosy face and small blue eyes that wrinkled with sympathetic kindness. "She is beautiful, my little bit of cabbage?"

Theo broke the last egg, sat down the bowl, and got down from the table. "Tannier---you remember him? The man who painted everybody last winter---said she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen." The pride in his voice was good to hear.

"*Tant mieux!* Beauty is a quality like another. And---*voila mon petit*, give me the eggs---she loves you?" As she put the question she took the bowl and began beating the eggs violently yet lightly with a whisk. She had turned the mixture into her hot saucepan and was holding it over the fire before the young man answered. He stood, his hands in his trousers-pockets, his head bent thoughtfully. Then he spoke, and his words mingled with the hissing of the omelet. "I think she must," he said with a certain dignified simplicity, "or she would not have accepted me. But---not as I love her. That could not be, you know."

The eavesdroppers started apart guiltily, and for a second Brigit wanted to rush up the stairs and out of the house. She had heard too much.

But Joyselle, gently pushing her out of his way, ran down the steps and with a big laugh threw his arms round his boy and kissed him.

"*Voyons l'amoureux*," he cried, "show me thy face of a lover, little boy, who only yesterday wore aprons and climbed on my knees to search for sweets in my pockets!"

Madame Joyselle turned quietly, after having, with a dexterous twist of her frying-pan, flopped her omelet to its other side. "Victor! And what brings you back, my man?"

Her pleasant, placid face was a great contrast to his as he rushed at her and kissed her hot cheek.

"*Va t'en*---–you will make me drop Theo's omelet."

Joyselle took Theo's hands in his and looked solemnly at his son. "My dear," he said, "my very dear son, God bless you and---–her."

Again Brigit longed to flee, but she knew that if she tried, Joyselle would be after her like a shot, and, she realised with an irrepressible little laugh, probably pick her up and carry her down to the kitchen.

"Are you hungry, my man?" asked Madame Joyselle, slipping the omelet onto a warmed platter, "there is some galantine de volaille truffee, and this, and some cold veal."

Joyselle patted her affectionately on the back.

"*Oui, oui, my femme*, I am hungry. But---–Theo---–to-night I am a wizard. I will grant you any wish you may have in your heart."

"Any wish-----–"

"*Pauvre petit*, tell him not that, Victor, my man. What would the poor angel desire but the impossible?"

Theo stood silently looking at them. He was evidently in no mood for farce, but as evidently he adored this noisy big father who towered above his slender height like a giant, and tried to force himself to his father's humour. "Dear papa," he murmured, "it is good that you have come. I am so happy."

Joyselle seized the opportunity, such as it was, and turning to the open door, called out in a voice trembling with pleasure and mischief, "Fairy Princess, come forth."

And the disdainful, bored, too often frankly ill-humoured Lady Brigit stepped out of the darkness into the homely light of the simple scene.

For a moment Theo plainly did not believe his eyes, and then as she advanced, scarlet with a quite unusual embarrassment and sense of intrusion, he gathered himself together and met her, his hands held out, his face glowing.

"Victor---–oh, Victor---–this is terrible," Madame Joyselle burst out, scarlet with shyness, all her serenity gone. "You should not have brought her to the *kitchen! Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, a countess' daughter!"

But Theo led his *fiancee* straight to his mother, and his instinctive good taste saved the situation. "Mamma---–here she is. Lady Brigit, this is my mother---–the best mother in the world."

The little roundabout woman wiped her hand on her apron, and taking the girl's in hers, looked mutely up at her with eyes so full of timid sweetness that Brigit, touched and pleased, bent and kissed her.

"*Voyons, voyons*," cried Joyselle, rubbing his hands and executing a few steps by the fire, "here we are all one family. Felicite, my old woman, is she not wonderful?"

Madame Joyselle, the flush dying from her fresh cheeks, bowed. "She is indeed. And now---Theo, call Toinon---we must go to the dining-room." Nobody else, even Brigit, who had never beheld that cheerless apartment, wished to leave the kitchen, but Madame Joyselle's will was in such matters law, and the little party was soon seated round the table upstairs. And the omelet was delicious.

* * * * *

An hour later Brigit found herself sitting in a big red-leather armchair, in a highly modern and comfortable, if slightly gaudy apartment---Joyselle's study. There was a small grate-fire with a red club-fender, a red, patternless carpet, soft, well-draped curtains, and tables covered with books and smoking materials.

There was also a baby-grand piano, covered with music, and a huge grey parrot in a gilded and palatial cage.

It was Joyselle's translation of an English gentleman's room, even to the engravings and etchings on the wall. One thing, however, the girl had never before seen. One end of the room was glassed in as if in a huge oak frame, and the wall behind it was literally covered with signed photographs.

"Most of 'em are royalties," Joyselle explained with a certain naif pride, "beginning with your late Queen. I used to play Norman folk-songs to her. There is the Kaiser's, the late Kaiser's, the Czar's, Umberto's, Margarita's, who loves music, more than most---and *toute la boutique*. Then there are also those of all the musicians, and---but you will see to-morrow."

He had brought his violin-case upstairs, and now opened it and took out his Amati. "I will play for you, *ma chere fille*," he declared.

And he played. Brigit watched him, amazed. Where was the rowdy, loud-voiced, amusing and almost ridiculously boyish middle-aged man with whom she had come to town?

This man's face was that of a priest adoringly performing the rites of his religion. His head thrown back, his fine mouth set in lines of ecstatic reverence, he played on and on, his eyes unseeing, or rather the eyes of one seeing visions.

He was a creature of no country, no age. His grey hair failed to make him old, big unwrinkled face failed to make him young. And as he played---to *her*, she knew---years of imprisonment and sorrow seemed to drop from the girl; she forgot all the bitterness, all the resentment that had spoiled her life hitherto, and she felt as she leaned back in her chair and listened as if she had at last come to a haven and found youth awaiting her there.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It is pleasant to wake to the sound of exquisite---and sufficiently distant---music. It is also pleasant to wake to the odour of good---and sufficiently distant---coffee.

The morning after her remarkable arrival in Golden Square Brigit Mead awoke to both these pleasant things. Somewhere downstairs someone was playing a simple, plaintive air on a violin, and still further away someone was making coffee---delicious coffee.

The girl for a moment could not remember where she was; the room, with its dark-grey paper and stiff black-walnut furniture, was foreign-looking, so were the coloured pictures of religious subjects on the walls. On the chimney-piece stood two blue glass vases filled with dried grasses, and the lace curtains flaunted their stiff cleanliness against otherwise unshaded windows.

Where was she?

And then, as the music broke off suddenly, she remembered, and smiled in delighted recollection of the evening before. Waking was usually such a bore; the thought of breakfast, always a severe test to the unsociable, was horrid to her. There would be either a solitary meal in the big dark dining-room, or what was worse, guests to entertain (for Lady Kingsmead never appeared until after eleven), and the disagreeable hurry and scurry contingent on the catching of different trains. But here she seemed to have escaped from what Tommy called Morning Horrors, and it was delightful to lie in her bed and wonder what, in this extraordinary house, was likely to happen next.

What did happen was, of course, quite unexpected; the door slowly opened and a small yellow dog appeared, a note tied to his collar.

A mongrel person, this dog, with suggestions of various races in him; his tail had intended to be long, but the hand of heredity had evidently shortened it, and the ears, long enough to lop, pricked slightly as his bright eyes smiled up at the girl, who laughed aloud as she took the note he had brought.

"Oh, you dear little monster!" she said to him. "I never saw anything so yellow as you in my life---except Lady Minturn's wig. I believe you're dyed!"

The note, written in a peculiarly dashing hand on thick mauve paper, was short:

"Ma Fille," it ran, "good morning to you---the first of many happy ones with us. Yellow Dog Papillon brings this to you. He is an angel dog, and loves you already, as does your Victor Joyselle,

"Beau-Papa."

Yellow Dog Papillon, having come to stay, was sitting up, as if he never under any circumstances passed his time in another way. His rough, pumpkin-coloured front feet hung genteelly limp, and his tail slowly described a half circle on the highly polished floor.

Brigit laughed again, and patted his head. "Does he expect an answer?" she asked seriously; but before the dog could tell her what he thought the door opened, and Madame Joyselle entered, bearing a small lacquered tray, on which stood a tiny coffee-pot, cup and saucer, plate and cream-jug, of gleaming white porcelain, the edges of which glittered in a narrow gold line, and a tall glass vase containing a very large and faultless gardenia.

"I have brought you your coffee, Lady Brigit," said the little woman, showing her beautiful teeth in a cheery smile, "and 'ard-boiled eggs. Theo told me you like them 'ard-boiled. The gardenia is from my 'usband."

Her English was very bad, and the unusual exertion of speaking in the tongue which to her, in spite of twenty-five years' residence in the country of its birth, still remained "foreign," brought a pretty flush to her brown cheeks. "You sleep---well?"

As she ate her breakfast Lady Brigit studied this simple woman who was to be her mother-in-law. Madame Joyselle was, socially speaking, absolutely unpresentable, for she had remained in every respect except that of age what she had been born---a Norman peasant. She had acquired no veneer of any kind, and looked, as she stood with her plump hands folded contentedly on her apron-band, much less a lady than Mrs. Champion, the housekeeper at Kingsmead.

But one fault Brigit had not: she was no snob, and the least worthy thought roused in her as she contemplated her kindly hostess was that her mother would be very much annoyed when she met her daughter's future mother-in-law.

"Such delicious coffee," she said presently, "*and* the rolls!"

"*Oui, oui, pas mal; c'est moi qui les ai faits.* I make myself-----"

As she spoke there came a loud rap at the door, and Joyselle put in his head, crowned with a gold-tasselled red-velvet cap of archaic shape.

"You permit, *ma fille*?" Without awaiting an answer he came in, gorgeous from top to toe in a crimson garment between a dressing-gown and a smoking-costume, girdled round his waist with a gold cord.

"She eats, the most beautiful!" he cried joyously, "and *petite mere* and Yellow Dog look on! Is it not wonderful, *ma vieille*?"

Madame Joyselle smiled---sensibly. "It is delightful, my man, delightful. But I fear you should not have come in---she may not like it."

"Not like it? Of course she does. Why should not the old beau-papa visit his most beautiful while she breakfasts? You are a goose, Felicite!"

Brigit, vastly amused by their discussing her as if she were not present, gave a bit of roll to the dog.

"A quaint little dog," she observed to them both.

Joyselle laughed. "Yes, yes, *il est bien drole, ce pauvre*. But-ter-fly. And the name, too, *hein*? Some day I will tell you the story of why I have had nine dogs all named 'But-ter-fly.' There is so much to tell you, so much."

He talked on, very rapidly, changing subjects with the rapidity of a child, using his square brown hands in vivid gesture, marching about the room, teasing the dog who, since his master had entered, had had eyes and ears for none but him.

"The concert, you know, yesterday, was a grand success. All the papers are full of it. Many play the violin to-day, you see, but there is only one Joyselle."

"There is also a Kubelik," suggested Brigit slily, to see what he would answer.

"My dear, yes; there is Kubelik, and there is Joachim still, thank God. *Chacun dans son genre.* But Kubelik is a boy, and he has 'violin hands'---fingers a *kilometre* long. Look at my hands, and you will see why I am not his equal in execution. In other things-----"

He looked gravely at his hands as he held them out to her. This was in its turn different from the childlike vanity of a minute past; he was a creature of a thousand moods, each one absolutely sincere.

Theo, she saw, was like his mother. From her he had his gentle voice and quiet ways; from his father only the splendid dark eyes.

Joyselle was a remarkably handsome man in his somewhat flamboyant way, and even the clear morning light failed to show lines in his brown face, though his silky, wavy hair was very grey about his brow. He could be compared to no one Brigit had ever seen; he was, even in his absurd velvet gown, head and shoulders above anyone she knew, temperamentally as well as physically. He could, she saw, go anywhere, among people of any class, and find there an at least momentary niche for himself. Gentleman? She would not answer her own mental question, but great artist, man of the world, good fellow, remarkable man, most certainly.

"Your hair is very charming," he was saying as she came to the above conclusion; "it seems to love being yours---as what would not? The hair of many women looks as though it were trying hard---oh, so hard!---to get away from them; but yours clings and---what is the word?---tendrils round your head as if it loved you."

"Ordinary curly hair," she answered in French.

"But no---black hair is usually dry and like something burnt, or of an oiliness to disgust. Is it not so, Felicite---is her hair not adorable?"

"*Oui, oui*, Victor; *oui, mon homme*. But we must go, for Lady Brigit will be wishing to rise. Theo, too, awaits her downstairs."

The big man, who was crouching on the floor playing with the dog, rose hastily. "Good God!" he cried in English words, but obviously in the innocent French sense, "I quite forgot that unhappy child! Come, Felicite; come Papillon, *m'ami*---let us disturb Belle-Ange no longer."

As if he had long been struggling with their reluctance to go, he shepherded them out of the room, singing as he went downstairs, "*Salut, demeure chaste et pure.*"

CHAPTER EIGHT

The parrot, whose name was Guillaume le Conquerant, was a magnificent, fluffy, grey bird picked out with green. His eye was knowing, and swift and deep his infrequent but never-to-be-forgotten bite.

"He is studying you---dear," explained Joyselle, as he stood before the huge gilt cage with Brigit shortly after her appearance downstairs that morning. "It is a severe test that everyone who comes here has to undergo. He is writing his memoirs, too."

"It will be a sad day for you, papa, when his memoirs appear," put in Theo, who was smoking a pipe and walking up and down the room just because he was much too happy to sit still. "You have yet to see the *real* Victor Joyselle, Brigit. This polite being is the one we keep for company."

Brigit laughed. "Is it true?" she asked the violinist.

"Yes," he returned unexpectedly, "you see now the happy Joyselle; the Joyselle *pere de famille*, domestic; the artist Joyselle, alas! is an irritable, nervous, unpleasant person, who forgets to eat, and then abuses his wife for giving him no dinner; an absent-minded idiot who leaves his own old coat at the club and goes off wrapped in the Marquis of St. Ive's sables; a swearing, smoking, wild-headed person, who adores, nevertheless, his little Theo, and that little Theo's beautiful

fiancee."

At the end of this long speech his face, which had in the middle of it been sombre with a sense of his own iniquity, suddenly cleared, until a radiant smile transfigured it.

"My little brother adores you, M. Joyselle," said Brigit suddenly; "he will be *so* pleased. He calls your hair a halo!"

"A sad sinner's halo, then. The beautiful saints have others. And your little brother, what is his name? And how old is he?"

"Tommy is his name, and he is twelve. He is music-mad, and such a dear! Isn't he, Theo?"

Brigit had never been so happy. It was all like a dream, these warm-hearted, simple-minded people, the father and mother so ready to love her for the son's sake, the mental atmosphere so different from that to which she was accustomed. She felt younger and, somehow, better than ever before. And Theo would be very helpful to Tommy, and Tommy's joy, in hearing Joyselle play, something very beautiful. She had sent a wire to her mother the night before at the station, but her mother would not answer it, and there were at least several hours between her and the moment when she must leave Golden Square. The very name was beautiful!

It was raining hard, and the blurred windows seemed a kind of magic barrier between her and the tiresome old world outside.

Then there came a ring at the door, and a moment later Toinon, the red-elbowed maid-of-all-work, appeared, very much alarmed, carrying a card, which she gave to Brigit.

"Oh, dear---–it is poor Ponty!" ejaculated the girl, involuntarily turning to Joyselle.

"Poor-----–"

"Lord Pontefract, Theo. Oh, how *tiresome* of mother!"

Joyselle frowned. "Do not call your mother tiresome," he said shortly. "But who is this gentleman?"

Theo stood silently looking on. It was plain that it seemed to him quite fitting that his father should arrange the matter.

"Lord Pontefract---–a friend of---–of ours," stammered Brigit, abashed by the reproof as she had not been abashed for years.

"And do you want to see him?"

"No, no; I certainly do *not* want to see him."

"Then I will go and tell him so."

"No, no. I---–I had better go, don't you think, Theo?"

Poor Pontefract seemed rather piteous to her as he was discussed, and her note had been curt and unsympathetic.

Theo looked up from his work of filling his pipe.

"I don't know. I should do as papa says."

"No. I must see him. I shall be back in a minute."

She ran downstairs almost into Pontefract's arms, for he had been left in the passage by the horrified Toinon.

"Oh---sorry!" she exclaimed. "Come in here, will you?" "Here" was the unused "salon" of the house, and in its austere ugliness would have attracted the girl's attention at any other time. But she had now before her something she had never seen, a perfectly sober Pontefract. And though red, a little puffy, and watery as to eye, the man looked what he was, an English gentleman. Brigit felt as though she had returned to an uncongenial home after a tour into some strange, delightful country.

"I---I owe you an apology, I suppose," she said, so simply that he stared.

"No, you don't, Lady Brigit. You wrote me a---a very kind note. But I wanted to ask you to reconsider. I---I am unhappy."

There was a short pause, during which he looked at her unfalteringly, and then he went on with a certain dignity: "I have---drunk too much of late years, I know, but---I will never do so again. And I think I could make you happy."

"Did mother send you here?" asked the girl suddenly.

"No; I telephoned her this morning for your address. She would be glad---if you could make up your mind."

"I have made up my mind, Lord Pontefract. I am going to marry Theo Joyselle. And---I think I am going to be happy. I---like them all very much. And," holding out her hand, "I am *very* sorry to have hurt you."

As she spoke the sound of music---violin music---came down the stairs. They both started, for it was the Wedding March from "Lohengrin."

Brigit's small face went white with anger. "I---am sorry," she stammered; "it is---ghastly. It isn't Theo---it is his father. Oh, *do* go!"

Pontefract nodded. "Yes, I'll go. And---never mind, Brigit. He doesn't *know*, the old chap!"

He left the room hastily, and she ran upstairs, her hands clenched.

It was as she expected: Theo had left the room, and Joyselle stood alone by the open door, his face radiant with malicious, delight. "*Parti, hein*? I thought he'd---What is the matter?" he ended hastily, staring at her.

She went straight to him, breathing hard, her brows nearly meeting. "How *could* you do such a thing? It was abominable---hideous!"

"What was abominable?"

"To play that Wedding March! Theo had told you about---about him, and you did it to hurt him. Oh, how could *anybody* do such a thing!"

Joyselle put his violin carefully into its case.

"You are rude, mademoiselle," he returned sternly; "very rude indeed. But you are---my guest."

And he left the room.

Brigit's temper was very violent, but she had seen in his set face signs of one much worse than her own, and, with the strange unexpectedness that seemed to characterise the man, his last move was as fully that of a gentleman as his trick with the Wedding March had been shocking.

He was her host, and---he had left her rather than forget that fact.

For the first time in her life she was utterly at a loss. What should she do?

She was still standing where he had left her when Madame Joyselle came in, perfectly serene, and closed the door.

"What is the matter?" she asked calmly, sitting down and folding her hands.

"I---M. Joyselle---hurt one of my friends---he was---rude. And then-----"

"*C'est ca.* And then *you* were rude. Never mind, he will not think of it again, and neither must you."

Brigit was silent, and stood looking at le Conquerant. She *had* been impolite, and Joyselle's discourtesy was, after all, more like a bit of schoolboy malice than the deliberate insult of a grown man. And his dignified rebuke to her had set her at once on the plane of a naughty child.

Were they both grown up, or both children? Or was he grown and she a child, or was she a grown-up and he a child? It was very puzzling and very absurd. She wanted to rage and she wanted to laugh.

She laughed. Because as she turned towards the disinterested spectator on the sofa, Joyselle came in, his face bearing such a reflection of the expression she felt to be in her own that she could not resist.

"*Bon.* It is laugh, then?" he cried, kissing her hands. "It appears Belle-Ange has a temper, too! Let us forget all about it. Felicite, my dear, bring us Hydromel, and we will drink forgetfulness." He opened the door of the cage, and William the Conqueror came mincing out, waddling on his inturned toes like some fat, velvet-clad dowager.

Hydromel is a Norman liqueur, thick and cloying. Brigit loathed it, but could not resist Joyselle, who, the parrot on his left wrist, poured the sweet stuff into little glasses and handed one to her.

"Item: forget that we both have bad tempers," he said, striking his glass against hers. "Item; remember that we are both good in our hearts; item, remember that father and daughter must be patient with each other."

As she drained her glass Theo came in and laughed as he saw what they were doing.

"A reconciliation already?" he cried. "Papa, what have you been up to?"

"We have both been correcting and being corrected. *Bon, c'est fini!*"

CHAPTER NINE

"My dear Gerald, anyone would think *I* wanted her to do it!" Lady Kingsmead's voice was very fretful, for Carron had done nothing but talk to her about Brigit for the last fortnight, and though she knew that his old love for herself was dead and buried, yet she enjoyed having an occasional flower of speech laid on its grave.

"I really believe you are in love with her," she went on after a pause, as he did not answer.

"Bosh!"

"But it certainly looks like it. You do nothing but talk about her."

Carron roused himself with an effort from the treadmill line of thought that had tortured him ever since Brigit's engagement. "My dear Tony, you are absurd. You know perfectly well that I have never loved any woman but you. You have led me a dog's life for years; you prevented my getting on in my career, because it amused you to have me dangling about-----–"

Lady K. Oh, Gerald, will you ever forget that horrible winter when you went to India?

Carron (*aloud*). No, Tony! (*In petto*) She *can't* love the boy. That much is quite impossible!

Lady K. The awful cables you used to send me? Heavens, how I cried every night, Gerry! And how horrid Kingsmead was that year! *So* jealous.

Carron (*aloud*). You were always such an abominable flirt! (*In petto*) If I only knew *why* she hates me so! God! it's worse than hatred; it's loathing.

Lady K. (*reproachfully*). That is unfair, dear. You *know* I never loved anyone but you!

Carron (*aloud*). But you flirted, Tony; yes, you did. You nearly drove me mad with jealousy. (*In petto*) Hang it all! how can I get away and go for a walk? This is unbearable.

And so on, and so on, all the *triste canzon*. Lady Kingsmead's boudoir was a charming room done in white and pale corn-colour. There were many books, but Tommy had one day betrayed the limitations of their field of usefulness by asking his mother before several people, "Mother, where do you keep the books you *read*?"

There were many flowers, beautiful Turkey carpets, shaded lamps, overloaded little tables whose mission in life appeared to be the driving parlour-maids, however reluctant, to the process of dusting, and, in the darkest corner, where its faded gilding was supposed to lighten the gloom, a beautiful old harp. The harp belonged to Mr. Isaacs in Baker Street, but was supposed to have been played by the fair fingers of Lady Kingsmead's grandmother.

The furniture and hangings, all new, belonged to Messrs. Bampton in Piccadilly, as did the carpets. The pictures, belonging to the entail, were paid for. Lady Kingsmead lay on a *chaise-longue* and played with a Persian kitten named Omar.

Carron sat opposite her in a low chair smoking cigarettes. It was just four o'clock.

"I suppose she'll curse me out for being here," Carron began suddenly, feeling that he deserved, after his hasty excursion into the churchyard of his ancient love, a short indulgence in his present feelings; "she's a good hater, that girl of yours."

"Yes, she has a very nasty temper. Now I, with all my faults"---(pause)---"with all my faults, never could stay angry more than five minutes. Besides, I was always so sensitive."

"Yes; oh, yes! What train does she come by, did you say?"

"The 4.27. Perhaps you'd like to go and meet her?"

He laughed, his blue eyes narrowing. "Thanks, no. And the others?"

"Oh, *I* don't know. The list is there at your elbow. You are dull to-day, Gerald."

"I know I am. I think I'm in for an attack of flue, or something; feel shivery and all-overish. And I think you might be able to understand my hating to have your daughter make such a horrible *mesalliance*, Tony."

She was touched with the pathetic facility for being touched common to fading beauties. Rising, she laid her pretty hand on his shoulder. "Poor darling, I am sorry I was cross. It is dear of you to mind. I hated it, too, at first, for poor old Ponty is a gentleman, and he is awfully cut up. But after all, it may not be a bad thing. She's a very queer girl, Gerald, not at all easy to live with, and this boy Joyselle is really nice. Besides, he has plenty of money-----"

"By the way," interrupted Carron, tossing the kitten to a soft chair, "where did he get the money? The fiddling chap can't have much. They say he's a great spendthrift-----"

"No, it isn't that. I mean Isabel Clough-Hardy left it to him. You remember the moley one who died in Egypt?"

"Did she? He must have been a mere child when she died. You mean Hugh Hislip's daughter?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, it was years ago. They say she was in love with Victor Joyselle before she married."

"By Jove! Why didn't he marry her?"

"Because in this unenlightened land no man is allowed to have more than one wife at a time---Oh, Tommy, what have you been doing?"

Kingsmead, who had come in without knocking, sat down and stretched his thin legs over the arm of the chair. "Ratting."

"Oh, you nasty child! What a beastly thing!"

"Ratting, my dear mother, is a fine, manly, old-time sport. Most fellows of my age and appearance would be making love to their mothers' friends, but I bar women. Sport," he added solemnly, "for Thomas Edward, Earl of Kingsmead."

Carron, who had always disliked the boy, looked at him. "So you bar women? Many other 'men of your appearance' have said the same."

It was a nasty thrust, but Tommy, though he felt it, grinned cheerfully.

"*Stung!*" he cried, laying his hand on his heart in an absurd theatrical gesture. "Your bolt has gone home, my dear fellow. But experience may take the place of beauty at fifty."

Carron started. He loathed being fifty, he loathed Tommy, he loathed everything.

Tommy turned to the kitten and talked artless nonsense to it to fill up the pause that followed, and Lady Kingsmead powdered her nose with a bit of chamois skin that lived in a silver box full of Fuller's earth under the *chaise-longue* pillows.

"Glad Brigit's coming?" asked Tommy, turning with appalling suddenness to Carron, whose hatred for him increased tenfold as he tried to answer carelessly.

As he replied, Brigit came in, without a hat, but covered from head to foot with a rough tweed coat. Her wavy hair was very wet, and her gloves, as she pulled them off, dripped on the floor. In her pearly pale cheeks was a lovely pink tinge.

"What a day!" she cried. "I can't kiss you, mother---–how d'ye do, Gerald? Tommy, you angel, come and be drowned in sister's fond embrace!"

They all stared at her. "It's such a jolly rain. I drove myself in the cart that had gone for Mr. Green. Green came in the brougham, poor dear! Well---–what are you all staring at, souls?"

"You look so---–so young, Bicky," answered Tommy, with an effort. "What a good time you must have had!"

Having taken off her coat and thrown her ruined gloves into the fire, she sat down by her brother and put her arm round him.

"Dear little boy! I *am* young, Thomas, and I did have a good time. He is going to play for you, dear---–all you want him to. He is a---–a---–what shall I say?" Her eyes crinkled with amusement as she sought for a word. "He really is a---–ripper, Tommy. And he has a human dog named Papillon---–But-ter-fly," she added, still smiling and obviously quoting, "also a parrot."

"And a wife," put in Carron sharply.

She looked at him, her face stiffening into its old expression of surly hauteur.

"You have seen her?"

"No. But a friend of mine has. Charley Masterson, Tony. He says she looks like a clean old peasant."

"That is exactly what she is---bravo, Charley Masterson! A clean old peasant. Joyselle, too, is a peasant. They come from near Falaise, and as a girl Madame Joyselle wore a cap. Is there no tea going?"

Lady Kingsmead, who hated rows unless she was one of the principals, rang the bell.

"How was Pam?" she asked hastily.

"As nice as ever. They both sent you their love, by the way. I had a heavenly week there, and they liked Theo so much. He came down for the week-end. Oh, mother," she went on as the man who had answered the bell closed the door, "please ask them down soon, will you? The clean old peasant won't come; she never leaves home, and *he* is---perfectly presentable."

Lady Kingsmead watched her daughter in amazement. Tommy, as usual, was right; Brigit looked, and seemed, years younger than she had done a fortnight ago.

"Yes, my dear, I'll write to-night," she said with the graciousness she used at will, and that was so charming. Then she added, "I might ask him when the Duchess comes. He is sure to love duchesses; *those* kind of people always do."

"Yes, and as to duchesses, *those* kind of people frequently like good music for nothing."

But there was no bitterness in her tone, and mother and daughter smiled at each other.

CHAPTER TEN

The Duchess did like good music for nothing, and when, a week later, she was told on her arrival that Joyselle was to be of the party, she was much pleased. She was only an ancient dowager, full of aches and pains and sad and merry memories, but she was a great favourite nevertheless, for her aches and pains and sad memories were kept safely in the background, whereas her merry and sometimes somewhat shocking recollections made her the very best of good company.

"A great man, my dear," she told Lady Kingsmead, "one of the finest artistes I ever heard. I remember once in Petersburg, heaven only knows how many centuries ago, hearing him play before the Czar. He was extraordinarily handsome then, a tall young fellow---he can't be much over forty now---very broad and strong-looking, with beautiful wavy brown hair and gorgeous black eyes. The Grand Duchess Anastasia-Katherine was very much in love with him, and he with her. She gave him a rose before everybody---a red rose---and he kissed it quite boldly before he put it into his coat. A remarkably dashing young man!"

"You have heard, I suppose, that my girl is going to marry his son?"

"Bless me, no! Has the creature a son? Men of that type ought never to marry and have sons. What is he like, the boy?"

"A delightful person, Duchess, and we are all so pleased about it. I had hoped for some time that she would take him---anyone could see how things were going with *him*---but she was always so peculiar, and I rather feared at one time that she would say no," and so on, and so on. Lady Kingsmead did not know she was lying, and the Duchess, who was sleepy and had on a tight dress, did not care. When she had found out who the other guests were to be, and that dinner was at half-past eight, she waddled upstairs, looking remarkably like Guillaume le Conquerant in her grey dress, and went to sleep.

Lady Kingsmead had a cup of Bovril, which she had been told was excellent for the complexion (although as her complexion was always carefully concealed from the eye of man, also from the far more piercing one of woman, it may be asked why she considered it). Then she had her maid lock her dressing-room door, and give her an hour's facial massage.

At seven Joyselle arrived, and she was told that he had arrived.

"Ask Mr. Joyselle to come to my boudoir, Burton."

"Very good, my lady."

When Joyselle was ushered in he found a beautiful person in a lacy white tea-gown reading Maeterlinck on a satin *chaise-longue*.

He kissed her hand.

"I am glad to have an opportunity of seeing you, Lady Kingsmead," he began abruptly, fixing his dark eyes on hers. "Our little private correspondence has, I trust, been as pleasing to you as it has to me?"

"I have greatly enjoyed it."

"I am delighted. And they, the *fiances*, know nothing of it?"

"Of course not, Monsieur Joyselle." Her ladyship bowed with some dignity as she spoke, for, besides being a very great artiste, this person with the quiet air of authority was also a peasant.

"As I said, I rather doubted the wisdom of writing to you, but Theo is a baby regarding money, and as you, of course, must consider the matter as not altogether advantageous in the point of birth---for we have no birth, my wife and I, we were just born,"---he smiled delightfully---"I thought it only just to reassure your"---he was on the point of saying "mother's heart," but thought better of it, and hastily substituted the word "mind,"---"on this point of money. Theo, by the will of my dear friend, Lady Isabel Clough-Hardy, does not come of age until he is twenty-five, in something less than three years' time. But you now understand that I, as guardian, am prepared to do all I can for the two dear children."

He *was* handsome, the Duchess was right. And he was beautifully dressed. And he would play for her guests after dinner.

Lady Kingsmead held out her jewelled hand.

"I am very glad that it happened," she said sweetly. "Theo's a dear boy, and seems to make my little girl very happy."

"Yes, they seem happy. Ah---is this Tommy?"

It was. A spick-and-span Tommy, with very wet hair and a nervous smile; a Tommy with cold hands and a curious twitching behind his knees. For he had come to Olympus to see a god.

Joyselle held out his big, strong hand and Tommy's disappeared in it. Thus, sometimes, are friendships made.

"I say---you *can* play," stammered the boy. "I---it is glorious."

"You love music, Brigitte says."

"Don't I just! She says you'll play for me some time."

Tommy's small, greenish eyes were wet with irrepressible tears of adoration.

Joyselle rose. "Come with me to my room now, Tommy, and I will play for you. *Vous permettez, madame?*"

Lady Kingsmead bowed graciously, but when the door closed, frowned with disgust, and putting Maeterlinck on the table, drew Claudine from under an embroidered pillow and began to read.

Tommy, treading on air, accompanied Joyselle to his room, and sitting on the floor as the easiest place in which to contain almost unbearable rapture, listened.

Joyselle as he played recalled another little boy who, years before, had listened in much the same way to another man playing the violin, and the comparison is not so far-fetched as it seems, for although the blind fiddler of the sunny day in Normandy had been only a third-rate scraper of the bow, and Joyselle one of the world's very greatest artists, yet in one thing they joined issue. Each of them gave to the listening child before him his very best.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Dinner that night was a very grand affair. Fledge inspired awe by his majestic mien---–Fledge liked duchesses---–and Burton and William, the recently promoted, with their heads striped with grease and powder, looked to the enraptured eyes of the female servants their very best.

There were crimson roses in beautiful silver vases on the table, and in the centre stood a particularly hideous but very valuable silver ship---–"given," as Tommy once gravely explained to a guest, "by somebody or other---–a king, or an admiral, I think---–to one of my ancestors, in the seventeenth century, who did something or other rather well."

Lady Kingsmead, under the Duchess' influence, was suffering from one of her attacks of thinking Tommy "quaint," so, by the old lady's suggestion, the boy was allowed to sit at the foot of his own table, pretending, as he had told his sister he should find it necessary to do, to be as young as his mother's guests.

The Duchess, greatly diverted by his demeanour, and reinforced on her other side by an amusing, sad dog of thirty, who wrote wicked novels, thoroughly enjoyed her dinner. There are so many reasons for enjoying one's dinner; some people do because they like to meet their fellow-creatures; some because they like being seen at certain houses; some because they have beauty to display or stories to tell; and some because they enjoy eating and drinking simply as eating and drinking. The Duchess, in that she enjoyed dining for all the reasons above cited, except that of bothering her ancient head about whose house she was seen at, was extremely pleased with her entertainment. She wagged her old head---–white now, quite frankly, after many years of essays in difficult tints---–whispered to her novelist, and made love to Tommy quite shamelessly.

"You look like an Eastern potentate, you are so silent and serious," she told him once. "Do I bore you so horribly, or is it Miss Letchworth?"

"I am not bored at all, Duchess," answered the boy simply; "I am thinking."

"And what are you thinking about?"

Tommy hesitated. Under her frivolous manner he knew the Duchess had a heart, and very human sympathies.

"I want to be a violinist," he said slowly, after a pause during which the Duchess, with a little shriek, rescued her salad, which William had pounced upon.

"A violinist!"

"Hush! Please don't tell."

"Of course I'll not tell, but-----–"

"Have you heard him play?"

"Joyselle? Of course I have."

"Well?" asked Tommy in quiet triumph. What more could anyone say?

The old woman smiled sweetly at him. She, too, had been young, and remembered. And there was in this little, plain boy a certain strain of blood that she loved; his grandmother had been a Yeoland.

"So you really love it that much, do you? It means hard work, Tommy."

"I know," nodded the boy gravely.

And his mother, seeing his gravity, feared that he was not being sufficiently quaint to amuse the old lady, and screamed down the table at him to tell the Duchess the story of the jibbing pony at the Irish race meeting. The story was not told.

On her right hand Lady Kingsmead had the local M.F.H., a dull man with his head full of hounds, as she expressed it. But on her left sat Joyselle, and as a guest he was certainly perfect. Lady Kingsmead in pale pink and pearls was good enough to look at, and feeling that she wished to be made love to, he made love to her, as was his duty. And he did it well, for he was an artist. He was not conspicuous, or over-impassioned, or over-adoring (very few women like unmixed adoration), but he was amusing, a trifle outrageous, admiring, and tactful. He was also amazingly handsome.

Down to her left Lady Kingsmead could see Carron being bored to death by the wife of the M.F.H., who, someone said, if he had *his* head full of hounds and foxes, certainly had hers full of coals and blankets. For the vicar was a bachelor, and poor Lady Brinsley hated hounds and foxes, and really loved helping the poor. And being of the simple-minded who talk to strangers out of the fulness of their hearts, she was telling him sadly of the shameful way in which the coal-dealer had cheated poor, dear Mr. Smith.

Mentally damning poor, dear Mr. Smith and his friend, as well as the whole race of coal-dealers, Carron watched Brigit as she talked to Theo and her other neighbour, Pat Yelverton, who watched her in quite evident surprise.

"May I be rude and make a personal remark?" he asked her presently. She smiled. "Yes." Yelverton hesitated, and then said slowly: "You have changed wonderfully since I last saw you, Lady Brigit."

"You mean that I am not so disagreeable?"

"I mean-----–"

"I know. And you are right, Mr. Yelverton. I was very horrid, and now I am---nicer---because I am very happy. It's a selfish reason, but I hope I can use it as---as a kind of means to a good end."

Yelverton held his breath. Was it possible that the mere fact of being engaged to a sweet-natured youth like Theo Joyselle could cause such a miracle as this before his eyes? What was the boy to change Brigit from a sullen, caustic woman into a charming, lovely young girl?

"I am very glad for you," he said presently, "and for him. I'm a sorry old stager, Lady Brigit, but it is good to see two young things like you and Joyselle find each other---in time."

As so often happens, his mood was answering hers, and she remembered some story she had heard long ago about him and some girl who had drowned herself.

"Thank you," she said very gently, and turned to Theo, for she had a manlike fear of intruding on people's secrets. But Yelverton was one of those unfortunate beings who, when they turn to their sentimental past, must turn not to the memory of one face, but to a kind of romantic mosaic of many faces that in time takes on the horrid semblance of a composite photograph. So it is to be feared that the sad little story of the girl who drowned herself because he who loved her, made casual and, so to speak, duty-love to a married woman, had not occurred to him, as Brigit in her new-found kindliness of supposition, took for granted.

It was a wonderful dinner to the girl; wonderful in the indulgence that had come over her regarding her *convives*, and in the interesting things she found it possible to glean from the snatches of talk she caught from time to time. Alert, bright-eyed, an unwonted smile ever hovering on her mouth, she listened, and young Joyselle watched her in a fearful ecstasy of joy.

He felt, in his innocent youth, so old, so wicked, so world-worn for this radiant angel who had given, herself to him. It was too good to be true, and he trembled at the thought. But after dinner, when he had at last been able to fly to the drawing-room, the Duchess had a beautiful word to say to him. "Mr. Joyselle," the old woman began abruptly, beckoning to him, "come here for a second, I want to congratulate you."

"Thank you, Duchess. I---I am indeed to be congratulated, for she is the most perfect-----"

"Ta, ta, ta, I don't mean that at all! I mean I want to congratulate you on what you have been able to do for her in so short a time."

"I? To do for her?" He was honestly puzzled.

"Yes, you. Do you suppose she has always been what she is now? Not a bit of it. The last time I saw Brigit Mead---it was at Ascot---she was a very good-looking, of course---oh, unbelievably beautiful, if you prefer it, but an ill-tempered, black-faced young minx, who should have been put on bread and water for a month to correct her manner."

"Her manners!" shouted Theo, unable to believe his ears.

"No. Her manners were always all right, but her manner was atrocious. And you have made her most delightful, as well as ten times lovelier than I would have thought possible. There, now, you may go to her." And Theo wasted no time.

"Love is a strange thing, isn't it?" went on the old woman to her neighbour, without looking to see who he was, for it is a remark that may safely be addressed to anybody.

"It is a damnable thing," growled the afflicted Carron, for it was he who chanced, for his sins, to have paused just then under the pretence of lighting a cigarette.

"Exactly," assented the Duchess briskly. "It has led you an awful life, Gerald, hasn't it?"

"The absurdity of calling that boy's feelings for Brigit by the same word that must express-----–"

"Yours for her mother, eh? Go away, you immoral thing!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

There was to be no Bridge that evening, and by unspoken consent everyone sat in the hall. It was a cold night, and the roaring fire was pleasant to hear, and in the expressive slang of the time, "things went."

Everyone was amused; for the time being, the bores had ceased from boring, and the bored were at rest. Brigit, who loved to look into wet and be dry, to look into cold and be warm, sat in the one plain glass window in the place (its coloured predecessor had been broken by a Roundhead cannon-ball and for vainglorious Family Reasons never been replaced), so that she could look alternately into the storm and at the comfortable, cheery scene within.

She wore white, and in her hair a tiny wreath of green enamel bay-leaves. And to her beauty was, as the Duchess had so plainly felt, added the great graces of good humour and simplicity.

"After all," thought the wise old lady, watching her, "all happy women are simple."

Tommy, big with his splendid secret, roamed about the room, his hands in his pockets, his chin poked up thoughtfully.

It was all very well to be an earl if one wanted to rule one's mother and get one's own way generally, but when one wants to be a violinist, then an earldom is distinctly a bore. He had never heard of a British peer who at the same time was a great musician, but which of the two positions precluded the other he could not decide.

He wished, naturally, to begin work at once. He would have to have a serious talk with his mother to-night. If these people ever went to bed!

Bicky looked heavenly to-night. My word! what a sister for any fellow to have!

And Joyselle---–he was far too great a person to be "Mistered." Fancy Mr. Beethoven, or Mr. Paderewski! Joyselle the Great and Glorious would help him. The mater appeared to like him. It was strange, for she had been in a terrible rage the first day or two---–but she certainly was as pleased as Punch now.

Joyselle had crossed the room and was sitting by Bicky now. By Jove, he was patting her hand! And before everybody!

Suddenly he rose, she smiled up into his dark face, and he called Tommy.

"Tommy, will you go to my room and bring me my Amati?"

Why Tommy did not then and there burst with joy, that enraptured little boy never knew. When he put the violin into the master's hand the child trembled so that the master saw it. "When I have played one thing, you are to go to bed," he said gravely. "You are tired."

And the spoiled and headstrong Tommy, he whose word was law to his mother and many other people, nodded obediently. "I will play again for you alone to-morrow," added Joyselle.

Then he went and stood near the fire, the red light flashing on him, and played.

The first thing, plainly for Tommy, was a Norman cradle-song, very slow and monotonous, and full of strange harmonies. When it was over, Tommy quietly withdrew. To-morrow was to be his day.

Brigit Mead had stayed at the house in Golden Square for a full week, and during that week she had heard her future father-in-law play a dozen times or more.

He had played in the crimson velvet dressing-gown, in morning clothes, in evening dress, once even in the fur-lined coat. Yet it seemed to her, as she watched and listened now, in the great hall of the house of her fathers, that she had never heard quite this same man play.

At home he had been "Beau-papa," noisy and demonstrative, or solemn with artistic responsibility and reverence, but always the oldish man playing to his family. Now, in some way, he was metamorphosed. He was now "Joyselle"; he was, as she listened and watched, an unusually handsome, not yet middle-aged gentleman, playing the violin as an artist, but indisputably a gentleman.

She recalled, with a shudder, his awful lack of taste displayed the day Pontefract called; she remembered her amusement on his insisting on wearing a pale blue satin tie one day when he was lunching at a club to meet a great pianist, and Theo's subsequent search among his belongings for other similar horrors.

She remembered his over-loud laugh and his too-ready gesture. She smiled, however, as she told herself that he was a peasant.

As she listened, her love for music quite subordinated to her strange interest in the mere man, Theo leant forward and whispered quietly: "Brigit, do you really care a little for me?"

"Yes." She smiled affectionately at him, for was it not he who made her so happy?

And then the poor girl drew a long, shuddering breath, and leant back behind the curtain, for she had suddenly realised that it was not Theo who made her happy. It was the fact that he was Victor Joyselle's son.

And it was the big man with the violin who---who---who made her happy.

It was a miserable end to her childish dream of felicity, for she was brave enough to admit to herself without the least hesitation what it was that had happened.

And when Joyselle at length stopped playing and came back to sit by her, she smiled at him in very good imitation of her own smile of half an hour before.

But he was not satisfied.

"You did not like it?" he asked simply.

"Of course I did---it was *splendid*."

"Yet I could not hold you," he persisted, his vanity evidently a little hurt. He could not hold her!

"Didn't we like it, Theo?" she urged, turning to the young man.

"To tell the truth, I didn't hear a note," he admitted, not in the least shamefacedly. "I was looking at you."

"Lucky young beggar," laughed Joyselle, "small wonder! You two make a very pleasant picture," he added, "and in a year or two-----–"

"Father," protested Theo, blushing scarlet in quick French sympathy for the strange susceptibilities of his English fiancee, "don't!"

Brigit rose slowly. "I must go and say good night to Tommy," she said. "I shall be down in a few minutes."

Tommy was in bed, reading a very large book by the light of an electric lamp.

"What have you got there?" his sister asked, lying down by him and pressing her face to the cool pillow.

"Oh, nothing. I just thought I ought to know something about---*Amatis*. It's very interesting," he returned solemnly, and then burst out: "Oh, Bick, isn't he *simply glorious*!"

"Yes, Tommy."

"There was never anyone like him. Not only the fiddling, but---everything. Don't you think so? Don't you, Bicky?" he persisted anxiously.

"Yes, Tommy, dear."

"I do think you the luckiest girl in the whole world. Just fancy being *his* daughter."

"Yes, Tommy."

Her head whirled, her heart beat hard, her hands were as cold as ice. This, she told herself, was the plunge; it would be better shortly. And when it *was* better, then she could begin to fight. For she would fight. It was a monstrous thing, a nightmare, and she would fight it down.

"Brigit."

"Yes, Tommy?" With an effort she roused herself and sat up.

Tommy had closed the book and put it away. He now sat hunched in bed, his thin arms in their pale blue sleeves clasping his knees. "Brigit, do you think a peer could ever be a really great violinist?"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A sleepless night is always a bad thing, but it is full of horror when its victim is haunted by an ever-recurring thought.

Brigit Mead went to her room, dismissed what her brother called her half of Amelie, the French maid, put on a dressing-gown, and sat down by the fire to think.

Her room was very exposed, and the wind howled dismally round the corner of the house, while the rain fell in violent gusts against the ancient panes. It was a comfort to hear the storm, for it made the fire welcome, and a fire is comforting.

The girl huddled close to it, and according to her wont began uttering her thoughts in a whisper.

"It is that. There's no doubt. And that is why I was so happy. He doesn't know, that's one comfort. Only---–what on earth am I to do? I wonder if it will get worse or better, the more I see him? If only he would make some more horrible blunders, or---–or what? It isn't what he does, it's what he is. It isn't even the playing. I barely heard him to-night. And Theo---–poor Theo! He must never suspect. But then, he never would, unless I shouted it in his ear!"

She paused and put another log on the fire.

"*He* will, though, unless I am very careful. He isn't old at all, forty-two is young nowadays, and I'm sure he likes women. I daresay, if I hadn't been engaged to Theo, he would have liked me. Most of 'em do. And I never looked better in my life than I looked to-night. Vain beast!"

Presently she got up, and roamed aimlessly about the room. The door leading into her little sitting-room was open, and she went in and switched on the light. "He wants to come in here to-morrow, and see where I live. *Live!* He wants to see my books. I'll hide those French ones; they'd shock Beau-papa, I suppose, though they aren't very bad. But what *am* I to *do*? Can I go on being engaged---–can I *marry* Theo while I---–love his father? Would marrying Theo cure me, or make it worse? And suppose he fell in love with me after we were married! And she---–Gerald's 'clean old peasant,' wouldn't she be horrified? Poor old thing, she is very nice, but---–and Tommy wanting to be a violinist! A nice family party, upon my word!"

She laughed harshly and pulled her dressing-gown closer about her. It was cold in here.

"I suppose I'd better tell Theo the truth---–or, no, just that I've changed my mind. No, I can't do that, for I'd never see *him* again. I want to see him; there's no danger; he'll never suspect me."

Up and down the two rooms she paced, her two long black plaits hanging over her shoulders and accentuating the red-Indian character of her face. "How Gerald would gloat!" she thought suddenly, clenching her hands. "The beast!"

The stable clock struck one. She had thought that wretched old Duchess would never want to go to bed.

"I wish I could tell Pam. According to the Duchess, Pam is a mine of wisdom. But I know what she did about that Peele man, and I haven't the courage to do that. Oh, why did I ever *see* Theo? Then I'd have married Ponty, and---–*what's that*?" Wheeling fiercely, she faced the door leading from her sitting-room into the passage. It opened noiselessly and Carron came in, dressed as she had last seen him. "Hush! don't be frightened, Brigit. I saw your light and-----–"

"Well---–and?" She looked as if she were about to spring at his throat, and he closed the door quietly and entered her bedroom.

"My good child, don't be melodramatic! I only wanted to tell you that---–that I am sorry I was rude to you the day you left-----–"

"Rude, were you? I had quite forgotten it. Now go!"

"No, thanks. I will sit down for a moment. Brigit, you are a very foolish woman. Hush, I will tell you why. Firstly, because you are going to marry the son of that musical mountebank; and secondly, because you seem bound to make an enemy of me."

"Threats?"

She stood looking down at him with a smile as disagreeable, though not as evil, as his own. "Don't you be melodramatic! And please go. If you don't, I'll ring for Amelie."

"I don't mind."

And she knew that he did not. She, on the other hand did, for she had always disliked and distrusted the Frenchwoman. "If you prefer one of the men?"

"They won't hear you; men-servants never do. And, besides, I'm going in a minute. Listen, Brigit; you have, during the past year, done everything you could to hurt me. Do you think it's fair, all things considered?"

"Fair or unfair, your---attentions annoy me."

"Well---your attitude annoys me, and unless you change it, I'll---get even with you. Now, there's plain English for you." He rose. "That's all I wanted to say. Rather pretty, your room."

"Very good," she sneered. "In the language of your favourite branch of dramatic art, 'do your worst.'"

"And you intend to continue to torture me till---till I can't bear it?" His face whitened, and there was real agony in his voice. After all, he was suffering too, and suddenly, for the first time, she pitied him.

"I am sorry, Gerald," she said, bending towards him and laying her hand on his shoulder. "I-----"

"Hush!" reaching out his hand he switched off the light, for they had both heard slow footsteps coming softly down the passage.

The room was dark now but for the fire which had died down, and luckily they stood in the shadow. The soft footsteps, heavy, though they would have been noiseless at any other hour than this most quiet one, approached slowly and deliberately. Instinctively the girl clung to the man, and he put his arms round her for the first time since she was a little child. Even in their mutual fright she felt his heart give a wild throb.

Then the door opened gently and on the threshold appeared---Tommy, sound asleep, hugging to his unconscious breast the volume of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in which he had been reading about the Amati.

Slowly the boy crossed the room and disappeared into the sitting-room.

"Go," whispered Brigit, desperately; "he mustn't be waked up---go this way-----"

But Carron had lost his head, and kissed her, breathlessly, hungrily, and then, just as the little blue-clad figure again appeared in the one doorway, he disappeared by the other.

The girl stood quite still, not daring to scream, so angry that only the unconscious presence of Tommy prevented her rushing after the man she hated, to try to kill him with her two hands.

And Tommy, after a moment's hesitation, made his slow way back to his room and to bed. When she had tucked him up in safety she went to her mother's room.

"Sorry to wake you, mother," she said, her voice shaky, "but might I sleep with you? I have had such a bad dream and am nervous."

Lady Kingsmead luckily liked to have her vanity played upon by such requests. It pleased her to have her daughter turn to her. "Of course, darling," she said sleepily.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Carron was late for breakfast the next morning, and when he came in found Brigit sitting in her mother's place, laughing and talking with Sir Henry Brinsley, who, much pleased by the manner in which his dull and endless stories were received, subsequently declared that it was all rot calling that handsome girl of Lady Kingsmead's dull; very intelligent girl indeed, as a matter of fact.

But for all her composure, Brigit never quite lost her that-morning-conceived hatred of people who have two goes at ham and eggs; and an infantile remark of Tommy's that eggs should be eaten only out of the shell, because they "bled all over the plate," recurred to her again and again as she watched the worthy baronet satisfy his enormous appetite.

"Mornin', Brigit." "Morning, Gerald." She nodded, and he went to a side table for some fish.

Theo, who sat opposite Brigit for the excellent reason that his father had insisted on sitting by her, took some marmalade. "What are we to do this morning?" he asked.

She frowned with sudden impatience. It was a horrible question. Would he always ask it at breakfast?

Then she smiled at him, for his fresh happy face was good to look at. "Oh, nothing---or anything you like. Why?"

"Because I thought it might be well, if you can spare the time, to take papa for a spin in the motor. He did not sleep well."

She turned to Joyselle. "It is true. I am one of the best sleepers in the world, but last night I had a bad dream, and it got on my nerves and I lay awake for nearly two hours," He spoke with an air of only half-amused grievance.

"I am sorry," she murmured perfunctorily, rising to shake hands with Miss Letchworth, whom she had always disliked as being one of those people who are jocund in the morning. Then, as Yelverton proceeded to provide food for the unfortunate jocund one (who was really as inclined to matutinal depression as any of her betters, but considered it her duty to be "cheery"), Brigit realised that she was not sorry Joyselle had slept badly; she was glad.

"My dream, Brigitte," he went on, his thought answering hers, "was about you. You were so unhappy, poor child, and I was trying to help you, but could not reach you. It was very dreadful, for I could hear you call to me."

"How---pathetic," she answered, with stiffening lips. "But---would you like to go motoring?" He nodded delightedly, for his mouth was full of toast.

"I *love* it," he went on, a moment later, "I love to go fast, fast, fast. It is wonderful. What is your car?"

"It is mother's; nothing very remarkable in the way of speed, I fear. Would you care to go for a drive, Lady Brinsley?"

But Lady Brinsley had letters to write, and no one else volunteering for the excursion, half-past eleven found Brigit and Joyselle in the tonneau of the car, and Theo sitting with the chauffeur.

"Go to Kletchley, Hubbard."

It was a cold, grey day, with a steely sky and a wind that threatened to be high later on. Brigit's cap was tied on firmly with a strong green veil, but she wore nothing over her face, and the chill air made her feel better. She had not slept at all, and was tired, although nothing in her aspect betrayed the fact. All night her mind had been busy with its new-found problem, and the unusual presence of her mother had made her very nervous. But---–she had not dared return to her room, for fear of finding Carron there.

If only she had had a father-----–

"*Vous etes roublee, ma fille*," said Joyselle, suddenly taking one of her hands in his befurred ones; "what has happened? Can you not think of me as your old papa, and tell me?"

She started, half-frightened, half angry. "I am not troubled, M. Joyselle," she returned, in French. "I---–have a headache, that is all."

Oh, time-honoured evasion; oh, classic lie, thou who hast served, surely, since Eve's day, used without doubt by Helen of Troy, Cleopatra and all the other unsaintly women, ancient and modern, whose stories are so much more entertaining than those of the unco' guid---–oh, Splendid Mendax, where should we all be without you?

"A headache?" Joyselle's magnificent eyes looked kindly but searchingly into hers. "No. Not that." Then, asking no further question, he leaned back in his place and looked out over the fields on his left.

"Daughter---–father---–child---–old man-----–" she told herself with set jaw, "that is what he thinks. He is eight years younger than that brute Gerald, too."

The road climbed dully up for half an hour, and then with a quick turn stretched out over splendid downs, beyond which lay a narrow glittering strip of grey sea. "There is the sea," announced Brigit, perfunctorily. It was not intrinsically beautiful, the scene, but as some chord in the human breast almost invariably vibrates in response to a view of salt water, this point was considered, at Kingsmead, to be a particularly important one, and as the motor flew on Brigit Mead wondered how many hundred times she had brought people there with the same curt introduction, "There is the sea."

Theo, perfectly happy, turned occasionally to look at the other two, but spoke little. It filled him with joy to see his beloved and his father together, and his engagement was still so young that he had not got used to it, and loved to think about it.

Joyselle, too, was unusually silent for a long time. Then at last he turned to Brigit, his face grave as she had hitherto seen it only when he was playing.

"I will not intrude again, Brigitte," he said, his deep voice very gentle; "but when---–if---–you ever care to come to me for help or advice---–of any kind, I shall always be at your service."

"Thank you," she said, and could say no more, for fear of breaking down. Then her sense of humour, never very keen, did for once come to the rescue, and in an absurd mental flash-light she pictured his face if she should suddenly put her head down on his knees and wail out the truth: "Yes, dear Beau-papa, advise and help me, for I am to be your daughter, my children are to be your grandchildren, and---–I love you!"

Something in her face hurt him, and for the rest of the drive he quite simply and frankly sulked.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Brigit went for a long walk that afternoon, as was her wont when she wished to think. As she started from the house she met Carron. "Look here, Brigit," he said roughly, "you slept with your mother last night. Was it because you were afraid I might come back?"

She eyed him with great coolness from under the shadow of her felt hat. "No, I was afraid, when I left---–my little brother---–that you might *have come back*." And she took her walking-stick from its place.

"I---–I beg your pardon," he returned sullenly, looking at her as she stood in the faint autumn sunshine, her well-cut coat and skirt somehow failing to take from her her curious Indian air. "I was a beast."

"You always are, Gerald. Once when I was a child a spider bit me---–or do spiders sting? Well, it made me a bit sick at first, and then I---–forgot it. Good-bye."

The man's nerves were evidently in a bad state, for at her insult his face broke out into a cold perspiration and went very white. "Oh---–I am a spider, am I? All right, I am glad I kissed you. Glad I held you close in my arms. You can't undo that, whatever you may say."

She stood quietly swinging her stick, a smile just touching her disdainful mouth. She was purposely being maddening, and she knew to the uttermost the value, as a means of torture to the trembling man before her, of the slight lift of her upper lip as she looked at him.

"Quite finished?" she asked, as he paused. "Then perhaps you'll let me go? *Good-bye.*"

He watched her out of sight, and then wiping his face carefully with his handkerchief, returned to the house.

Crossing the park by a footpath that was now half-buried in fallen leaves, she came out on the high road, and turning to the left, took a steep path leading to the downs.

She walked with unusual rapidity for a woman, climbing the path without relaxing her gait or losing her breath. The sharp, damp air brought to her face colour that Carron had been unable to call up. He was, poor wretch, so utterly secondary to her, that he was as little important as the long-forgotten spider. It was Joyselle who occupied her thoughts, whom her mental eyes saw, as she walked steadily seawards, as plainly as if he had been with her.

The next morning would begin a respite for her, in one sense, for he was going away. His old mother was ill in Falaise, and he was going to see her. "Then," he had added, "I must visit a friend in Paris. I shall not be back before the last of November."

This information he had volunteered to her immediately after lunch, having quite forgotten his resentment at her lack of response to his offers of advice. His quick changes of humour were very puzzling, and continually made her doubt

whether she or anyone else knew him at all, though she had too much discrimination to doubt the sincerity of any one of his moods.

She had left him on the point of going to his room to play for Tommy, and knew that her brother would probably unfold to him during the afternoon his plan of becoming a violinist.

If the child had talent, Joyselle would, she believed, do his utmost to help him, and this was another reason why she could not make up her mind how to manage her own affairs.

Even if she wished to break her engagement and never see Joyselle again, had she the right thus to take from her brother the chance of great happiness and protection that seemed to have come to him?

"Joyselle would never speak to me again if I threw Theo over," she told herself. "First, he would scold me violently, and then he'd lop us all off, trunk and branch. And---he might be the making of Tommy. Theo is so gentle and good, and he so splendid---I could have Tommy a lot with---us-----"

On the other hand, however, what if she went from bad to worse regarding Joyselle? Would she be able to bear it?

Her thoughts turning the matter relentlessly over and over, as a squirrel does his wheel, she came home, getting there just at tea-time.

Lady Kingsmead, very much bored with her guests, had her useful headache, and the girl had to hurry into dry clothes, for the rain had come on, and play hostess.

"Tea, M. Joyselle?"

He made a wry and very ludicrous face. "*Merci*, Lady Brigit!"

"French people always loathe tea, my dear," laughed the Duchess; "they take it when they have colds, as we take quinine."

Miss Letchworth, who had been three times to Paris for a week at a time, looked up from her embroidery. "Oh, *Duchess*! People of our class often drink it," she protested, the only tea she had ever consumed in Paris being that of her hotel or of Columbins, "don't they, mossoo?"

Joyselle's eyes drew down at the corners and he gave his big moustache a martial, upward twist. "Ask others, mademoiselle," he retorted wickedly. "I am not of your class!"

It was brutal, and there was a short silence. Brigit was annoyed. Last night she had hoped for one of his outbursts, but now that it had come she was ashamed for him. And she shivered as she realised that this shame was a serious sign.

"Horrid speech," she remarked, looking into the teapot she had forgotten to fill with water, "isn't it, Theo?"

But Theo only laughed and shrugged his shoulders. His father was his father, and except in little matters, such as satin and too flamboyant ties, not to be even mentally criticised.

"But it is true, my dear," continued Joyselle, the mischief suddenly gone from his face, a shrewd look of inquiry taking its place. "You are going to marry into a peasant family, you know." Another change of mood! He was severe now and

disapproving.

She held up her head. "No one could call Theo a peasant, could they, Duchess?"

Joyselle understood, and with bewildering rapidity again changed. "Bravo!" he cried, laughing heartily. "You are marrying the *son*, you mean, not the father. *C'est vrai, c'est vrai!*"

His utter unconsciousness was a great blessing, no doubt, but at that moment it nearly maddened her. Was he blind?

Apparently he was, as he drank some mineral water and talked to the Duchess.

The arrival of Lady Brinsley's poor dear Mr. Smith, the vicar, was the next mild event of the day, and as his head too was filled with coals and blankets, the story of the abominable coal-dealer had again to be listened to and lamented over.

"The very worst coals I ever saw in my life, positively, are they not, Lady Brinsley?"

"Eh, yes, Mr. Smith, quite too shocking. Nothing but dust, Duchess, positively."

"We are all dust," returned the Duchess, who was whispering to Joyselle about the Grand Duchess Anastasia-Katherine, *dans le temps*. "Oh, no, we are all worms, aren't we?"

"Positively, I *never* saw such very inferior coals," went on the Vicar, wondering what on earth she was talking about.

Brigit looked at him as he babbled on. He was a very thin man, who always reminded her of a plucked bird. Soon he would ask her why he had not had the pleasure of seeing her in church for so long. He would hope that she had not had a cold.

He did both these things, poor man, for it was his *role* in life always to say and do the perniciously obvious.

It was a very trying hour, but at last, under the dutiful pretext of going to look after her mother, Brigit escaped and flew to Tommy's room.

It was a strange apartment for a little boy, for it had been assigned to him once when he was ill, as being sunny, and beyond his brass bedstead and small boy hoards, contained nothing whatever that looked as if it belonged to one of few years.

For it was hung in faded plum-coloured satin, the eighteenth-century furniture was quaint and beautiful, and the narrow oval mirrors, set in tarnished gilded frames like a frieze about its walls, presented to Brigit's eye as she opened the door an infinite and bewildering number of Tommies, bending studiously over a large sheet of writing-paper, that he held on a book on his knees.

"Hello, Tommy, what are you up to?"

The boy looked up, his face full of ecstasy. "I say, Bick, he *will*! He will help me learn to be a violinist! He's going to find a good teacher for me, and then, when I have got over the first grind, you know, he's going---oh, Bicky, darling---he's going to teach me himself, at the same time. Isn't he an angel!"

She sat down. "Yes, Tommy. But what on earth are you writing?"

"Well, you see, he---–he says I must be educated. I had to promise him to go in for Latin and all that rot. It's---–a bore, but he says a musician must be educated-----–"

She started. And he himself, was he educated? Did he know the ordinary things known, colloquially speaking, by everybody? She did not know. It had never occurred to her before.

"Yes, dear, but---–what is that paper?"

Tommy blushed.

"Well, he's so keen on it, you know, I thought I'd advertise for a---–a tutor."

"Advertise for a tutor!"

"Yes. There is no good in wasting time, is there? And *she* would potter about asking people their advice, *etc*., so I---–I have just drawn up this. You won't tell?"

She shook her head with much gravity and then read what he had written:

> "Wanted, by the Earl of Kingsmead, a tutor. Oxford man preferred.
> Must be fond of sport, particularly ratting and cricket."

"Do you think it's all right?" he asked, as he read it.

"Y---–yes---–only there isn't any 'k' in 'particularly.' But I think we'd better---–ask someone, little brother. I don't imagine that children usually advertise for their own tutors."

"But there isn't any 'usually' about me, Bick. And certainly *mother* isn't 'usual,' nor you. And if she got a man I'd be sure to loathe him. Think of that chap Baker that she thought such a lot of. Why, he read poetry!"

"Poetry isn't any worse than music, is it?"

Tommy's mouth, as he smiled, was its most fawn-like. "*Music!* Rather different, my dear Brigit. Well---–can you lend me some money for my ad?"

She was silent for a moment, and then answered in a kind of desperate impatience, "Oh, dear! Suppose you go and ask *him* what to do."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Duchess, that evening, watched Brigit with dismayed surprise. What had happened to the girl? Where were her happy expression and youthful spirits?

Theo had not changed; that they had not quarrelled was quite evident, for when she spoke to him there was something of the gentleness of the day before in her manner; but this exception excepted, the girl had reverted to her old air of silent, resentful indifference, and her strange beauty was to the watchful old woman as repellent as she had ever seen it.

Once, when Carron spoke to her, Brigit answered without turning her head, and with her narrowed eyes and slow-moving lips looked almost venomous.

If she had produced a knife and plunged it into him, the Duchess told herself she would not have been surprised.

"An uncommonly unpleasant young person," thought the old lady, "with the temper of a fiend. I wonder where she got it; poor Henry had no temper at all, and her mother is at worst a spitfire."

Yelverton, too, noticed the disquieting change that had come over Lady Brigit, and observed with some amusement that she had noticed his observation and did not care about it, one way or the other.

Theo, seeing his love with the rosiest of spectacles, asked her gently what was the matter, and was told in a quiet voice that she was cross. "I have an abominable temper, poor boy," she said.

And possibly because it was the simple truth, it never occurred to him to believe her, and he set this remark down as an example of her divine humility.

Her mother, glaring at her toward the end of dinner, shrugged her shoulders.

"Cross again," she thought; "what an infernal temper she has. I'm glad I haven't, it makes so many wrinkles."

But Brigit had some reason for looking tragic, for she had made up her mind, while dressing, to break her engagement. Perhaps, after all, Joyselle would prove large-minded enough to continue to see Tommy, and even if he did not, she must end matters.

Regarding herself, the girl had a curious prescience, and the vague foreboding she had felt ever since her realisation of her love for Joyselle had, as she sat before her glass while her maid dressed her hair, suddenly developed into a definite terror. She knew that something dreadful would happen if she continued to see Joyselle, and the fact that he was quite innocent, and unsuspecting of the threatened danger, gave her the sensation of one who sees a child playing with a poisonous snake. *He* was in danger as well as she, and not only they two, but his son and his wife. Her beauty was so great, and she was so accustomed to see its effect on men, that there was no vanity at all in her suddenly awakened solicitude for him. At any moment he might see her with the eyes of a man, instead of, as he had hitherto done, with those of a father.

"And if he fell in love with *me*," she told herself as the maid clasped her pearls round her neck, "there would be no hope for any of us."

It is remarkable that the possibility of Joyselle's loving her only added to her misery, for most women in like cases would have clutched at the bare chance of such a contingency in rapturous disregard of all consequences.

She, however, who had been the object of more strong passions than many women ever even hear of, knew although, or possibly because, she had never before cared a jot for any man, that her time had come, and that for her love must be a perilous thing. She had once been called a stormy petrel, and now as, racked with the agony of her resolve, she sat through the interminable dinner, she recalled the name, and smiled bitterly to herself. Yes, she was a stormy petrel, and she had no right to ruin Victor Joyselle and his family. She would break her engagement and go to Italy for the winter. The Lenskys were going, and she would go with them.

Joyselle was in high spirits that evening. He had had a letter from La-bas, as he always called Normandy, and his mother was better, and greatly looking forward to his visit. "She is old, my mother," he told the party, "eighty years old, but her cheeks are still rosy! They live in Falaise, in a small little house near the parish church, and in her garden she grows vegetables---ah, such vegetables!"

"It is a great age," observed someone, and he laughed aloud. "Yes---for here. La-bas with us, she is not so old as she would be here. I am an old man here, but there, I am still *jeune* Joyselle! And my big boy, my betrothed boy, is still *le petit du jeune* Joyselle."

It was not particularly interesting, but nevertheless everyone at the table listened with delight. The man's vividness, his simple certainty of their sympathy, were irresistible.

"Next September," he went on, draining his champagne glass and wiping his moustache upward, in a martial way, "is their golden wedding, *mes vieux*! It will be very fine. Very fine indeed, for all the children and grandchildren," he glanced slily at Brigit, who clasped her hands lightly on her lap, "will be there, and we shall eat until we can eat no more, and tell each other old tales, and boast about our successes in life---ah, it will be very pleasant!"

"You will come too, my Brigit," whispered Theo under his breath. "I can show them my wonderful---wife?"

She could not answer, and he took her distress for girlish confusion, and, manlike, rejoiced in it.

After dinner Joyselle came straight to her. "May I talk to you about Tommy?" he began, "I love Tommy very much."

"He---adores you."

"Yes. Let us go into the library, Most Beautiful, where we can talk quietly." Before she could protest he had turned to her mother and announced his intention. "I leave to-morrow, before she will be up," he declared, "and there are things I must say. You allow me, Lady Kingsmead?"

Then he put his arm round the girl's waist and marched her down the hall and up the stairs leading to the library.

"Isn't he quaint?" giggled Lady Kingsmead to the Duchess, and the old woman assented with a laugh. "He is an amazing mixture of the boyish and the paternal. I thoroughly like him."

Meantime Brigit had sat down in a tall-backed carved chair, and, her hands on its arms, waited for Joyselle to speak. He walked about the room for a few moments, looking up at the book-covered walls, opening one of the windows, examining an ivory dragon that grinned on the chimney-piece. Then he burst out, "*Eh, bien*, my dearest, and when is it to be?"

"When is what to be?"

"The wedding."

A hot blush crept over her, leaving her cold.

"Theo wants his wife, and I want my daughter," he continued, sitting down by her and taking her hand affectionately, "why waste time!"

She looked at him in hopeless dismay. He was so big, so strong, so overpowering, she felt that her strength to resist his will was as nothing.

"You think I ask too soon?" He looked at her, an anxious pucker in his eyelids, "But no. There is never too much time in which to be happy, ma Brigitte-----–"

For the first time in her recollection she was glad to see Gerald Carron, as he came up the stairs, and approached them slowly.

"Does mother want me?" she asked, rising.

"No. I---–just wondered what you were doing."

"I brought Lady Brigit here because I wanted to talk to her," explained Joyselle, mildly. Carron laughed.

"So do I want to talk to her!"

Brigit gave a nervous laugh. "Let's all go downstairs and talk there. My conversation isn't usually so appreciated."

The two men followed her in silence, and to her immense relief were both promptly accosted by someone of the party, and she could escape to her window seat.

What would have happened if Carron had not come, she asked herself with a shudder. Would her strength have come back, and would she have been able to tell Joyselle that he must make no plans for her wedding?

Until she had known his father, Theo had never seemed to her to lack personality; he was young, but his very boyishness was individual. Yet now with Joyselle clamouring for her to fix her wedding-day, Theo seemed to fade into insignificance, and her task to become that of breaking the news of her intended rupture with the son, to the father.

And as she sat there in the background watching the members of the little party as they smoked and chatted to each other, she gave up and resolved on flight. "If I told Theo he would rush to his father," she thought, "and then Joyselle would come to me. And we'd quarrel, and then anything might happen." His utter unconsciousness was at once a safeguard and a menace.

"I'll say nothing until he is safe in Normandy," she decided.

PART II

CHAPTER ONE

There is on an olive-covered slope near the Mediterranean a certain shabby pink villa which is remarkable for one thing. In it, years ago, dwelt for a long time a man and a woman who, having no legal right to love, yet not only loved, but were perfectly happy. They lived almost alone, they had little money, the house was shabby even then, they had few servants and but indifferent Italian food, and nothing but old-fashioned tin baths to wash in. Yet they were English, and they were happy because they loved each other so much that nothing else mattered. Now this phrase about nothing else mattering is as common in love affairs as the pathetic abuse of the poor old word eternity; but in the case I instance, it fitted. Nothing else did matter. Not even, to any extent, the presence of the one child that had come to them. Contrary to all ethical and reasonable law, these two sinners were happy in their pink house by the sea, and years after they had left it

there seemed to hang about the old place a kind of atmosphere of romance, as if the sun and the moon, that have seen so much changeableness, loved still to look down at the place where two human beings had been faithful to each other.

These two people were Pamela Lensky's father and mother, and hither came, early in the November that followed her meeting with Victor Joyselle, Lady Brigit Mead as the guest of the Lenskys. And here she stayed, while the mild, sunny winter days drifted by unmarked, a silent, ungenial guest.

The Lenskys were happy people and enjoyed life as it came. He, a slim, blond, exceedingly well-dressed little man, was attached to the Russian Embassy in London, in some more or less permanent quality, having given up his secretaryship after a miserable sojourn in a Continental city that he and his wife both hated.

They had money enough to live comfortably, in the quiet way they both liked, in England, and a year before that November his mother had died, leaving them the richer by a few hundred pounds a year. So they were well-off in the sense that they had plenty of money to spend, and the certainty that their children would one day be in still better circumstances.

One day in January Mrs. de Lensky was sitting on the floor in the brick-floored nursery, building a Moorish palace for her son, aged eighteen months.

She was a thin woman of thirty-six or seven, with large dark eyes, somewhat hollow now, and a brown vivid face on which life had put several deep lines---all of which, though unbeautiful in themselves, were good lines, and made for character.

"And here's the tower in which the little boy lived," she said to the baby, who, very fat and peculiarly blond, regarded her rapturously, "and here's the dungeon where they put him when he was naughty. If Thaddeus bites Elvira again," she added gravely, "what will happen to him?"

But Thaddeus, who was possessed of the courage incidental to a sound digestion and dormant nerves, only laughed and showed the wicked fangs that had bitten the nurse.

It was a pleasant, bare, sunny room, the rug covered with shabby toys, the walls nearly hidden by pictures from illustrated papers. Through an open door one saw a table at which sat a little girl of six, bending over a book with the unmistakable air of a child learning something uninteresting.

"Eliza!"

"Yes, mother?" Eliza looked up. She too was blonde, but her eyes were dark.

"Where is Pammy, dear?"

"I don't know, mother. Perhaps she's eating plaster again," suggested Eliza, with the alertness that even charming children sometimes show when face to face with the crime of some contemporary.

Pam did not laugh. Plaster-eating may be funny in other people's children, but seven-year-old Pammy, her adopted daughter, was too old to persist in the habit, and punishment seemed to have no effect on it. The house was old, and the walls defective in many places, and Pammy's joy was to dig out bits of ancient plaster and consume it on the sly. It was presumably bad for her stomach and indubitably bad for her character, as the child persisted in it with a quiet effrontery that baulked discipline. So Mrs. de Lensky rose, and bidding Eliza look after the baby, started in search of the wicked

one.

January was spring at the Villa Arcadie, and as she went downstairs a strong scent of heliotrope and narcissi was wafted towards her. A boy stood in the hall carrying a basket.

"*Buon giorno*, Beppino. Oh, what lovely flowers! Tell Giovanni to bring them to me in the *salone*, will you?" Crossing the hall she went into the dining-room, and there, as she had expected, sat Pammy.

Years before, when she had, half out of kindness, half out of loneliness, adopted the little new-born girl, she had never meant to marry. And when she did marry, neither she nor her husband wished to get rid of the child. But the result had not been particularly satisfactory, for Pammy had grown to be a very fat, very stolid person, with no nose to speak of and no sense of humour at all, and every day that passed seemed to leave her a little more unattractive than she had been the day before.

Now, at seven, she was as tall as most children of ten, immensely fat, with pendulous red cheeks that in spite of cold cream and soft water always looked as though they had just been rubbed with a grater. Her hair, long and fair, was dank, hanging in two emaciated pig-tails nearly to her waist, and her nails---–another ineradicable trick---–bitten to the deepest depths possible.

"Pammy, dear, what have you been doing?" inquired Pam, gently.

"Looking out the window---–and I ate some more plaster." Stolidly, with lack-lustre eyes, the culprit gazed at her benefactor.

Pam sighed, but her mouth twitched. "I asked you not to."

"I know. I didn't mean to, but---–it looked so good."

"'*Tous les gouts sont dans la nature*,' my dear," quoted Lensky, coming in at the open window, "there are even people who like German bands!" Looking down at Pammy through his eyeglass, the sun fell full on his head, betraying an incipient bald patch. Otherwise Lensky had aged not at all since his marriage.

"I saw Lady Brigit just now," he said, suddenly, "down in the olive grove. I think something has happened. She looked---–queer."

Pam started. "Poor dear---–I'll go and speak to her---–only, you know, she never says a word to me about her trouble, whatever it is. I wonder-----–"

"Love story, of course," returned Lensky, briefly. "When a woman looks like that it always *is* a love story."

"Yes, but---–Theo is such a dear! And I know he writes to her."

"Then it isn't Theo. He's not the only man she knows."

Pam frowned thoughtfully. "That's true, but---–she *is* so beautiful."

Lensky smiled at her, and on his strangely white, shrewd, worldly-wise face the smile looked like a sudden flash of sunlight. "Yes, she *is* without a doubt very beautiful, but-----–"

"'But'?"

"I think she is taking her trouble the wrong way. She is bearing it without grinning, and the grinning is to my mind the greater half."

"But remember what her surroundings at home are, Jack. She had had no discipline whatever; her mother is horrid-----–"

Lensky did not answer. Somehow he never cared to hold forth on the subject of mothers to his wife.

And then, thin, erect, light-footed, Pam went out from the house in which her strange childhood had been lived, and turning to her left passed down the dangerously mossy marble steps, and into the olive grove.

CHAPTER TWO

Lady Brigit Mead was sitting on the hummocky sparse grass under an ancient olive-tree, looking seawards. She wore a blue frock without any collar, and her face and long, round neck were very sunburnt. Her face had hardened in the last four months, and there was a tense look about her upper lip, yet an artist would have preferred her face as it now was to what it was before she had become engaged. For now the nervous strain she was living under had told on her more material beauties, leaving more room for expression, as it seemed, to the others.

It was not that her face was better, but the suffering in it was less petty than the resentment that had formerly stamped it.

The dominant characteristic in it had hitherto been disdainful bearing of small annoyances; now it showed a grim endurance of a great suffering.

"Bicky, dear," Pam asked suddenly, coming up unheard, "what is it?"

She started. "What is what?"

"Your trouble. Oh, don't tell me if you don't want to, but I can see you are suffering, and---–I used to tell the Duchess, long ago, and it always did me good."

"Did you tell the Duchess about---–Mr. Peele, Pam?"

The elder woman smiled and sighed. "No, my dear, I didn't. But---–he was her son-in-law."

"That wasn't why." Brigit had not moved, and Pam had seen no more than her profile as she sat down.

"No, it wasn't. But then I was particularly lonely, and literally had no one to tell. Whereas," she added with brisk good sense, "you have *me*."

For several minutes there was unbroken silence, and then Brigit said slowly, "I believe you're right. And I'll tell you. It's about---–myself, of course; nothing else could upset me to this extent! You know I'm engaged to Theo Joyselle. Well---–I love his father."

Her voice was defiant, as if deprecating in advance any cut-and-dried disapproval.

Pam did not answer for a moment. Then "Is his mother---I mean Theo's mother---alive?" she then asked, drawing up her knees and clasping them comfortably.

"Yes."

"That---is a pity."

"A pity! Aren't you shocked and frightened?"

"I'm sure I'm not shocked, and I don't think I am frightened. Brigit, does Theo know?"

Then Brigit turned, her face white under the sunburnt skin. "No. I am---afraid to tell him."

"Afraid?"

"Yes, afraid. If I broke the engagement, Joyselle would be furious, and come and scold me."

"Surely you aren't afraid of being scolded?"

"By him, yes. If we had a row---the whole thing would come out."

"I don't see why."

The girl frowned. "You are you, and I am I. When I lose my temper I lose my head and behave like a lunatic. I'd---let it all out as sure as we both live. And then-----" She broke off with a shrug.

"But, Brigit dear, I don't quite understand. What does Theo think of your being here all the winter? And the father, doesn't he think it strange?"

"No. You see, Joyselle went away from England in November, and was detained for two months; his mother was ill. When I left, I told Theo I'd write to him once a week, but that I wanted a long rest before---before I saw him again. I lied, and said I wasn't well.

"Then when Joyselle came back he wrote to me, saying I must come home. I wrote him a disagreeable note, practically telling him to mind his own business. He was angry---and besides, he was working hard, and didn't write again until this morning."

"Oh, I see."

"Theo has been---fairly contented---and I have been trying to tide things over---no, I haven't, I've just funked it, Pam. I don't know what I'm to do. I've loved being here, for you and M. de Lensky are so good to me---but I'm afraid he might come-----"

"Theo?"

"*No*," sharply, "Joyselle. He adores Theo and would hack me to pieces if it would do him any good. And---well, I'm afraid of him."

Pam, in like case, would have faced the whole family, successfully broken her engagement, protected her own secret, and done her hiding afterwards, but she was too wise to say so.

"I am sorry for Theo," she remarked presently.

"So am I. And for Tommy, too. Tommy has been staying in Golden Square ever since Joyselle came home, and he is so happy, poor child. It's---all hideous. Will you read his letter?"

There was no need for Pam to ask whose letter, as she took it, and felt Brigit's hot, dry fingers tremble against her own.

"My dear Daughter," she read, "you must come back to us. We want you. Theo says nothing, but I can see how he misses you, and surely it is but natural? And *petite mere* and I want you. Surely you have had enough of the South? It is unfitted for you, my beautiful one. You are too strong to like warm air in the winter. Come back and go out into the fog with me, and let the chill rain dampen your hair. Come back to your lover who sighs for you, to your old adoring Beau-papa who longs to see again the face of his beautiful child. "Joyselle."

"Brigit---you must go."

Brigit poked at a clump of moss among the tangled roots of the tree under which they sat, and sulked.

"You must, dear. And---you must buck up and break the engagement. It isn't fair," continued Pam, energetically, "to go on stealing their love."

"I stealing their love!---*I!* And what has he done to me, pray? Do you know that I haven't slept more than an hour at a time, for months? Do you know that I cannot get away from the horrible, haunting thought of him? That a flower, a book, a snatch of music---anything that reminds me of him, turns me cold all over and takes my breath away, so that I simply cannot speak? You are an idiot, an utter fool, to talk that way. He has ruined my life, and you say I have stolen his love!" She gasped in very truth as she ceased, and stood with one hand on her heaving breast, her face white with anger.

"You have, my dear. The man seems really to love you as a father. And you certainly have no right to that kind of affection from him! You *must* break your engagement."

Suddenly, after a long pause, during which she gazed blindly at the brilliant sea, Brigit sat down, and turning, buried her face in her arms and burst out crying.

It was nervous, irregular sobbing, cut by moans and muttered words, broken by the convulsive movement of her shoulders. Pam was appalled, much as a man might have been, for she herself had never been hysterical, and this mixture of anguish and anger, given vent to so openly, was a strange and horrible thing to her.

However, she knew enough to let the storm pass without interruption, although it took nearly ten minutes for it to subside, and then, while Brigit, her face red and disfigured, sat up and smoothed back her hair and wiped her eyes, Pam spoke.

"It must be lunch-time," she said with great wisdom, and Brigit rose, with a nod.

"I'll go for a walk. Don't want any lunch."

"All right. Good-bye."

Then they separated, Pam going up the sunny slope to her husband and children, Brigit, down through the deserted garden of a long uninhabited house, to the lonely sea.

CHAPTER THREE

Brigit left the villa the next morning and went straight to London. And the nearer she got to the old town which contained, for her, the very kernel of life, her spirits mounted and mounted in spite of herself. She had for so long been "down among the dead men," as Tommy called depression, that her sudden change of mood affected her strangely.

"If I must never see him again," she repeated over and over again aloud to herself, in the solitude of her compartment, "I shall at least see him once, and---–hear him speak. I'll make him play to me, too; and I shall see his big unseeing eyes, and his wonderful hands!" The very wheels of the train seemed to be saying, "I'll see him, I'll see him, I'll see him," and when she landed at Dover, in a pouring rain, she could have laughed aloud for sheer joy.

Her mother was living in town, in the tiny house in Pont Street, but had gone to the country for the week-end, so the girl, to her great delight, was alone with the servants.

Putting on a dressing-gown she sat down by her fire and closed her eyes.

"Three months, a fortnight, and six days," she thought. "It seems years. I wonder what he will say to me? Will he be glad to see me? And---–how am I to do? Shall I tell Theo, and make him tell? Or shall I be brave---–as Pam would---–and tell him myself!"

Then, realising her absurdity in forgetting that after all it was more Theo's affair than his father's, she laughed aloud.

It was easy to laugh, for whatever happened she would see Victor Joyselle that evening, and beyond that she could not, would not, look. The world might end to-morrow, and it mattered nothing to her. That night he and she would be face to face.

She shuddered, for he would call her his daughter and kiss her forehead. Then the smile came back to her lips, and she rose. It didn't matter; nothing mattered but the great, primary fact that in---–how many hours?---–four, she would see him. Let his mood be what it would---–fatherly, aloof, impish---–he would be himself, she would see him, and she loved him.

The Duchess of Wight had written to her, and going to her dressing-table she re-read the note.

It was short, simply telling her that her mother had told of her arrival, and asking her to dine at 8.30 in Charles Street. Not she, she would not lose one second of the glorious anticipations that were hers now. She would sit here close to her fire and gloat over her joy. Sitting down, she took a sheet of paper and began to write-----–

"Dear Duchess,---–Thanks so much for asking me to dine, but-----–"

She broke off and sat staring at the wall. To-morrow at this time what would have become of her? The world would have run its course, come to its end, and yet she would be still alive! Could she bear it?

She would have told her story; made these people understand that she could never be one of them; broken (for the time) Theo's young heart, and been reviled and cast out by Joyselle.

And she would have to return here, alone, broken with grief, hopeless. Drearily she looked round the room. It would all be the same; nothing would change; the very roses on her dressing-table would still be fresh and sweet, and---she?

Raising her head, she met her own eyes in a glass, and started. Her own beauty amazed her. "If he could see me now," she said aloud, "he couldn't call me '*petite fille*.' He doesn't know I *am* a woman; he has seen me---as if through spectacles. If I had never known Theo, and then met him somewhere by chance-----"

She recalled his frank, wondering amazement as she raised her veil that evening in the train.

"He sees me always with Theo's shadow between us. It is---unfair---and-----"

She took a fresh sheet of paper and began her letter again:

"Dear Duchess.---Thanks so much for asking me to dine to-night.
I shall be delighted to come.
Yours sincerely. "Brigit Mead."

Then she rang for the housemaid, who would in the absence of her half of Amelie have to help her dress, and gave her certain directions.

To-morrow might bring what it would. That one evening was hers, and she would use it. Joyselle should see her with his own eyes, as a man sees a woman, not as a father sees a daughter. And he should see her as a man sees a marvellously beautiful woman!

Satisfied with the conclusion to which she had come, she lay down and slept for an hour, after which, the enigmatic smile on her lips bringing into predominance the resemblance to the portrait in the Luxembourg, she dressed, with more care than she had ever devoted to that process in all her five-and-twenty years of life.

When she arrived at Charles Street and had shaken hands with the Duchess, who had had influenza and looked very old, the first person she saw was Gerald Carron.

"Will you speak to me, Brigit?" he said diffidently, "please do."

He, too, looked ill, and moistened his lips nervously as he spoke. She shook hands with him without answering, and he hurried on, "Haven't I been good? I knew where you were, and---I might easily have come-----"

"You would not have had a flattering reception," she suggested drily.

"Or written. And I did neither. I was glad you went, though God knows-----"

"How do you do, Mrs. Talboys," she cut him short ruthlessly, "when are we to have another book?"

It was a very large dinner, and Brigit, placed between two men who dined out for reasons dietetic and economic, and did not talk, was free to pursue her own thoughts at leisure. She had wired Theo before leaving the de Lenskys', that she was leaving for home, and before starting for the dinner she had sent another wire, addressed simply "Joyselle," to say that

she was dining out, but would come to Golden Square after dinner.

She knew that Joyselle, recognising her prompt appearance as an answer to his letter, would be at home late in the evening, no matter where he might have dined. "He has such strong family feelings," she reflected, with a menacing curve of her upper lip.

So deeply was she buried in her thoughts that she was amazed to find suddenly that the Duchess was trying to gather her flock's eye, preparatory to herding it upstairs. Both her hungry neighbours made spasmodic attempts to eradicate from her mind the memory of their fanatical devotion to the rites of the table, and she smiled absently at them, wondering what they would have thought if she had politely thanked them for their silence!

"My dear," said the Duchess, a few minutes later, sitting down in her favourite corner by the fire, "come and tell me about Pam."

"She is well, Duchess."

"Didn't she send me any messages?"

"She did. Much love and some kodaks of the children. Your god-child is a love."

"H'm. And how is the horrid little adopted one?"

"Poor Pammy!"

"Now *will* you look at Lady Agnes Blundell spilling coffee all over my carpet. She did the same thing the other night at the Beaufoys'! I really believe the woman drinks, or something. What were you saying, my dear? Oh, how is your young man?"

Brigit did not smile. To-morrow was coming.

"I---I haven't seen any young men since I got back, Duchess."

"Oh, well, you tell him from me that his father is a wretch. Is there a wife? I think someone said there was---well, she probably doesn't know all *I* know." The old woman pulled down her mouth in comic disapproval.

"What---is it?" queried Brigit.

"Oh, nothing, only---a very beautiful foreign actress, a lady famous for her---plastic beauties. Voisin, my hairdresser---you know Voisin? Delightful person, and the most indiscreet man in London---tells me they dined together every evening at a little French place near Leicester Square, where *he* dines. And it appears your future papa-in-law was furiously *epris*, or still is---possibly! You will have to keep him in order. What is it, Bishop?"

The butler, whose name, the Duchess had been known to declare, explained why no Anglican or other prelate ever dined or lunched with her---"It is so confusing, my dear; suppose I should say 'Bishop, see if Mrs. Snooks' carriage has come'"---came quietly up to the sofa. "Her ladyship's carriage, your Grace."

Brigit rose. "Yes, I fear I must run away. Thanks so much for having me-----"

And when the men came in she had gone.

When she reached Golden Square she found the house in a blaze of light, and smiled. It was like Joyselle to celebrate her return by illuminating his every window; it would have been like him to put up a triumphal arch; to have a big supper awaiting her; these things belonged to the side of his nature that clamoured for expression in white satin ties.

For a moment she sat still in the motor, while the footman held the door open.

"Come back at half-past eleven, Jarvis," she told the man, and got out.

The door was opened by Toinon, somewhat to Brigit's surprise---for it would have been more like Joyselle to rush downstairs on hearing her motor stop, but the reason was soon plainly comprehensible, for Joyselle was playing. It was evidently earlier than they had expected her. Slipping off her cloak and with a finger to her lips, she went quietly upstairs and stood leaning against the side of the door.

It was wild music that she heard; music that made the blood in her temples and throat pulse harder than ever. Breathing deep, she waited for the climax, and when it came, quietly opened the door.

She had chosen her moment well, and as the door faced a long mirror between the windows she saw, as she stood on the threshold, not only Joyselle, who, alone in the room, stood staring in amazement, but also that at which he stared---herself. Clad in a dress made apparently entirely of flexible dull gold scales, the long lines of her figure unbroken by any belt or trimming, the woman in the glass stood smiling like a witch of old, a deep colour in her cheeks, the palms of her hands held down by her side, the fingers outspread and slightly lifted as if in water. Quite silently she stood and smiled until the man before her dropped his violin---for the first time, she knew instinctively, in his life.

Then she spoke, saying his name, the name by which the world knew him: "*Joyselle.*"

"*Mon Dieu!*" he returned softly. Coming slowly forward he caught her hand with clumsy haste and kissed it. Her heart stopped its mad beating, for she had won. Here was no Beau-papa. Here was the man, Victor Joyselle.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I did not know you," he said. "I thought---*juste ciel*, how do I know what I thought? You are so beautiful, I-----"

She laughed gently. "Beau-papa! Beau-papa! Where is Theo?"

For she knew now that she would not break her engagement to-night. The end was not yet. And by the strange laws that govern things emotional between men and women, her self-control, hitherto utterly lamed by his presence, was now, in face of his involuntary, as yet evidently unconscious awakening, restored to her tenfold strong. She could have spent weeks alone with the man without betraying her secret, now that she had established her power over him. It had been his acceptance of the fact of her future relationship to him, his unexpressed feeling that she was a being of another generation, his tacit refusal to see in her the woman *per se*, that had beaten her. Now she had, by the plain assertion of her beauty, the enforcing of the appreciation of it as a thing appertaining to her as a woman, not a daughter, got the reins---and the whip---into her own hands.

"Where," she repeated, still smiling, "is Theo?"

"He is in his room; he will come--–ah, *mon Dieu*!" Kneeling by his violin, which luckily had fallen on a bearskin, he took it up and looked at it shamefacedly. "See what you made me do," he said to Brigit, "you and your golden dress! *Mon pauvre* Amati."

She continued to look at him in silence, her instinct telling her that the strange smile she had seen on the face of the woman in the glass could not be beaten for purposes of subjugation. She continued to look and smile, but she was sorry for him, even while every fibre in her thrilled with triumph.

He realised her now; if she wanted him to love her, he would.

"Will you call Theo?" she asked as he rose. Without a word he left the room, and a few moments later Theo's arms were around her, his fresh lips on hers.

The boy was so happy, so incoherently, innocently jubilant, that if she had in her room for another feeling, it would have been one of pity for him. But there was no room. She was filled with triumph, and a full vessel can contain not one drop more of however precious a liquid.

"*Ma Brigitte--–mon adoree--–que je t'ai desiree!*" stammered the boy. "Why did you stay so long? Why was it so long? But, now, it is over and you are here. You have come to me--–you, a queen to her slave!"

His delightful face was wet with unconscious tears as they sat together, and his voice trembled. For a moment she wished she could love him. It would be so much more fitting, so much better--–and then the demon in her laughed. No. It was his father she loved, and who, if she chose, should love her.

Madame Joyselle came in, splendid in a new brown silk dress that fitted her as its skin fits a ripe grape, her face beaming with joy in her son's joy. She gazed in amazement at Brigit before the younger woman bent and kissed her, and then sat down and folded her hands, as was her way.

"You look like a beautiful dragon--–doesn't she, Theo?" she asked, "doesn't she, Victor?"

Joyselle had returned with a look of having just brushed his hair. He looked smoothed down in some way and was a little pale.

"My faith, she does, *ma vieille*," he returned. "When she opened the door I was so startled that I--–guess what I did, children? Dropped the Amati!" When they had stopped exclaiming he went on, gradually, but with a perceptible effort getting back his usual tone, "and stood and gasped like a young prince in a fairy-tale, didn't I, Most Beautiful?"

She smiled, but she was not pleased. "You did--–Beau-papa," she answered. "I didn't know I was so beautiful. I have been dining out, hence the dragon's skin. It is a nice frock, isn't it?" she ended, artistically casual.

And then there were questions to be asked, stories to be told, and an hour and a half passed like five minutes.

No more was said about the length of her untimely visit to Italy, but much about the days in the near future. Would she go to see "Peter Pan" the next night? And would she dine first at a little restaurant, where the cooking was a thing to dream of?

And would she do several other things?

She would. She would do all these things. But---she would not go to a certain little restaurant near Leicester Square, of which she had heard. Joyselle blushed scarlet and for a moment looked as though he intended to thunder out a severe reproof at her. Then she smiled at him with narrowed eyes, and he said nothing.

At about half-past eleven an idea occurred to her. She wanted an omelet. Like the first time. And she must borrow an apron and help make the omelet; and it must be full of little savoury green things, and be flopped in the long-handled frying-pan.

"But your dress!" cried Madame Joyselle, in horror.

"An apron, and I will twist up the tail of the dragon and pin it at the waist, and---oh, come, come, come, it will be such fun!"

Down the stairs they ran, the three, leaving Madame Joyselle to turn out all but one light, and to put another log on the dying fire.

Filled by the relentless spirit of coquetry that had suddenly awakened in her, Brigit Mead danced about the great white kitchen, teasing Joyselle, making love to his wife, laughing openly at Theo's admiration. She, always so silent, chattered like a magpie; she, the uninterested, flushed with intoxicating nonsense; the three people before her were her audience, and she played to them individually, a different *role* for each; they were her slaves, and she piped her magic music to them until they were literally dazed. Then, suddenly, she whisked off her blue apron and unpinned the dragon's tail.

"The omelet was good," she said, "but it is eaten. And it is to-morrow morning and the motor will be frozen. Come, *mon maitre*, play one beautiful thing to me before I fly away from you---something very beautiful that I may dream of it."

And he played to her as she had never heard him. If the omelet had been a magic wine, he could not have been more inspired!

His face took on the look it usually wore while he played, and solemnly and reverently he stood, his eyes half shut, him mouth set in noble lines. He had forgotten Brigit, but sub-consciously he was playing for her, and she knew it, and appreciated the tribute, which was all the greater because offered without intent.

She watched him unceasingly, and gradually, as the music went on, her heart sank, and she realised that she had done a most unworthy thing. The feeling she had had that last evening at home came back to her, the feeling that he was a child in horrible danger. Only this time it was she who had deliberately led him into the danger. And his unconsciousness of his peril hurt her so, that as he stopped playing she could have cried to him to go away, to run to the ends of the earth, where she could not reach him.

"You liked it?" he asked gently, and the question seemed so pathetically inadequate, and so plainly emphasised the innocence of his mind, that tears came to her eyes.

"Yes," she said in a very quiet voice, "thank you, dear papa." But this time there was no malice in the term, and when she said good-night to him at the motor door, it was simply and filially. Then she turned to Theo, and he, looking hastily up and down the quiet street, put his head in at the window and kissed her.

CHAPTER FIVE

And that was the beginning of a most extraordinary phase of Brigit Mead's life.

For the next four months she saw Joyselle almost daily. She never broached the subject of her engagement being broken, its permanence was taken for granted by everyone, and Tommy's indefinitely prolonged visit to Golden Square would, if anything more than the fact of her engagement had been necessary, have explained her constant presence there.

Once Theo had urged her to set their wedding-day, but she had put him off and he had never again opened the question. That the young man was not, could not possibly be, perfectly satisfied with the state of affairs, she knew very well, but that, she told herself, she could not help.

She lived on from day to day, more simply and with less self-analysis, in spite of her curious position, than ever before in her life, for the inevitable day of reckoning seemed to be the affair of the Brigit of the future, whereas the Brigit of each day was concerned only with those particular twenty-four hours. It was enough to live in close companionship with the man she loved, and when, as occasionally she tried to do, she reasoned to herself about it, her mind seemed paralysed and utterly refused to make plans of any kind. So, twisting to her own purposes, as people do, the saying about the evil of the day being unto itself sufficient, she let time slip away unremarked and spring came.

It was a cold rainy season that year, with chill dark mornings and flickerings of pale sunshine later on.

People talked much about the weather, and pretty women shivered in their light finery. Tommy, who went home for a fortnight in April, reported that things in the country were deplorable.

"Everyone has colds, and Mr. Smith says there is diphtheria at Spinny Major. Green is disgusted, and from what I can gather from his cheery reports, everyone is going to be ruined by agricultural depression. The Mother of Hundreds has nine new pups---rather good ones."

This was at the end of April, and Lord Kingsmead was coiled in a big chair in his sister's room in Pont Street. Mr. Babington, his tutor, had just gone for a walk, poor man. Tommy's attitude to him had from the first been one of polite tolerance, and Mr. Babington's bump of humour being imperfectly developed, he in return regarded his charge with something like horror.

A boy of twelve, who knew only the very first principles of Latin (Mr. Babington was number three, the other two having proved unsatisfactory to their employer-pupil), and knew the multiplication table only up to "eight-times," disturbed his tidy little mind. There was, moreover, a youth in Sydenham who clamoured for Mr. Babington, and who was after that much-tried young Oxonian's heart. But Mr. Babington stayed on, for---there was Brigit, and in the evenings the tutor locked his door, smoked asthma cigarettes, and wrote sonnets by the yard to the Enchantress.

Tommy, of course, had at once perceived the first shoots of the hapless young man's baby passion as it sprang up in his heart---which did not make it easier to bear, but still Mr. Babington stayed on.

"He'll never go, Bick," complained Tommy that afternoon, after his remarks on Kingsmead. "I even tried smoking the other day, but he had a handkerchief of yours that you left on the hall table, and was so bucked that he barely noticed my iniquity. He *is* a poisonous person!"

"Yes, I certainly preferred Mr. Catt---but you didn't like him either."

"How could anyone like a fellow named Catt? I nearly choked every time I had to speak to him, and so did the Master." It was thus that the boy designated and addressed Joyselle. "He used to call him Minet. I have learned that rotten old multiplication-table, however, and Latin is easy. I do wish," he went on, gnawing at an ancient bit of almond-rock that he had acquired at the village sweetstuff shop at home, "that mother had had me well whacked when I was a kid. It

would have saved me no end of trouble now."

Brigit laughed as she dabbed some cherry-coloured grease on her pointed nails. "Poor old Tommy!"

The almond-rock was an impediment to fluency of conversation, but after a moment Tommy mastered it and went on. "I say, Bicky, what's gone wrong with Carron?"

She started. "I---why do you ask?"

"Because I think he looks very ill. Saw him yesterday as I went out, and hardly knew him."

"Perhaps he's had influenza," she suggested.

She had not seen the man for weeks. He had been away several times, and when he had come to the house had not asked for her. The last time they had met they had, of course, quarrelled, and then she had forgotten him, as she forgot everybody and everything not brought directly under her notice.

In March he had gone to Monte Carlo to see her mother, who was visiting there, and Lady Kingsmead had told her afterwards that he had been wretched all during his stay. Brigit said she was sorry, but it is to be doubted if the afflictions of anyone, if not directly affecting herself, would at that time have given her any pain, and of all people poor Carron was probably the last with whom she could feel any real sympathy.

Tommy had a bad throat and was not to go back to Golden Square that night, but Brigit was dining somewhere with the two Joyselle men, and was to spend the night in the now so-familiar spare-room, with the coloured religious pictures on the walls.

Lady Kingsmead had returned to town that morning, but the perfect freedom she gained by Tommy's long stay with, and her daughter's daily visits to, the Joyselles, had long since overcome her first scruples about "those sort of people being after all quite the associates for Kingsmead," and had accepted Brigit's announcement for her intention with an absent nod.

"Very well, dear, and remind him not to forget that he is dining here on Tuesday. He really is *most* obliging, about playing, I must say."

"Yes, the poor creature has his qualities," returned the girl, drily. Twice during the past twelve weeks she had gone to Kingsmead for a day or two, and on each occasion her note, written to the violinist at her mother's suggestion, asking him down to dine and spend the night, had met with telegraphic acceptance.

"Good-bye, little brother."

"Good-bye, Bicky, give him my love." Tommy's small eyes beamed with fanatical affection, and Brigit kissed him again.

Then she went downstairs, picked up a passing hansom, and sped to Paradise.

CHAPTER SIX

Felicie Louise Marie Joyselle was sitting in her bedroom, darning her husband's socks.

She sat in a straight-backed chair near the dressing-table, and a huge basket of mending of different kinds stood on the floor by her side. The room was very simple, for she loved the well-polished black-walnut furniture among which she had lived all her married life, and nothing would have induced her to change it for new, however beautiful.

The walls were adorned with religious prints, but on the space over the dressing-table, with its array of ebony and silver hair-brushes, was a group of old, faded photographs, evidently all of the same person---Joyselle; and over the chimney-piece hung four large oval photographs, in varnished black frames, picked out with narrow red stripes; quite evidently four middle-aged peasants in their best attire. Near the door a coloured crayon of Theo at the age of five, in plaid trousers, a short jacket, and a wide collar of crochetted lace, smiled sheepishly down at the world. There was a table covered with books of the kind whose gilt edges invariably stick together, because they are never opened, and on the little table on the left of the broad bed, with its scarlet counterpane and huge, soft-looking pillows, were an old black crucifix and two shabby prayer-books.

It was a plain, inartistic room, and the middle-aged woman whose holy of holies it had been for fifteen years was as old-fashioned and unbeautiful as it; yet there was, somehow, about the place a certain atmosphere of goodness and peace that cannot be described in words.

When Brigit Mead came in that afternoon she kissed Madame Joyselle as usual, and then taking off her hat and coat, drew up another stiff-backed chair and sat down.

"How are you, *petite mere*?" she asked gently, in French.

"I am well, as I always am, thank God. And you? And Tommy?"

"Tommy has a bad throat, but it is nothing. He sent his love. I am very fit."

Madame Joyselle cut her cotton, scrutinised her work closely, and laid the sock down and took up another.

"Such a man for wearing out socks. And always the heels," she remarked. "It would try the patience of anyone!"

"Does it try even yours?" asked Brigit.

The little woman looked up, her shrewd black eyes twinkling under their well-defined brows. "You have observed, then, that I am patient? But yes, my dear, God help the wife of an artist if she is not! He is terrible, my man, at times, but luckily I was born long-suffering. He has, too, a way of wrenching at button-holes in collars that tears them to bits, and desolates me."

"But-----" began the girl, and then stopped.

All things considered, there was remarkably little constraint in her feelings for this good woman, but somehow at that moment she wished to change the subject.

Madame Joyselle, however, gave a gentle chuckle, and continued: "He was his most terrific yesterday! Like a lion with no self-control; it was very ridiculous."

Brigit started. Terrible, yes, but---it struck her as very unfitting for the great man's plain little wife to find him ridiculous. And Felicite, as her husband always called her, saw her start, and understood.

"Ah, yes, to you he is the great artist as well as Theo's father---*hein*? To me he is, of course, just---my husband. All men are, they say, different, but surely all husbands are much alike."

"There are certainly very few men like---*him*." Brigit took a sock out of the basket and looked at it absently. There was a short silence, during which Felicite did not speak, but she was watching her visitor in the glass. Then she said suddenly, with a certain briskness in her voice, "Shall I tell you about him? About my husband, you know, not about the great artist of---all you others."

Brigit nodded. "Yes, please do. Tell me about---long ago, in Normandy."

"*Bien.* It will interest you. You like him very much, don't you?" she added, suddenly, looking up and fixing the girl with her bright eyes.

"Like him? Indeed I do. I think him simply glorious," was the answer, given in a gushing voice, but for a moment the girl felt vaguely uneasy. During the last twelve weeks she had not, although seeing Joyselle's wife every day, learned to regard her as a real factor in the game. Joyselle, always tender and considerate of her, yet seemed to regard her as a kind of cross between a mother and a nurse, and she, never precisely retiring, and almost always present during Brigit's visits, appeared to be perfectly used to the *role* that he assigned her, and sat, usually silent, a kindly spectator of whatever might be going on.

This was the first time that Brigit had realised that she had a real personality, and the girl wondered at her own blindness, for every line in Madame Joyselle's face meant, she now saw, an individuality stronger rather than weaker than the average woman's, even in these days of clamorous individualism.

"Do tell me about him---when he was young," Lady Brigit Mead continued, her thick-looking white eyelids, eyelids that the hapless Mr. Babington compared in his twenty-second sonnet to magnolia-petals, drooping till her lashes made shadows on her cheeks.

And Felicite Joyselle told her story.

"He lived at St. Pol---a mile from Falaise on the way to Caen. His father was gamekeeper to M. de Cerisay. My father, Jacques Rion,---there is his picture to the right, with the beard,---was a tanner in Falaise. We were all poor, but it was very pleasant. Falaise is a beautiful city. Sometimes I used to think there was nothing so beautiful in London as the Place St. Gervais on a market-day in summer, with the fountain playing, and all the friendly people selling their wares. But that," she added simply, "was before I had seen the Albert Memorial. Victor's mother used to sell her fruit in the town, and her sister had married my uncle, anyway! and Victor used to come with her. The first time I remember seeing him, however, was at Mass. It was winter, and very cold, and he kept blowing his hands to warm them. I was twelve, and he about ten. He was a beautiful little boy. Then one day his father brought him to see his aunt---who had married Monsieur Chalumeau, my uncle, you see?---and I was there. And we went up to the castle. You have been there? It is where the Conqueror---who conquered England---was born, in a tiny little stone room high above the tower. You know the story of Arlette?" Brigit nodded, but she did not know. She wanted to hear about Joyselle.

"*Bon.* And then, when I was twenty, and he eighteen, he came back from Rouen where, did I tell you?---M. de Cerisay had sent him to learn to play the violin---and he told me he wanted me to marry him. He was very splendid then, with city clothes, and oil on his hair, and his hands smooth as a gentleman's.

"We were married at St. Gervais. Then he went back to Rouen and he studied again. That," she added, "was the worst time of my life."

"But why?"

The elder woman looked up. "Because---–I was just getting to know him," she returned slowly, "and---–he was very wild."

Brigit nodded sympathetically. "Poor you," she said in English.

"Yes. The music made him half-mad, and then he had friends who taught him to gamble. There were other things, too. Women. He was so handsome and so fascinating, and his success was just beginning, they all ran after him, and he enjoyed it. I," she added, "didn't. Then we went to Paris. That was bad, too, only Theo was on the way, which made things better. He was good to me during my illness---–ah, very good; and beautiful it was to see the big strong man, mad with his music and his success, washing the little baby and dressing him. When Theo was two---–Victor had been working with his violin since he was fourteen---–we went to Berlin, and then began his craze for work. He used to work four and five hours at a time for months. Once his health gave way, and we were very poor, so he went to some place for a cure, and the little one and I stayed at home. Then he met a great Prince,---–I can never remember his name,---–and he invited us to stay with him. It was in a big castle near Munich. Victor loved it, but I was very miserable. I never went anywhere with him again."

"Why were you miserable, *petite mere*?" Brigit's voice was very gentle; she seemed to see the young violinist, handsome and, as his wife put it, driven half-mad by his music, the centre of attraction at the German castle, and his little plain wife sitting forlorn by herself, looking on.

"It was a Lady Crefinne Cranewitz,"---–this name at least, she remembered! "This Crefinne (it means countess) was very beautiful, but too big; large all over like a statue, and blond. She used to wear one flower in her bosom at dinner, and then give it to him afterwards. Also she gave him a lock of her hair."

"And what did he give her?"

Felicite smiled placidly. "He gave her---–his love. Ah, yes, he loved her, his Crefinne Gigantesque."

"But-----–"

The teller of the tale drew a blue silk sock over her hand and poked at the hole in its heel with a thoughtful needle. "He always loves them---–for the time, my dear. He is of a sincerity, my man!"

Since the evening of the dragon-skin frock Brigit had done nothing to charm Joyselle; he saw her through his own eyes now, and she, knowing that the game was in her own hands, could afford to wait; when the day came when she wanted to hurt him or to further gratify her own love, she could make him love her almost in a moment. So, so far as she knew, he still enjoyed her beauty without *arriere pensee*, although he saw her through his own eyes, not Theo's. Yet now, at this phrase of his wife's, "He always loves them---–for the time," she started, half angrily. When---–if---–the day came when he loved her, would this "clean old peasant," as Carron had called her, sit and darn his socks and say to herself---–"for the time"?

"You are very---–placid about it."

"Yes. In the beginning---–no. Then I was jealous, and angry. But a jealous woman is always ridiculous, my child, and men are so vain that the implied homage upsets them. Many a woman has lost a man's love through showing jealousy. So---–in time I got used to it, and *tout passe*," she continued comfortably.

"And you wouldn't mind now, if-----–" asked Brigit, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her hands.

Madame Joyselle laughed. "*Wouldn't mind?* Oh, *ma chere*! Just before you came, he had a very bad turn---–it was an Italian actress---–a pantomimiste, with the most beautiful arms in the world, and the face of a vicious little boy. And he? *Epate.* His ties wouldn't tie, he got new shoes---–fresh gloves every time he went to see her---–scent, a new kind, very expensive---–he sent her flowers by the cartload, and went every evening to see her act. Every day little mauve letters and wires from her (he always forgot to burn them, and I was afraid Toinon might see them), *etc*., *etc*., *etc*."

"And how did it end?" asked Brigit, her throat dry and hot. She hated the pantomimiste.

"End? My faith, my dear, it is of a simplicity, the end. *You came.*"

"I came-----–"

"Yes. And he was so delighted with his new---–daughter---–that he promptly forgot his---–love."

"But what did she do?"

"She made a fool of herself, poor thing; wrote, and telegraphed, and threatened to kill herself. So we sent Theo to see her, and she quieted down."

Brigit burst out laughing. "Sent Theo?"

"Yes. He always goes. He is very quiet and reasonable, you see."

"I see."

Madame Joyselle rose. "I must go and see about the dinner. Will you come? Ah, yes," as they went downstairs, "they are like that, the men. But Theo will be faithful to you, of that I am sure. He is like my people, and then, thank God, he is not an artist!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Antoinette, I have something to say to you."

"So I ventured to gather from the fact that you have come to see me."

It was mid-May, and a fragrant breeze stirred the delicate curtains of Lady Kingsmead's little drawing-room in Pont Street. There were flowers everywhere, chiefly white lilacs, and the pale green and white chintz and the quantities of light-hued pillows on the sofas (all of which belonged, as yet, to Messrs. Liberty) made of the room a pleasant refuge from the unusual heat outside. Lady Kingsmead, dressed in pale pink, looked in the faint light very pretty as she leaned back in her deep chair and played with the Persian cat.

Carron, upright on his small gilt chair, was pale and agitated, the primitive feelings showing in his ravaged face looking in some way more out of place, because he was exquisitely frock-coated and had a fresh-blown tea-rose in his button-hole, than they would have done if he had been shabby.

When Lady Kingsmead had spoken, he cleared his throat and began hurriedly: "Antoinette---–my---–my wife is dead."

"Good Lord, Gerald, how you startled me! Is she really?"

"Yes, I---I saw her this morning."

"Drink?" asked Lady Kingsmead, pleasantly.

He frowned. "No. Cancer."

"How---horrid!"

She went to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"You look ill, poor dear. What is the matter? *Your* looks are a bit on the blink, too, Gerry! You must buck up."

She sat down and dabbed gingerly at her eyes with a scrap of handkerchief. "It *is* rather tragic, in its very insignificance, isn't it? Well---what is it? Is it Brigit?"

Mutely and miserably he bowed his head, until she saw the carefully concealed thin place on his crown.

"I thought so. It's no good, Gerald---give me the cat, will you?---she dislikes you."

"She loathes me. And I would be burnt to death for her to-morrow."

She started at something in his tone---something she had not heard for years.

"Can't you get over it?"

"No."

"Then-----"

"Oh, my God, Tony, *I* don't know. Can't---can't you help me?"

"I!"

"Yes. She can't love that boy; he is utterly insignificant. She's marrying him for his money."

"No. She likes him. But, of course, the money helped. But she wouldn't marry you if you were a millionaire yourself. She loathes you. Always has."

"I am going mad, I think. I haven't slept for months. Look at my hand, how it shakes; anyone would think I was a drunkard! Look here, Tony, couldn't you ask her to speak civilly to me, at least?"

She was almost frightened as she looked at his piteous face. He had indeed changed appallingly in the last six or eight months, and there was a tremulous movement about his well-cut mouth that was alarming.

"Yes, Gerald, I'll ask her. I---I am awfully sorry for you."

"Thanks. As far as that's concerned, everybody in the world ought to be sorry for everybody else. We all have our little private hell. When is the---is the wedding-day fixed?"

"Oh, no," she returned hastily, "dear me, no. She is in no hurry to marry, and he is, of course, dough in her hands. You, at least, needn't worry about that. Will you dine here?"

"Sorry-----"

"She is to be here, and Joyselle. Theo is out of town."

Carron rose and hesitated. "Do you think she'd mind?" he asked piteously. A sharp pang touched her worldly heart. If, years ago, she had let him go? If she had not made him give up diplomacy because she wanted him in England? He would, doubtless, have divorced his impossible wife, and married, and this would not have come to him.

"Of course she won't mind. Does she know that you love her?"

He nodded. She stared, and then rang the bell. "Bring Mr. Carron a brandy and soda, Fledge; he is not well."

She went to the window and stood looking out into the quiet street until the man had returned and she heard Carron set down the empty glass.

Then, without looking at him, she came back. Her shallow soul was dismayed.

"Dinner at 8.30?" he asked after a pause.

"Yuss. Good-bye till then, for I must fly and make some calls."

"Good-bye, Tony. You are sure that boy isn't coming? I---I am getting to hate him-----"

"Nonsense," she laughed harshly, for she was not merry; "he isn't even invited. He is in the country, I tell you."

"Then, *au 'voir*."

"*Au 'voir*, Gerry."

He went away, feeling that his cause perhaps was not utterly hopeless.

And in her gaudy bedroom, in the caravanserai that had been her idea of luxury, his wife lay dead.

CHAPTER EIGHT

When the women had left the dining-room Carron got up from his place and sat down by Joyselle, who looked at him with unconcealed astonishment. He had never liked Carron, and knew that the man did not like him.

"When is your next concert to be, M. Joyselle?"

"The third of June."

"I---I always come. I have come for years, and last June I heard you in Paris. You must like playing with Colonne."

"I do. He is a wonderful director. But---I did not know that you liked music, Mr. Carron."

"I have always liked it. And no one plays the violin as you do."

He would not have hesitated to lie about the matter, had it been necessary, but he happened to be telling the truth, and his weary voice carried conviction.

Joyselle smiled. "I am glad," he said.

The two men eyed each other for a moment, and much was decided by their gaze.

Carron broke the silence. "Did I not see you the other day in Chelsea. I was motoring, and going very fast; but I think it was you."

"It is possible. I have a studio in Tite Street. I go there to practise. It is very quiet there, at the top of the house, and I am very nervous when I am working."

Carron nodded absently; this did not interest him. At the other end of the table one of the Italian secretaries was talking about the Ascot favourite to Freddy Fane, who had recently divorced his chorus girl and stopped drinking, and who was supposed to be looked on with a favourable eye by old Mrs. Banner, the aunt and chaperon of Lady Mary Sligo, the prettiest of the season's *debutantes*.

"Is that man going to marry the beautiful girl I saw on the box-seat of his coach the other day?" asked Joyselle, suddenly.

"I daresay. His mother died last month and left him pots of money. Marmalade-pots---Peet's Peerless." After a moment Carron pursued, drawing lines on the tablecloth with a fruitknife: "I have a very fine violin---left me by my grandfather. It is a Strad, I believe. I wonder if you'd care to see it?"

Joyselle pursed up his lips. "I should, but I warn you, it is probably an imposture. Most cherished violins are---that are in the hands of non-players."

"No doubt, but Sarasate has played on this one, and he believed it to be genuine."

"Aha! When may I come?"

Carron named a near day, and then they went upstairs. He had obtained his immediate object, and now there remained to him that evening a far more difficult task.

Brigit was sitting by the window, fanning herself with a fan made of eagle-feathers. She wore white and looked very tired.

"May I sit down here, Brigit?"

She turned at his voice, and then stared at him. "You look very ill," she said abruptly, "is your heart all right?"

Her face did not change as she spoke, and there was no friendliness in her tone, but he thanked God that he was, and looked, ill.

"My heart is weak, I believe; nothing organic. It is very warm, and I never can bear heat. You look tired yourself."

She nodded absently. "Yes, I have been away---at the Bertie Monson's. Nelly Monson always gives me a headache, she talks so loud. And my room was under the nursery. I do hate children."

Carron caught his breath. She was actually talking civilly to him. And, then, remembering his request to her mother, he, for a second, hated Lady Kingsmead with a bitter and senseless hatred. Was Brigit, after all, only talking to him as a favour to her mother? But a second's reflection showed him the folly of this idea. Had Brigit ever done anything to please her mother? Never.

One of the two women-guests sat down at the piano and began to play, very softly, an old song of Tosti's. Everybody listened. A hansom jingled by and a bicycle's sharp bell was a loud noise in the after-dinner silence.

Joyselle was standing by a table, absently balancing on his forefinger a long, broad, ivory paper-knife. He was, Brigit remembered, curiously adept in balancing, and once she had seen him go through, for Tommy's amusement, a whole series of the kind, from the classic broomstick on his chin, to blowing three feathers about the room at a time, allowing none of them to fall. How quickly he had moved, in spite of his great height, and how Tommy had laughed. But, for the past week, something had gone wrong with the violinist. He had been away from the house one day when she went, and that afternoon, when she "dropped in" on her way from the station, he had hardly spoken. In his silence he seemed immeasurably far from her, and she would have given worlds to read his thoughts.

During dinner he had been conventionally polite, but playing a *role* was so foreign to him that even this laudable one of pretending to be amused when he was bored sat gloomily and guiltily on him.

Carron sat by her for twenty minutes, but her eyes were fixed on Joyselle, and her whole mind groping in the darkness for his.

There was a ball that night, so the party broke up early, but Joyselle stayed, absently, as if he did not notice that the others were going. He sat on a sofa and smoked cigarettes rapidly, rolling them himself, with quick, nervous movements, and throwing them into a silver bowl before they were half-burnt.

Lady Kingsmead tried to talk to him, but finding that, though he answered her politely enough, his thoughts were elsewhere, gave him up and took up a book, casting an impatient look at her daughter.

Carron had gone early, too restless to stay quiet, and afraid to rouse Brigit out of her curious lethargic state.

For a long time the three people sat in silence, and then Lady Kingsmead rose. "I think I'll go upstairs," she said, "but if you two enjoy sitting as mute as fish, there is no reason why you shouldn't continue to do so. Good-night, Joyselle."

He rose and kissed her hands, and a moment later he and Brigit were alone. It was the first time it had happened, for weeks, the girl realised suddenly.

He stood where Lady Kingsmead had left him, the light falling directly on his head in a way that showed up very plainly the curious halo-like effect caused by the silver greyness of the hair about his brow.

"What is wrong, Master?" she asked softly, using Tommy's name for him. He started. "The matter? Nothing that bears talking about, Brigit. But I am in its clutches and I will go."

A cold terror came over her. Was it---some woman? "Do not go," she said, her cheeks burning. "I don't mind your being silent."

He looked at her inquiringly, raising his eyebrows. It was clear that he noticed something strange in her voice; also that he did not know what it meant. But he sat down and began rolling a fresh cigarette. The flat silver box in which he carried his tobacco lay on the table beside him, and she idly took it up. "Rose-Marie a Victor," she saw engraved on it. "What a pretty name! The box is old, isn't it?"

"Yes. Or pretends to be. I have had it for years."

"And---she? Rose-Marie?"

"I don't know. It was twenty years ago---in Paris."

Felicite's story recurred to Brigit, the "bad time" in Paris; "how he loved them all for the time."

He was smoking fitfully, and frowning to himself. She was again forgotten. It was very warm, and the curtains swayed in irregular puffs of wind; then came a rumble of thunder. Joyselle started nervously.

"*Un orage*," he said; "I---I hate thunder."

"Do you? I like it." Together they went to the window and looked up at the threatening sky. A whirl of dust met them, and they drew quickly back, his sleeve brushing against her shoulders. "It will be bad," he said, broodingly.

"Yes."

She felt breathless and welcomed the coming storm as suiting her mood.

"I---you asked me what is the matter," Joyselle began, speaking very quickly. "I will tell you. It is this. There is in me a god, and I refuse to give him speech. I have genius and I waste it; I have a soul and I am crushing it. I am a most unworthy and miserable being!"

Absolutely sincere in every word he said, his dramatic temperament gave force and a kind of rhythm to his confession that made it very poignant, and his face very white, his big eyes glowed tragically as he stood looking over his hearer's head.

"A most miserable being."

He groaned, and throwing himself into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

Outside one or two carriages hurried past, and the darkness was streaked with quick recurring flashes of lightning.

Brigit looked long at Joyselle, and then, irresistibly drawn to him, laid her hand with great gentleness on his head. "You are tired, and the storm has got on your nerves."

"No, no! I am not tired. There is for my great good-for-nothingness not that excuse. I am---a wastrel of my gifts." It was, she saw, one of the crises of despair under which many artists suffer, but its intensity was most painful. "You are good to me, Brigitte," he said, brokenly, taking her left hand and holding it to his forehead, which was cold and damp. "You are an angel!"

As he spoke a terrific zigzag of fire crossed the windows, and the house shook in the almost immediate crash. Like a child Joyselle threw his arms round Brigit and hid his face against the embroidery on her corsage, holding her tight. It seemed to her an eternity before either of them moved, and when, abruptly, he let her go, and rose, his face had changed.

"Good-bye---I must go---I beg your pardon-----"

He stammered piteously, and did not look at her, but stood holding the lapels of his coat as if he was trying to tear them off. Then, without another word, he was gone, out into the storm.

CHAPTER NINE

Brigit was not at all surprised when, early the next morning, a note from Joyselle was brought to her.

She had slept very badly, for she seemed to have reached a crisis in her relations with Joyselle; and lying awake in the heat that the storm had but increased, she passed hours in unprofitable forecastings. What would he do, now that he knew? Would he make love to her? Or would he try to hurry on the wedding? Or-----

Of course, what he did do proved an utter surprise to her.

"My dear Brigit," he wrote, "just a line to say good-bye to you for a time. I am accepting an offer to do two months' touring in the United States (which country I do not like, but which likes me), and shall come back laden with dollars with which to buy you a beautiful wedding present. What shall it be---diamonds? I hope you will say lace---yards and yards of exquisite lace of all kinds---it is so much more poetic than stones. So *au revoir*, my dear, and may all happiness be yours.

"Joyselle."

She sat up in bed and drew a long, uneven breath. She had not counted on the possibility of flight! And she could not bear it.

There had been some talk of his going to America, but he had disliked the idea, and she had not dreamed that he would even seriously consider it. There was not the slightest doubt that his decision was entirely due to the little scene of the evening before. That moment when his nervous horror of the lightning had impelled him to put his arms round her had, she knew, opened his eyes to his own danger. And it was characteristic of the man to act immediately and without hesitation. He would go---it was Saturday, and very probably he would leave by the noon train for Liverpool. It was now eight.

She lay for a long time with her eyes shut, trying to realise what life would be like without him. And then her undisciplined, wayward mind revolted. It was unbearable; therefore she would not bear it. She would not let him go.

Half an hour later she was in a hansom, trying to decide the details relative to her decision. He should not go, but which of the several possible ways should she employ to prevent it?

Before she could decide on anything more than the great fact that, cost what it may, she would not let him go, the hansom drew up at the house, and she was about to get out when the front door opened and Joyselle himself appeared.

"You!" he cried, impetuously, and then stood still. "You got my note?" he added a second later, sternly.

Her heart sank. He was very strong. Then he came towards her, his brows drawn down over his eyes, his nostrils dilated, and she lied.

"No---what note?"

Normans are quick to suspect deceit, and for a moment his expression did not change; then, for individually the man was as trustful as racially he was suspicious, he smiled. "I see. But why are you out so early? It is not yet nine."

"And you?" she returned deftly, her heart beating not only with the excitement of the duel, but with enjoyment of her own skill.

"I---well, I have business."

"Then get in and I'll take you wherever you want to go, I want to talk to you."

He hesitated, but she smiled at him and he succumbed, thinking to himself, she could see, that after all she knew nothing of what was going on in his mind.

As he took his place beside her the cabman opened his trap-door and asked with the hoarseness of his kind:

"W'ere to, sir?"

Joyselle frowned. "To---Piccadilly. I'll tell you when we get to where I wish to stop."

Brigit suppressed a smile. Now he was thinking, she saw, that he would tell her of his intended departure before he gave the Cunard Company's address.

He was pale, but to her surprise looked younger rather than older than usual. His mental disturbance had left traces on his face, and they were, as it was, young in their nature. He had fallen in love, and the youth in him, both physical and mental, flared up responsively to the call of the emotion.

Suddenly she saw her line of action clearly marked out for her, and without an instant's hesitation took it. If he suspected that she loved him, nothing in the world could keep him by her. So he must not know. In all her dreams and reflections about their relations, she had never taken into account the possibility of things turning out as they had. She had always tacitly taken for granted that it would be by her will that the man should be waked up to the real state of his own mind. Even after the evening of the dragon-skin frock he had not known the real explanation of his amazement on her entrance, and had, she knew, merely advanced in his perilous path to the point of realising that she was, although his future daughter, an amazingly desirable woman.

So far she had read him correctly. But that something outside her own personal sway should open his eyes she had not anticipated.

This had, however, happened, and with the acute intuition of a woman fighting for her life, she understood what she must do to prevent his flight.

So, turning towards him, she smiled amusedly.

"*Eh, b'en*, Beau-papa? Got over your fright? You big baby!"

He stared, and she went on without a pause, but speaking slowly, to give an idea of leisure, "To think that you of all people should be afraid of *thunder*! It was lucky you had your valorous daughter to shield you."

He gave a short, nervous laugh. "Yes, it is very idiotic, I know, but-----–"

"And then to bolt away into the very thick of it! That was because you were *ashamed*! I shall tell *petite mere* and Theo. But it was an awful storm, and so fearfully warm afterwards, wasn't it? I couldn't sleep at all---–that's why I'm up so early. I came over to ask you to go up to Hampstead with me to get some real air. This London extract of air is a very poor substitute, isn't it? Now don't say no to a poor daughter whose young man is out of town!"

As she talked, looking casually at the passers-by, she could, so tense were her nerves, almost hear him think. "She is quite unsuspecting," he was telling himself, "there is no danger for her, and---–it doesn't matter about *me*. And I am strong and need never betray myself-----–"

She talked on, the kind of unconcerned nonsense that was, her strange, new instinct told her, best calculated to quite his vibrant nerves. "Little child, little child," he returned mutely, "how little you know! Well---–as you are so innocent, why should not I snatch this fearful joy while I may? It harms no one but myself, and such pain is better than any happiness on earth-----–"

"Yes, *ma fille*," he said at length, as she pointed to a barrow of nodding daffodils, "we will go to Hampstead; it is a good idea. But first I must send a wire or two. And---–you must promise to return to me, unopened, the note you will find in Pont Street."

Her wandering stare was admirable. "Return unopened? But why? Was it---–cross?"

He laughed aloud, his brilliant teeth flashing. "*Si, si*, that is it. Cross! You know how stupid I was last night? The coming storm---–well---–it was a silly note, and you will return it."

"Oh, of course, if you wish me to," she answered carelessly, but clenching her hands. "*C'est une boutade comme une autre!*"

He laughed again. His spirits were flying upwards like those of a criminal unexpectedly reprieved.

"Yes---–just a fad. Hi, cab_bee_, stop here, will you?"

While he was in the telegraph-office Brigit allowed her muscles to relax and her face to express her hitherto rigidly concealed triumph.

He was not going. He would stay; she should continue to see him, and the world was full of joy. "Heavens, how I can lie," she whispered softly, "and now we shall both have to lie. We both know about him; he thinks I don't know; and he doesn't know about me! It is a comedy. Oh, Victor, Victor, Victor!"

He came out a moment later, seeming to fill the world with his giant bulk and his astounding radiation of joy. Two narrow-chested city clerks stood still to stare at him, their pallid little faces blank with amazement. A red-nosed flower-girl thrust a great bunch of yellow roses up at him with certainty of sale written all over her. "Roses? Of course. How much?"

He laughed aloud as he gave her some money and then got into the hansom.

"Hampstead Heath, cabby. At Falaise there are millions of these roses---see, with the outside leaves wrinkled and red. Oh, Brigit, Brigit, what a day!"

CHAPTER TEN

If it be true that everything is in the eye of the beholder, then Joyselle's and Brigit Mead's eyes must have been full of beauties that day.

For to them Hampstead Heath was the most marvellously lovely place on earth.

His light-heartedness, chiefly due to his faculty for ignoring side-issues and enjoying the present, was of course magnified as well by the fact that it followed close on the heels of one of his despairing black fits. Yesterday he had been, because of an unsatisfactory morning's work in Chelsea, in the very depths, honestly despising himself as an artist, sincerely loathing his incorrigible love of amusement and consequent wasting of time.

So this sunny, rather windy morning, Brigit by his side, and his newly awakened conscience stilled for the moment, was to him as near Paradise as anything he could imagine.

They lunched somewhere---neither of them could ever remember where---on very tough cold ham and insufficiently cooled beer, but they were both too happy to mind, or even to observe the faults of the *menu*. And as neither of them had ever before set eyes on the Heath, it was full of surprises, as well as of beauties. Yielding to some unexplained instinct, they both took off their hats (what is it that induces people to uncover their heads in high places?), and the warm sun shone down on their hair.

"Your hair must be very long, Brigitte?" observed Joyselle once, as he looked at her silky plaits that covered her crown in disregard of the laws of fashion.

"It is. Comes to my knees. Oh, look!"

Two people, a man and a girl, sat in the shade of an isolated tree only a few yards below the place where they stood. They were evidently enjoying an unlawful holiday, for they were workers---factory hands, probably, and they were as palpably rejoicing in their freedom.

The girl, whose brilliant red hair was pulled out at the sides until her head was as big as a bushel basket, wore a pink blouse and a green skirt. The youth, stunted and pale, was gorgeous only as to tie, but quite evidently she considered him her complement. For they were busy drinking beer from a bottle, turn about, and kissing each other delightedly between swallows. Joyselle started, drawing a deep breath, and Brigit, without moving her head, looked at him sideways, as the so-called Fornarina looks in the Uffizi, in Florence.

"They are cheery, aren't they?" she asked hastily, and he, nodding, turned away. For a few moments he was silent, and then he began to talk rather loudly about nothing in particular, and in a few moments was himself---the Joyselle of that

particular day. Brigit realised that their stronghold of reserves and lies had been dangerously threatened by his mounting emotion. If he had broken down in his *role*---and she knew that the playing of any kind of a *role* was foreign to his nature, and therefore perilous---she would have lost him.

His mind, of course, except in certain moments when it all unconsciously was subjugated by her will, was a closed book to her.

For he was not only a man (and no woman can ever wholly understand any man's mind), but he was nearly twenty years older than she, and he was a Norman---a race very complicated, in its mixture of shrewd cunning and simplicity, and difficult for even other French people to comprehend. But groping in the dark though she was, the girl had grasped two essential facts: if Joyselle learned that she loved him, he would go away if it killed him; and if, though remaining in ignorance of her love, he was led to betray his, the result would be the same.

So her aim must be to keep him well under his own control, and to avoid betraying her personal feelings in the very least degree.

It was easy that first day. He was still more or less dazed and taken up with his discovery that he loved her, and therefore not so shrewd as usual. The future, she knew, would be harder.

But that one day was a delight to them both. He told her about his youth---as truthful an account as his wife's, but oh, how infinitely more picturesque and interesting.

His acquisition of the Amati was recounted with a wealth of detail that enchanted her, and she closed her eyes the better to see the little dark shop on the *quai* at Rouen, and the old man who would not sell his treasure, even for a good price, until he had heard the would-be purchaser play on it. "And then, my dear, I tuned it, and played. It was a bit from Tschaikovsky's Pathetic Symphony---the adagio movement. It was dark in the shop, with the velvety darkness old places get on a sunny day, and on the other side of the street lay the sunshine like gold. He sat, *le vieux*, in his chair away from the light, for his eyes were bad, and listened. And I played well, for I was playing for the greatest price I had ever commanded!"

"And then?" she asked softly, stroking her cheek with some young beech-leaves.

"And then he kissed me, and---I took out my cheque-book," returned Joyselle simply.

It was after four, and the wind had gone down, freeing the common from the beautiful cloud-streams that had chased over it earlier in the day.

The red-headed girl and her young man had disappeared, and from where they sat Joyselle and Brigit saw no signs of life.

"To-morrow it will be crowded with odious people," Brigit sighed.

"Why odious?"

"Well, I mean vulgar, noisy people."

He shook his head in a way that ruffled his halo of silver hair, and laughed.

"You should not be a snob," he teased. "After all, you are marrying the son of peasants."

"Peasants are different," she insisted, a little sulkily.

"Peasants are picturesque only in books, my dear. As for me, I like happy people, and even your English 'noisy and vulgar' ones are happy, I suppose, when they come up here on Sunday. Some day you and I will come again. And bring Theo," he added suddenly.

Then he rose. "Come, we had better start to walk back." She obeyed in silence.

"If I had not had genius," he continued as they reached the bottom of the slope and turned homewards, "I should be now---what? A Norman peasant in a black blouse driving, probably, a char-a-bancs to sell my fruit---or my corn. I could never have been a gamekeeper like my father, for I cannot kill. And if you, then, had come to Falaise and gone to the market, you might have bought a pennyworth of cherries of me. And all this might have been if I had not, one day, heard an old half-witted blind man play a cracked fiddle on the high road, thirty years ago!"

She frowned, for she hated this kind of talk. It was too true, and it hurt her baser pride, even while her nobler pride rejoiced in the very humbleness of his origin because it emphasised his present greatness.

"But---you are you, and I am only---me," she returned, ungrammatical but proudly humble.

He turned, his face flushing brilliantly. "Then you are proud of me?" he cried.

Danger again. After a long pause, which visibly hurt him, she returned with a smile, "Of course I am. Who would not be proud of such a father-in-law?"

Half an hour later it was all over, the wonderful day was finished, and to Brigit's amazement she was more than a little glad. It had been delightful, but it had been full of danger.

In time Joyselle would learn to evade these pitfalls, with which their future seemed to bristle, but as yet he was so unused to avoiding things in his path that it was almost a miracle that she had, as she put it with a half-whimsical, half-despairing smile, got him safely home without an outburst.

She was, had been from the first, fairly sure of herself, but she was wise enough to acknowledge that her strength depended largely on his. If he had broken down, she knew that the odds were largely against her being able, in her inevitable despair over his certain-to-follow good-bye, to continue to hide her own feelings. And after that, she believed, he would never see her again.

So it was with a strong feeling of relief that she said good-bye to him, half-way home, and went on alone.

As the hansom started again she turned and looked back. Joyselle stood, hat in hand, where she had left him, his face, now that he believed himself to be unseen by her, black with thought. Then, with the so familiar jerk of his head, he put on his hat, smiled, and marched off down the street.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

One afternoon, a few days later, Tommy Kingsmead burst into his sister's room where she was sitting writing.

"I say, Bick-----"

"Hello, little boy, what's the matter?"

Tommy shrugged his shoulders in close imitation of Joyselle.

"I don't know, but something is. Very. It's---Theo!"

She started. "Theo? He isn't ill, is he?"

"No, no. He's downstairs; wants to see you. There's been some kind of a row in Golden Square. *Petite mere* and the Master have been talking for an hour, as hard as ever they can talk, and Theo is upset, and the Master has gone off in a tearing rage---do go down and find out, Brigit, and then come back and tell me."

Lord Kingsmead's pristine curiosity regarding everything with which he came into contact had by no means suffered eclipse since he had been living in London.

Devoted as he was to Joyselle and to his music, the little boy's passion for knowledge of all kinds seemed to increase, and there was in his small, pale, pointed face a strained, overkeen look that troubled his sister at times. Now, however, she had no leisure to think of it, and hurried downstairs to the drawing-room, where she found Theo walking restlessly up and down.

"Brigit," he burst out abruptly, as she came in, "when will you marry me?"

"Good gracious, Theo---what---what has put that into your head?" she parried ineffectively, sitting down, as he did not offer to give her any further greeting.

"Into my head? Has it ever been out of it? I am sorry to have startled you, dear," he continued, more gently, sitting down by her and taking her hands in his, "but surely I have been patient. And---I am tired of waiting."

She sat with bent head, looking at their joined hands. His hands were smaller and whiter than his father's, but very like them in shape. If they had been Joyselle's! If he had been able to come to her with that question: "When will you marry me?"

"You are very good," she said slowly, after a long pause.

"Then--?"

"Suppose you tell me why this sudden frenzy of haste?"

He hesitated. "Well---we have been engaged nearly eight months---and I love you, dear."

But she remembered Tommy's story and persisted.

"Surely, though, something must have happened to-day? You were quite content yesterday."

He flushed. "*Eh bien, oui.* It is that my grandmother has written. In September is to be their Golden Wedding. They are very old, and---they want---me to bring my wife to them. Brigit," he added, his boyish face flushing with anticipatory

pink, "may I not do it?"

She rose and went to the window, her temples beating violently. For weeks Theo had played such a subordinate *role* in her mind, owing as much to his native modesty as to her absorption in his father, that his mood of to-day came to her as a shock. After all, put the thought away, forget the inevitable future in an almost hysterical enjoyment of the present, as she would, it must be faced some time. Could she possibly marry this boy whom her sentimental contemporaneousness with his father naturally seemed to relegate to a generation younger than herself?

It would be horrible, unnatural. A husband, be he ever so modern, and his wife ever so unruly, is in the nature of things more or less a master, whereas, she realised with a flash of very miserable amusement, she would, if displeased with him, feel less inclined to use wifely diplomacy than to box his ears. Emphatically, she had hopelessly outgrown him. Then, what should she do?

If she refused him now, what would be his father's attitude? She did not know. A week ago Joyselle would have hated her---or thought that he did, which is practically the same thing *pro tem.*

But now! Now that the violinist had had time to face and measure his own passion, would he not realise the futility of trying to force one's inclinations in such matters? Again she could only shake her head; she was out of her depth. Meantime, behind her, Theo was waiting for his answer. Suddenly the horrors of the situation seemed to burst on her from all sides. What had she done? Accepted this boy because he had money, and because she disliked her mother and her mother's friends; then she had, finding that she loved her future father-in-law, deliberately torn from his eyes the veil of family sentiment that had protected him from her, and later, when he had by an accident learned that she was to be loved, and that he loved her, she had by an ignoble trick kept him in England, refusing to let him play the decent part he had chosen. What was she, then, to have done this abominable and traitorous thing?

"Brigit---is it so---horrible to you?"

There was in his voice something like a repressed sob, and she had an extravagant horror of melodrama. If he wept she would, she knew, lose her temper.

"Listen, Theo. I---I will tell you to-night. I mean, I'll set a date. Only you must go now. I---I have an engagement."

"Then-----"

"Then you are a goose to be so upset! I must think it over. I know I'm queer and---rather horrid, but---I have not changed. You knew what I was when you asked me to marry you. And---I never pretended to be---romantic, did I?"

He watched her dumbly. She had never looked to him more beautiful than at that moment in her simple blue frock, her hands behind her, her eyes almost deprecating. He rose with an effort. "All right, then. To-night. Thank you, Brigit."

As full of humble doubts as he had been the night he asked her to marry him, his honest eyes shining with the tears she had arrested in their course, he kissed her hand and withdrew.

When she had heard the front door close she went to a mirror on the wall and looked at herself.

"And now, you loathsome creature," she said aloud, fiercely, "you must make up your mind what you are going to do."

Like many nervous people, she had a habit of walking while she thought hard, and now after a few turns up and down the overcrowded room she went upstairs, put on a hat, and, leaving the excited Tommy a prey to a most maddening attack of thwarted curiosity, left the house.

She walked rapidly, looking straight ahead, seeing nothing, a rather ferocious frown causing many people to stare at her in surprise. She wore a delicately hued French frock and a mauve hat covered with blue convolvuli, but in her extraordinary self-absorption and intentness of thought there was something uncivilised about her. Her clothes were unsuited to her, and she walked as if quite alone in a vast plain.

Her answer to Theo? What was it to be? Should she find it here, in Sloane Street? How could she decide, not having the remotest idea what effect her decision would have on Joyselle? Could she live without him? As things now stood, he might, on her announcement that she was willing to marry Theo in, say, three months' time, fly to the ends of the earth that he might hide his own suffering, or---he might have the strength to endure it in silence for his son's sake.

If on the other hand she said no, that she could not marry his son, would he look on her decision as perfidy, and refuse to see her ever again, or---A man in a hansom swore softly with relief as she just escaped being knocked down by his horse, and quite unconscious of her danger, hurried on, her head bent.

Or---would he then---allow himself to love her---to love her frankly, so far as she was concerned?

At the corner of Sloane Square a man coming towards her saw her trance-like condition, and stopping short, forced her almost to run into his arms. "I beg your pardon," she began mechanically, and then her face changed. "You, Gerald! How d'ye do?"

She had not seen him for days, and then it had been in the evening, so that now in the strong afternoon sun she saw with a momentary shock that he looked very ill indeed.

"Seedy?" she asked, some unanalysed feeling of understanding urging her to an unusual gentleness of tone.

"Yes. What is wrong with you, Brigit?"

She had never forgiven him the affair of the evening when Tommy had walked in his sleep, but her mind was too full of her own trouble to have much room for resentment, and his value as an enemy had gone down. He looked too broken and ill to be dangerous.

"I---I'm all right," she returned.

"Where are you walking so fast?"

"I'm just walking."

"I see. A race with the demons," he said in a curious, hurried voice. "I do it, too. Everyone does, it seems. I just met Joyselle tearing out Chelseaward---the father, I mean."

She looked up at him, her face clearing. "Ah!"

"Yes. I like him. He is a great artist and---a whole man. No disrespect to your young man, my dear," he added, with a dismal attempt of his old jaunty manner.

"Yes; he is 'a whole man.' Well, I must get on. Good-bye." With a nod she left him and hurried on.

To Chelsea? Yes; No. 16-1/2 Tite Street---–she knew. She had never seen the house, but she had heard the number. No one ever went there. Madame Joyselle had never been, and Theo only once. Why was he "tearing" there at that hour? Because, of course, he wanted to be alone. There had certainly been a row of some kind, of which Theo had not told her. The old woman in Normandy had written, oh, yes; but then there must have been a great *pourparler*, and even Felicite had grown angry. Poor Felicite! To-night---–oh, yes; at a dance at the Newlyns; she must give Theo his answer. At a dance!

But how could she decide until she knew what Victor---–"*Hansom!*" Her own voice surprised her as a pistol shot might have done. "Tite Street, Chelsea, 16-1/2."

The cabby, who was a romanticist and fed his brain on pabulum from the pen of Mr. Fergus Hume and other ingenious concocters of peripatetic mystery, wondered as he gave his horse a meaning lash with his whip---–a tribute to the beauty of the fare---–"Wot the dickens she was h'up to, with 'er big eyes and 'er 'ealthy pallor."

It further excited the excellent man's interest to be obliged, when he had arrived at his destination, to remind his fare that they had done so. "'Ere y'are, miss," he murmured soothingly down the trap. "Shall I wait?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

The house was an old one with a broad, low front door and shallow, much-worn oak stairs. In answer to Brigit's knock a Gamp-like person with a hare-lip appeared, and informing her curtly that Mr. Joyselle had come in only a few minutes before, added that she might go up---–"To the top, miss, an' there's only one door when you've got up."

Brigit almost ran up the four flights, and then, when opposite the door, sat down on the top step and hid her face in her hands.

What should she say? Why had she come? Would he be glad to see her---–or shocked? Worse still, would he accept her coming as an act of filial devotion?

No. That she would not allow.

Her mind, boiling, as it were, with a thousand ingredients, she could hardly be said to be thinking. Realising perfectly that she had behaved outrageously, sincerely ashamed of herself and full of remorse, yet her own position and her own welfare had never for a second ceased to be her chief concern. Suffering was of a certainty in store for some of the actors in the drama, but she held the centre of the stage and meant to avoid as much pain as possible. For her love for Joyselle was, of course, a purely selfish one. For several minutes she sat crouching on the stairs, utterly undecided as to what her next step was to be. Then a sound from within the room behind her caused her to turn sharply. A sound of---–not music, but of pitiless, furious scraping and grinding on a violin.

Could it be Joyselle? It was horrible, like the cries of some animal in agony. And it went on and on and on.

"It must be Victor," she whispered; "it is his room. But---–oh, how frightful! Has he gone mad? Oh, my God, my God!"

Rising, she stood for a horrible minute bending towards the door, and then with a quick movement opened it and went in.

The curtains were drawn, but a large window in the roof let in a square of cross daylight that looked like an island in a surrounding sea of dusky darkness; and in the light stood Joyselle, his back to her, his head bent over his violin in a way almost grotesque, as he groaned and tore at the hapless strings with venomous energy.

Brigit stood, unable to move. It is always an uncanny thing to watch for any length of time a person who believes himself to be absolutely alone, and when, as in this case, the person is undergoing, and giving full vent to a very strong emotion, the strangeness is increased tenfold.

The man was, it was plain, after a week's tremendous and for him wholly unusual self-restraint, now giving full rein to his great rage over his miserable situation. As he played, she could see the muscles of his strong neck move under the brown skin, and his shoulders rise and fall tumultuously with his uneven breaths. The din he made was almost unbearable, and she pressed her hands to her ears to shut it out.

The room was very large, and high, and round it, half-way up the dull yellow walls, ran an old carved gallery, relic of the time when it had been the studio of a hare-brained painter, a friend of Hazlitt and Coleridge, a believer in poor young Keats while the rest of the world laughed at him---in the very early days.

In those days feasts had been held here, and in the gallery, hidden behind flowering dwarf peach-trees in tubs, stringed instruments were played---very softly, for the painter of one good picture and dozens of bad ones, had taste---while his guests sat at his board. Stories are still told of the small table that used to be brought into the room at the end of dinner by two little Ethiopians in white tunics. An ancient table with faded gilding just visible on the claw feet that looked out from under its petticoat of finest damask; and on it priceless gold and silver bowls and salvers of all shapes, full of the most marvellous fruits from all countries, some of which fruits were never seen elsewhere in England. All dead and gone to dust years ago, host and guest and grinning little Ethiopians. Joyselle had told Brigit this story, and now as she stood watching him vent his wrath and anguish on his faithful Amati, a kind of vision came to her; and she seemed to see the room as it used to be---vaguely, the big table with six or eight men sitting around it drinking wine, and, more distinctly, the heaped-up bowls and plates of fruit-----

Half hypnotised she stood there, her hands pressed to her ears until, with a final excruciating dig into the strings, he dropped his left arm and turned.

For a moment he, in his square of light, did not see her in the dusk under the gallery. Then he took a step forward, and with a low cry caught her in his arms and crushed her and the violin painfully to his breast.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*," he repeated over and over, kissing her roughly, "you have come. Then you know, ma Brigitte, you know!"

"Yes, I know," she admitted sullenly. "Let me go, Victor, you---you hurt me."

He dropped his arms and she withdrew a few steps. He was very pale and his hair was ruffled.

"You---it was good of you to come," he said after a pause. "Then, you are not angry?"

"No."

"Brigit---*je t'aime, je t'aime*. I am infamous, I am a monster, a father to be execrated by all honest men and women, but---I love you!"

He laid the violin down in a chair and came to her. "*Et toi?*" he asked hoarsely.

The moment had come when she *must* think, she told herself, but her brain refused to work. The only thing that mattered was that he should stay. What must she say, truth or lie, that would inspire that necessity?

She stared at him blankly, and then, before she could speak, he knelt at her feet and pressed a fold of her dress to his face.

"Victor," she said slowly, trembling so she could hardly stand, "you will not---leave me?"

And Joyselle caught her up off the floor and held her as if she had been a baby.

"*Dieu merci*," he cried. "*Dieu merci.*"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

An hour later Brigit Mead came quietly down the now nearly dark stairs of the old house, smiling faintly to herself.

Joyselle's confession had been complete and circumstantial. He had not attempted to hide from her one thing, and in the relief of his, as it seemed, unavoidable avowal, he had hardly given her time to speak. "It was, I think, the evening you came in the golden gown. You remember? It was a vision; but an angelic vision, Most Beautiful; but one that turned me first to stone, and then to fire. Vivien must have worn a golden gown. And then the evening in Pont Street---the storm, when I put my arms round you---they went round the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, it is true, but also round my daughter. But---in that lightning flash of time I found they were round the woman compared to my love of whom the whole world does not matter! And I ran into the night and walked for hours in the rain, and I think I was mad. Then I determined to go to America. And I would have gone, God knows, but---you came, and your unconsciousness broke me down. If you had suspected, I should have gone; I was on my way to the Steamship Company when I met you. And then, Hampstead---and this past week---and then you came to me here where I work---and where I dream---ah, my beloved!"

He was very gentle in his unhoped-for happiness, and to her immense relief he never once mentioned, or even appeared to remember, his son.

When he asked her, with the marvelling curiosity of a boy lover, when and why she ever came to love him, she only shook her head. "I love you," she answered, and he forgot, looking at her, to insist.

No word of the future had been said, not a plan had been made. Only, at parting, to meet later in the evening at the Newlyns, he said to her, "I will be the greatest violinist in the world, my woman."

And her heart beat high with honest pride in him.

Too happy to think, she went down the stairs, and half-way down found herself face to face with Gerald Carron.

It was nearly dark, but she could just see that his white face was drawn and hideous with anger.

"What are you doing here?" she cried, drawing back, but furious in her turn.

"What are you doing here? You---you!"

"You have been spying on me," she returned with a good assumption of courage that she was very far from feeling. "Well---–I have been to talk to Mr. Joyselle. Have you any objection to my doing so?"

"Objection? Yes, I have. You have fooled us all. Engaged to the boy, and---–I have always known that you didn't care for that child, and wondered---–Now I know." He laughed shrilly. "And other people shall know, too! Your mother will be pleased, and---–the clean peasant! I only wonder you haven't *married* that poor wretch. The situation would then be even more---–biblical."

She tried to pass him, but he barred her way. "If you don't let me go, I will call for M. Joyselle. And if he doesn't hear me, someone else will. Do you understand?"

He did not answer, and looking at him carefully for a moment she was for the first time terrified. His eyes were not those of a sane man.

"Gerald, don't be nasty," she urged, gently. "Surely you must see that there is no harm in my coming to see Joyselle! In a month or two he will be my father-in-law."

He sneered. "Ah, bah! I saw your face as you passed the last window. It was not the face of a girl coming from her future father-in-law. It was the face-----–"

Before he could finish a door opened on the floor above and two children came downstairs, chattering gaily to each other. Brigit turned to the elder, a boy of six, dressed in a quaintly cut green blouse.

"Is your papa at home, my dear?" she asked.

The child laughed. "My papa is dead," he answered cheerfully, "but Uncle Chris is there."

Brigit looked at Carron for a moment, and then went downstairs with her hand on the little boy's shoulder. "And what is your name?" she asked.

"I'm Bob Seymour, and this is Patty. Uncle Chris has been painting us. He gives us a shilling apiece each time."

"How very nice." Patty, who wore as obviously artistic a costume as her brother's, thumped noisily from behind them, and a few seconds later Brigit had kissed her unconscious but all-powerful bodyguard and jumped into the hansom.

If a man had come instead of the children, almost anything might have happened, for she had no doubt that Carron's sanity was approaching snapping-point, but the innocent courage of Bob and Patty had quieted him.

Brigit had a very unpleasant drive home, but the romantic cabby was delightfully thrilled. As it happened, he had been "crawling" for some minutes before Brigit had engaged him in Sloane Square, and had noticed her being accosted by Carron.

"Something queer along of all this," he meditated; "that lean chap didn't look quite right, an' she 'adn't no patience with 'im neither. Then in she goes to the old 'ouse, an' then along comes another 'ansom with the lean chap. Then I waits an hour, an' out she comes with the little kids, kissin' 'em, an' the biggest little kid arsks 'er 'er nime! If she didn't know 'im, why did she kiss 'im? An' before we'd got to the corner out comes the lean 'un, lookin' like a bloomin' corpse. Something must 'ave 'appened in that old 'ouse, an' I'll keep a lookout in the *People* and see wot it was. I'd like to 'ave been a fly on the wall during that there interview, I would. A fly on the wall with a tiste for short'and."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Lady Kingsmead, who was going to the Newlyns' ball later, was having dinner in her little sitting-room when Carron came rushing in, nearly treading on the heels of the afflicted Fledge, who did like to have a chance to announce visitors properly.

"Good Lord, Gerald!---–what is the matter?"

"Matter enough. Brigit is Victor Joyselle's mistress."

He sank into a chair and pressed his thin hands together until the bones cracked.

"Gerald!"

"She is! she *is*! I have just come from his studio in Chelsea. Followed her there. She was alone with him for over an hour. And when she came out-----–"

Lady Kingsmead rose and went to him.

"Now listen to me," she said firmly. "You have either been drinking or you are mad. I don't care where you have been or where you saw Brigit. This story is---–rot!"

Lady Kingsmead was not a clever woman, but this move on her part, the result not of a virtuous belief in virtue or of a sudden swing of her mental pendulum towards the effective, such as some women have---–was amazing in its effect, because it was spontaneous and sincere.

"Will you have something to drink?" she asked.

It was a curious scene; the dainty little room with the swivel-table laid for one, the pretty, well-preserved woman, looking down with real pity but something very near scorn at the broken, haggard, untidy man sprawling in a rose-coloured chair.

"You are a fool, Tony," he said roughly. "I tell you I know."

"Bosh. You know perfectly well that I was never silly about my children. Well---–I don't care what you say about Brigit, I *know* she is all right. As yet, anyway," she added.

"She loves that---–that brute," he stammered, wiping the perspiration from his face with a crumpled handkerchief. "I saw her face as she left his studio."

Lady Kingsmead pursed her mouth thoughtfully.

"That may be," she admitted. "I've thought for some time that something was in the air-----–"

Breaking off, she glanced hastily at him. The old habit of telling him her thoughts as they came to her was still strong, but this was not her Gerald Carron. This was a new man of whom she knew little. For this much wisdom she had learned: that every new love makes a new man of a man.

And this Carron, with his wild eyes, was no person to confide in.

"Come, buck up, old thing," she said, with an affectation of brusque good-humour: "you haven't been sleeping. Isn't that it?"

"Yes. I'll never sleep any more."

"And you're taking---Veronal?"

"Yes, sometimes. Oh, don't bully me, Tony! I'm---done."

"I should think you were, to come and tell a woman beastly stories about her own daughter! You'll be sorry to-morrow. Did you tell *her* this beautiful idea by way of making yourself engaging?"

"I told her---yes."

"And she didn't knock you down? Upon my word, I am surprised. Now look here, Gerald; you must go. I'm going to dress. We are going to the Cassowary's ball. You'd better go to bed and try to sleep *without any Veronal*. Will you? Will you, Gerry, poor old boy?"

His nerves were in such a condition that this unmerited and unexpected kindness broke him down utterly. Suddenly, to her horror, the poor wretch burst into tears, sobbing like a child.

"Gerry, don't---oh, for Heaven's sake, don't!" she cried, laying her hand on his head. "You---you *mustn't*. Gerry, Gerry dear-----"

"Yes, pat his head and call him dear!" cried Brigit furiously from the open door. "He insults me in the most abominable way, the vile little beast, and then you pet him. Bah! mother, you do really make me ill!"

Lady Kingsmead turned, amazed. "You are off your head, too! Can't you see he is *ill*?"

But Brigit's anger, nursed all during the drive home, burst out afresh. All her life she and her mother had quarrelled; there had never been implanted in her even an idea of the common decency of filial respect, or of its semblance. Her mother's gusty, fitful temper had always, when roused, been given instant vent in a torrent of vituperation, and the girl, while too sulky to be so spontaneous even in the unpleasant sense of the word, had early acquired the habit of speaking to her mother as she would have to a greatly disliked sister.

So now, when her rage with Carron burst its bounds, and she found, as she thought, her mother taking his part, she gave free rein to her temper, and its eloquent bitterness struck Lady Kingsmead for the moment dumb.

Carron sat still, his face hidden in his hands. When at last Brigit's arraignment ceased, Lady Kingsmead's turn came, and more feebly, less effectively, but to the best of her powers, she gave back abuse for abuse.

It was not a pleasant sight. Unbridled rage never is, even when in a good cause, and these two undisciplined women had lost all dignity and said very bad things to each other.

Brigit's one excuse was her mistaken assumption that her mother had believed Carron's story, and when Lady Kingsmead had shrieked out everything else that she thought might hurt her daughter, she added, "I believed in you, you little brute,

though he said he *saw* you there. I might have known he wouldn't have dared to make up such a tale."

Brigit, who had stood quite still, now spoke. "Then---–you believe him now?"

"Yes, I *do*!" lied Lady Kingsmead, goaded by the sneer on her daughter's fierce mouth.

There was a long pause, and then Brigit Mead went to the door.

"I am sorry I lost my temper and made such a beast of myself," she said slowly, "and---–I will never speak to you again as long as I live."

She closed the door gently and went upstairs to her room.

It was done now, decided, her boats were burnt. From this day henceforth she would be spoken of as the queer Mead girl who doesn't live with her mother.

While she dressed for dinner she laid her plans with the quickness native to her. She would dine and dance at the Newlyns, and then she would go to the Joyselles' for the night.

The next day she would go and talk to a girl friend who had a flat in huge and horrible "Mansions" out Kensington way. She would live alone with a maid; and she would have to pinch and scrape---–but that would not matter. And then---–Joyselle would come to see her, and very probably some day they would lose their heads, and it would be her mother's fault. There was much satisfaction in this reflection, for she ignored the fact that in all probability the crisis had been only precipitated by her mother's speech.

There was Tommy. Well, Joyselle would be good to him for her sake. And even if Tommy should elect to come and live with her, her mother could not prevent his doing so. She would fuss and cry and tell all her friends how ungrateful her children were, but in the end Tommy's firmness would prevail.

She laughed as she got out of the carriage at the Newlyns. By great good luck Joyselle was dining there, and Theo coming only to the dance.

"I will tell him," she thought, and her heart gave a great throb and then sank warmly into its place at the thought of seeing him. "He will turn slowly and hold his shoulders stiffly and try to look indifferent," she thought, "but oh---–his eyes!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Sparrow and the Cassowary were much delighted with their own dinner and their own ball.

Freddy Newlyn was a kindly little man, with an absurd fussy manner full of importance, as so many kindly little men have. Is it by some gentle providential dispensation that the physically insignificant are so often upheld by harmless vanity?

The Cassowary, on the other hand, bony and distressingly red in the wrong places, suffered from a realisation of her own defects that she endeavoured to conceal by an assumption of the wildest high spirits. This jocularity, of course, became at times rather painful, but as she was possessed of much money and a kind heart, it was forgiven her.

The dinner was very large, and the guests sat at small tables all over the place---a delightful invention of the Cassowary's, who screamed with piercing glee at the excitement displayed as lots were drawn for the different tables.

"Seven, Sir John? Then you'll find your partner and go to the library---only three tables there! Dicky, what is your number? Four? Oh, you lucky little brute The conservatory. Who's your girl? Oh, yes, Piggy! Aren't I a lamb?"

The numbers of the various tables were being drawn, as she spoke, from a vase on the drawing-room table.

"And you, M. Joyselle? Thirteen. Oh, what awful luck!"

Everyone screamed with laughter, for the Norman was looking with unfeigned concern at his bit of paper.

"*Je n'aime pas le treize*, madame," he protested, disregarding the prevailing mirth.

"But---what can I do? It's a nice table in the billiard-room. Who's your partner?"

"Lady Sophy Browne---which is she?"

"Oh, Sophy Browne. Go on drawing, you men, I must speak to Fred. I say, Fred-----"

The good-natured Cassowary tramped across to the door where the Sparrow was standing, and bending down, said something to him.

"Is he really? I say, that's too bad. But you can't change the tables, can you, dear?"

"I don't know. These kind of people are so superstitious, you see; it's enough to make him glum all the evening, and Sophy was so keen---she says he looks like a bust by Rodin, and she wants to do him in pen and ink."

The Sparrow rubbed his pointed nose thoughtfully.

"Change the two of 'em to another table, can't you?"

"I've got 'em all sorted, though. Unless---I might change Billy and the Farquhar girl to their table, and put them in the boudoir balcony! Billy wouldn't mind and the Farquhar girl doesn't matter; she didn't get me those tickets, anyhow."

The Sparrow gave a little hop of satisfaction.

"Right. That'll do famously."

So the Cassowary went back to the table and laid her hand on Joyselle's sleeve. "I have put you at another table, M. Joyselle. You go to the boudoir balcony---Sophy will take you there---so it's all right. I must go and find Billy Vere now. Oh-----" turning, she found herself face to face with Brigit Mead, who had just arrived.

"I say, Brigit, would you mind sitting at the table with M. Joyselle? Eugene Struther is your man, and M. Joyselle objects to his table because it is number thirteen."

Brigit, shaking hands with her enthusiastic hostess, caught Joyselle's eye. He had heard.

"Mind? Not a bit," she answered carelessly, "if he doesn't."

Mrs. Newlyn turned, to find the top of Joyselle's head presented to her in a bow of mockly-resigned acquiescence. "Then, *that's* all right. What's the matter, Oliver?"

Lord Oliver Maytopp, a cherished clown in that section of society in which the Newlyns had their being, was making believe to cry, his large mouth opened grotesquely, his fists digging into his eyes.

"I d---don't want to sit at the table next Meg's," he sobbed, "when I tell funny stories she always---makes faces at me. I want to go home to Nursey."

Brigit moved away, her upper lip raised disdainfully. How odious they all were!

And how detestable the whole house with its health of art-treasures, selected by an artist friend of Newlyn's.

"*Nouveau-riche?*" asked Joyselle, joining her.

"No. That is, they are well-born, but they are *nouveau* as regards money. Her father made a lucky speculation in electric-lighting, I think it was, after she was married. They haven't got used to their money yet. So," she added, as they stepped out on to one of the many balconies with which the house was ornamented, "you don't object to sitting at my table?"

"*Brigitte!*"

His was of the type of face that is ennobled by any strong passion, and he looked very splendid as he towered above her, white and shaken.

"You will not leave me?" she asked, again possessed by the fear that had tormented her from the moment when he had dropped his violin the evening of the golden frock.

"Brigitte," he returned, leaning on the rail and presenting a non-committal back to anyone who might chance to join them, "let us not talk of that yet. I love you, and you are mine, and I am yours, whatever happens."

An agony of terror took her strength as he spoke. Uncertainty was always hard for her to bear, but in this vital matter she felt that she could not endure it.

"If you are going to be cruel and leave me," she said, her face taking on an expression of relentless cruelty, "you must do so at once."

He turned.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean---I cannot bear suspense. If, for any reason, you are going to---to go---please go now."

He was honestly puzzled, for she looked at him as if he had been an enemy.

"My dear---my beloved---what do you mean?" His voice was grieved and gentle. "Surely you can see that-----" he broke off into French, "that the situation is not simple? That we love we cannot help---nor would we, by God!---but in an honest man and an honest woman-----"

"Come along, you two," cried Mrs. Newlyn, "dinner is announced. M. Joyselle, go and find Lady Sophy, and you, Brigit, come and be found by your man---I forget who he is-----"

"Eugene Struther," she answered quietly, "I am glad, too."

Struther was one of the best of the young men to be met at the Newlyns, and he and she always got on fairly well. Their table was squeezed rather tightly into a little balcony looking over the diminutive garden that, although she never went into it, or knew one of its flowers from another, was one of the several joys of the Cassowary's heart. So few people have gardens in London.

Lady Sophy Browne, an ethereal-looking woman, with a consciously wan smile and a grey chiffon frock, that looked as if it would have had to be unpinned and unwound, rather than taken off, when bed-time came, put her elbows on the table and clasped her hands under her chin.

"Do you know Rodin's Portrait d'un Inconnu?" she asked Joyselle.

"No, madame."

"But you know Rodin?"

"I have met him."

Ecstatic was her smile.

"I knew it. And unconsciously you were his model for the Inconnu. But it is you, M. Joyselle! Do not deny it, for I know."

Joyselle took an olive.

"I do not deny it, Lady Sophy. But I know nothing of it. If you are right I am---much flattered."

Brigit was amused, for she saw that the Spectre, as her friends called the grey-draped peeress, had anticipated excitement and curiosity on Joyselle's part.

There was music somewhere in the distance, and the air was sweet with the smell of roses from the room behind them as well as from the garden below.

Struther talked little, Brigit, with her usual indifference to others, almost not at all, and as Joyselle's self-command rose only to the height of an occasional reply to the Spectre's monologue, which was not of an arresting nature, the party on the balcony was very quiet.

Brigit suffered tortures as she sat watching Joyselle. It was, then, as she had feared. He was going to be strong and make everyone miserable.

If she had been asked to propose any kind of a plan for the future, her answer would have been, when denuded of side issues and fantasy, simply that she could see nothing better than simple drifting. As yet she could not anticipate, and it roused in her a kind of jealousy that Joyselle had so soon begun to think of Theo. His love for her should have dimmed all consideration for his son---it should have been *she* who suggested some means of hurting the boy as little as possible.

But she could see that Joyselle was going to be what she called in the frankness she allowed herself, tiresome about that wretched boy of his.

She also knew that Joyselle would be anything but pleased by her resolution to leave home and live by herself. His respect for certain laws were an integral part of his nature, and she knew that he would not approve of her deserting what he was certain to call the maternal roof. This curious element of Philistinism in his otherwise Bohemian nature was very perplexing, and she told herself, as she looked at him while he gravely listened to the ghostly Lady Sophy, that her troubles were in reality only just beginning.

"M. Joyselle," she asked him during a pause that only a burning desire for champagne induced Lady Sophy to allow to pass unchallenged, "will *petite mere* mind my coming to sleep to-night? I want very much to see her about something, and so I told mother I'd get you and Theo to take me home."

He bowed with an assumption of fatherly gratification. "But of course, my dear." Then, for his powers of dissimulation were not of durable quality, he turned quickly to Lady Sophy.

So that was all right.

When dinner was over and the women were herded together in the drawing-room, Brigit sat down and took up a book. In an hour Theo would be coming, and would want his answer. What was it to be?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Theo arrived rather late, and after making his bow to his hostess, came straight to her. His fine young face was flushed and eager and his eyes very bright.

Brigit, who was standing talking to Maytopp, felt her heart sink. She had not yet decided what to say, and instinctively she looked round the room for Joyselle.

"Brigit---will you dance?" Theo bowed, a trifle lower than Englishmen bow, and offered her his arm with the very slightest suggestion of swagger. And somehow he reminded her at that moment more of his father than he had ever done.

He did not speak as they danced, but she knew that he was fairly confident of her answer being a favourable one, and she tried to think that the waltz was never going to end.

But it did end, and she found herself near the window leading to the balcony where she had talked with his father early in the evening.

"Brigit-----" he whispered gently, looking out into the darkness.

And then she heard herself answer: "Yes, Theo. But---ask your father what he and I have decided."

"Ask papa!"

"Yes. He knows what we are going to do, and he will tell you."

Without a word he left her and she stepped out on the balcony. Leaning against the parapet she stared down into the empty street, wondering what Joyselle would say. She had not intended to put the responsibility of the future on him; she had said the words almost unconsciously, but they were said. And he, when he came?

Would the horrible courage she had felt in him prevail to the extent of allowing him to give her to his son? Or would he refuse to settle things? Or would he, worst of all, announce his departure for America!

He was so many men, each of whom were so strong and so individual, that she could not know what he would say. Closing her eyes she waited. When the two men joined her Theo was---laughing. And to her overwrought nerves the sound seemed an insult.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked sharply.

He started. "Why---I don't remember. Papa said something amusing. Is anything wrong, my dear?"

"No." Joyselle stood in the light and she could see his face. It looked set and a little grim, but there was a fierce light in his eyes.

She looked at him defiantly. Yes, she had done well; he should choose.

"*Eh, bien?*" suggested Joyselle suddenly, "why have you sent for me, Most Beautiful?"

So Theo had not explained!

"Theo is very impatient," she answered in a low voice; "he wants me to set our wedding-day. And---I have to make up my mind, you know---I thought as you and I had talked it over before dinner, you would not mind---casting the die for us."

There was a pause while Joyselle deliberately moved beyond the radius of the light.

Theo did not move, but his immobility was the motionlessness of extreme tension. He had not observed the discrepancy in her story, Brigit saw, and was simply waiting.

It seemed many minutes before Joyselle spoke. Then he said briskly, "The pros and cons are many, Theo. Brigit will tell you them later. And there are---clothes to be got, are there not? And I must go away in a few days---to Madrid, and shall be gone three weeks. It might be well for you to marry at once, say early in June, or---you might wait until the autumn."

He lit a cigarette and Brigit drew a deep breath of relief. Thank God, he was hedging, and could not make up his mind.

"I do not wish to wait," announced Theo, with unexpected and terrible decision. "I can see no reason for it, *pere*. Brigit, let it be early in June."

Joyselle's match fell to the floor, and his cigarette was still unlit.

"I think I have been patient," pursued the young man, his voice trembling a little. "Ah, father, I love her, and I want my wife."

Joyselle's arm jerked and the unlit cigarette flew out into the darkness. "You are right," he began abruptly, but Brigit drew nearer to him and in the darkness laid her hand on his.

"He is right in one way, *Beau-pere*" she said, grasping his hand with spasmodic strength, "and I am a brute, but I should so *much* rather wait a little longer. I have reasons, Theo."

Joyselle caught her hand in his, and gave a great laugh.

"Oh, *mes enfants, mes enfants*," he cried. "When lovers disagree, who is to decide but---chance? Come, Theo, your chances shall be the same as hers. Heads you win, tails you lose. Agreed?"

Staggering back into the light, his face flushed, his teeth flashing in a broad smile, he took a sixpence from his pocket. "You both agree?"

Theo nodded in silence and Brigit answered simply "Yes."

The coin shot from the violinist's thumb-nail, flew up into the air and was caught on his palm, his left hand covering it.

"Heads, then, a June wedding. Tails, then *mees* has her way, and the event is put off till autumn? Right?"

"Yes."

Theo had turned away, and Brigit was free to look full into Joyselle's face. It was a wonderful face in its absolute oneness of expression. There were no complications, no remorse, nothing but wild and fierce love of gambling, and hope that the woman he loved should remain free a little longer.

"It is---tails."

Theo walked into the ballroom without a word, and Brigit found herself close in his father's arms for a wild moment. "We have won, *mon adoree, mon adoree*," he murmured. "Thank God!"

She drew away, trying to remember prudence.

"Yes. Then---this summer is ours. And in the autumn-----"

"It is not even summer yet. Do not think of it. We shall be happy, Brigitte, for you are my woman and I am your man. And the future---oh, never mind the future, my love, my love!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Cromwell Mansions are a depressing pile of buildings not far from the Kensington High Street; they have lifts, uniformed hall-porters, house telephones and other modern inconveniences, and a restaurant.

The restaurant is, of course, the Mansions being inhabited chiefly by women, very bad indeed, but it obviates the necessity of cooks and kitchens in the, for the most part, diminutive flats into which the place is divided.

One day early in August Brigit Mead sat in the restaurant at a small table near an open window through which she caught an invigorating view of a brick court in the middle of which a woman was washing a cabbage at a pump.

It was a very warm day and the butter, more liquid than solid, seemed to be the last of a huge bundle of straws the weight of which threatened to break the girl's back.

That the cold beef was hard and tasteless was a detail to be borne with, but the butter seemed particularly insulting as it melted before her eyes.

"Going to thunder, I believe," observed a wan girl at the next table. "It *would*, of course, as I have tickets for Ranelagh!"

"Of course," agreed Brigit, absently.

She hated being so late in town, but the Lenskys, to whom she had been going, had wired to put her off, as Pammy had come down with measles. And the wire having come only that morning, she had as yet made no other plan for the rest of the month.

"Give me some cream, please," she said to the waiter, "without too much boracic acid powder in it."

There was no irony in her remark and the waiter accepted it in good faith. "It's the 'eat, my lady," he explained serenely. "It all goes sour if they don't put something in it."

Brigit ate a piece of fruit tart, a bit of cheese, and rose languidly.

"I see your mother has gone to the country, Lady Brigit," said a girl near the door, as she passed.

"Yes. She always goes on the 28th of July."

"I saw it in some paper. Are you staying on long?"

The story of her leaving her mother's house was, Brigit knew, common property, but this was the first time anyone had ventured to broach the matter to her.

"I suppose," went on the unlucky questioner, "that you will soon be joining her?"

"Do you?" asked Brigit.

"Do I what?"

"Suppose so?" And Miss M'Caw was alone, staring after the tall figure in the plain white frock, that for all its plainness looked so out of place in Cromwell Mansions.

Unlocking her door, Brigit went into her sitting-room and lit a cigarette. She had taken the flat from a friend who had been sent abroad by her doctor, and the whole place was absurdly unsuited to its present owner.

Maidie Conyers was blonde and small, so the room was pale blue and "cosy." There were embroidered pillows on the buttony Chesterfield, lace shades to the electric lights, and be-rosebudded liberty silk curtains.

Brigit hated the house, but it was cheap, and she had little money.

With a grunt of furious distaste she sat down in a satin chair, and leaning back began to smoke. The tables in the room were very bare, for the chief ornaments had been photographs---in very elaborate frames---of Maidie Conyers' friends, and Brigit, finding that she loathed Maidie Conyers' friends, had banished them one and all.

"Loathsome room," the girl said aloud, lighting a fresh cigarette, "disgusting curtains."

What she in reality felt mostly, though she did not know it, was the lack of room in the flat. Used all her life to the large rooms of Kingsmead, she felt, now that the unusual heat had come, cramped and restless.

It maddened her to have to make plans. Where should she go? How like that little wretch Pammy to go and have measles now.

She would go to Golden Square as soon as it got a little cooler and make Victor play to her. They might go for a drive later. Or she might make Theo take her for a walk in the park. Suddenly she heard a slight scratching noise in the entry, and rose. The porter, to save himself trouble, was letting some visitor in unannounced. She would murder that porter.

But when she saw the visitor she forgot the guilty official.

"Gerald!"

"Yes, Brigit. Do---do you mind?"

"I---yes, I mind, of course I do. Why have you come?"

Carron, who was very smartly dressed and who looked wretchedly ill, sank into a chair.

"It is nearly four months ago," he murmured. "I---I hoped you would have forgiven me."

"Well, I haven't. So please go."

Her ill-humour, accumulating ever since the receipt of the wire from the Lenskys, seemed about to burst. She looked exceedingly angry, and the poor wretch in the chair before her trembled as he looked at her.

"D---don't be so hard on me, Bicky."

"Don't call me Bicky. And please go. I don't want to be rude, but I shall lose my temper if you don't."

Carron's pinched face quivered. "I---I am very ill Brigit," he said in a hurried, deprecating way. "I---I am not sleeping at all, my nerves are---rotten. And I thought I'd die if I couldn't see you. Don't be any harder on me than---than necessary."

She sat down on the arm of a chair, and looked at him closely.

"You do look ill---very ill. And you look---I say, Gerald, are you taking anything?"

He gave a shrill, cackling laugh. "Taking anything. No. You mean morphine or something of that kind? *Pas si bete*, my dear. Oh, no, I have always had a perfect horror of anything like that. W---why?"

"Because---I think you *are*," she returned coolly. "Show me your left arm, Gerald."

"No, no, you are mad, my dear,---I assure you I don't. I give you my word of honour-----"

She came to him, and taking his arm in her strong hands pushed up his sleeves and studied his emaciated arm for a few seconds in silence.

"I thought as much," she commented, as he almost whimpered in his helpless annoyance.

"You are so rough, Brigit. Tony always says you are so rough."

"Yes, I am. Well---I am sorry for you, Gerald. When did you begin?"

"Oh---long ago. But---I seem to need more of late."

"Took it at first to make you sleep, I suppose?"

"Yes. And then---well you see, I like it. And it's nobody's business," he finished defiantly.

"That's true. Would you like some tea?"

"Oh, yes, Brigit. You *are* kind. It is good of you to forgive me."

"I haven't forgiven you," she retorted, going to the tea table, "but I am sorry for you. Where have you been of late?"

"Oh, all about, as usual. I came up from Morecambe yesterday. Rotten party. Have you seen your mother?"

Brigit's lips tightened. "No."

"I saw her three weeks ago. She is very much hurt by your behaviour."

"Broken-hearted, I should think!"

"Well, she's queer enough, I grant you, and not over-motherly, but---she *is* your mother when all's said and done."

The girl watched the kettle boil and said nothing.

"Tommy is coming on wonderfully with his violin, isn't he?" pursued Carron.

"Yes."

"Does he come here often?"

She looked up, frowning. "You know perfectly well that he has *never* been here," she returned shortly. "Do you like your tea strong?"

"Yes, please, no milk. Well---–you must miss him."

"And you know perfectly well that I see him twice a week at Joyselle's."

Carron took his cup with trembling hands and set it down carefully on the table.

"You needn't snap my head off," he observed.

"No. But why play comedy? Mother has told you all about it, so I can't see the use of this sort of humbug."

He was silent for a moment, and then began in a new voice. "Brigit, I---–I really have something to say to you."

"What is it?"

"It's this. That day---–the last time I saw you, you know, your mother was standing up for you when you came in. She---–refused to believe me when I, when I-----–"

"I know. But when I came in she was-----–"

"She was simply being good to me. Look here, Brigit, really and truly, she was. She *went* for me when I said---–that. And your coming in in a temper was what---–upset the apple-cart."

Brigit raised her eyebrows.

"Right. Now let's talk about something else. When did you see Tommy?"

"A week ago. He is in town now."

"I know. I shall see him to-morrow."

"At Joyselle's?"

"Yes."

"Brigit---–you can see what a wreck I am. Tell me. Are you going to marry that boy?"

"I am."

"When?"

"In October."

"Then-----–"

She rose. "I am a model of patience, Gerald, but you have asked enough questions."

"But---–well, I am sorry I was such a beast. Can you endure seeing me once in a long time---–say once a month? It---–it may make life possible to me---–don't say that you don't see the necessity for that! Brigit-----–"

"But it is so useless, Gerald, and so painful-----–"

"No. And I can tell you all kind of things about people---–you must be lonely! Tommy is only a kid after all, and doesn't hear---–By the way, why does he never come here?"

She hesitated. "Do you really not know?" Then, seeing sincerity in his eyes, she went on. "Well---–Joyselle made me promise mother that."

"*Made* you!"

"Yes. He---–you see he is old-fashioned. And---–well, in two words he said that unless I promised he---–he---–would not teach Tommy or even see him!"

Carron whistled. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Yes. Absurd, wasn't it? But---–Oh, well, there's no use in explaining."

As she spoke she heard the introductory scraping at the keyhole again, and a moment later Tommy came in.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A remarkably dandified Tommy; a solemn and significant Tommy, who shook hands solemnly with his sister and Carron and then sat down and took off his gloves.

"I have come on business, Brigit," he announced quietly.

Carron rose. "Then I will go. Thanks very much, Brigit, for your hospitality---–and I will look in again in three or four weeks, if you don't mind."

Tommy's frame of mind was too dignified to permit of his staring, but he was obviously surprised at Carron's presence, and when the man had gone he said with considerable importance: "Since when has Carron been calling on you?"

"This is the first time. Oh, Tommy---–should you have come?"

"I have just left mother at Aunt Emily's," he answered, his voice explaining plainly what his dignity forbade his putting into words.

So her mother knew!

"New clothes; also gloves; also something smelly and *very* nice on your hair!"

Brigit bent over and kissed him tenderly, her face very sweet with affection. "Please elucidate, little brother. Has mother sent you?"

"No. She knows I have come, though."

"Some tea?"

"If you please."

So she lit the kettle and going to a cupboard produced two enchanting-looking white jars. "Marmalade or cherry jam?"

"I think---neither, please," returned Kingsmead, with an effort. "I---am not hungry."

It was all very mysterious, and Brigit, scanning the little boy's face, saw that he was nervous as well as important; pale as well as elegant in attire. So she made the tea and gave him a cup in silence.

After a long pause he cleared his throat and began. "Brigit, of course I'm only a kid---and all that sort of thing."

"Yes, dear?"

"And you are grown up, and have a great deal more---well, experience than I. And then you are very beautiful, and I am---not," he added with a flicker of irrepressible mirth that was immediately quenched.

"Yes, Tommy?"

"Well---I just say all that, dear old thing, so you won't think me sidey, you know."

"I don't, Tommy. In fact, I have sometimes observed in you symptoms of almost radical-----"

"Don't laugh, Brigit," he broke in with a quaint wave of his hand. "What I mean to say is simply this. I am, although so young, and not very big---the Head of the Family."

This magnificent declaration was so unlike his usual style of conversation that his sister with difficulty refrained from laughing.

"Well, Tommy---yes, there would be no use in my denying that you, not I, are the Earl of Kingsmead. But---your manner is somewhat solemn; surely you are not thinking of marrying?"

The earl's mouth broadened spasmodically, and his eyes gleamed with amusement.

"I say, Bick, if you laugh at me, how on earth am I ever to get it said?"

"All right. Only take some jam and don't terrify me with magnificence. This is the first time to my knowledge that an earl has ever shed the effulgence of his presence in these humble walls-----"

Tommy's grandeur gave up the ghost, and with a yell of delight he dived deep into one of the jars and heaped his plate with suspiciously crimson cherry jam.

"Good old Bick! I must have looked an awful little ass. But---well, *will* you chuck it all and come home?"

"Oho!"

"Yes, 'oho' as much as you like, but it is all rot your living here, and *she* hates it, and it's unpleasant all round. Besides the country is really lovely now, and I miss you."

"Do you, Tommy dear?"

"I do."

"Did mother send you?"

"No. She said you wouldn't come if she did, but that you might if I---if I-----"

"If you exerted your authority as Head of the Family!"

"Well, yes." Tommy, now completely shamefaced, took more jam and handed back his cup.

"She *is* funny," mused Brigit. "To have so little sense of humour."

"That's what I told her. But Aunt Emily says people are talking about your living alone, *etc*. And---besides, I think she is really rather fond of you, Bick."

"Oh, no, she isn't. However, M. l'Ambassadeur, you have fulfilled your mission, so be content."

Tommy paused in his task of biting into a piece of cake and looked up at her. "Then---you will?"

"No, dear; I most certainly won't. But don't you bother about that. I like this very well, and after all it isn't for long."

"Oh. You mean you are going to marry Theo. When?"

"In October, probably. Nothing is settled. More jam?"

"No, thanks. I say, Bicky, what are you going to do in September?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because they are all going to La-bas, to the Golden Wedding. They were talking about it the other day. Are you going, too?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no. But I daresay I shall be with the Lenskys then. I can't go now, because one of the children is ill."

Tommy rose and looked at his watch, a shadow of his former proud manner settling on him as he put on his gloves. "She will be very much disappointed," he remarked, "but I don't see how she can forbid my coming here now, do you?"

"No, of course she can't. And oh, Tommy, I have missed you! Are you at Golden Square to-night?"

"Yes. Coming to supper?"

"I think so. Good-bye, you darling little boy."

After he had closed the door, Tommy pounded on it until she opened it.

"I say, Bicky, what happens to ambassadors who fail in their missions?" he asked, winking delightedly.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Yellow Dog Papillon lay asleep on the Chesterfield in Joyselle's room. He was dreaming an enchanting dream about a particularly aromatic bone that he found in a dust-bin---a ham-bone slashed by a careless hand and cast away before all meat had been removed from it---a bone for which any dog would have risked much.

So it was tiresome to be awakened by a sound of low voices.

Opening one eye warily Yellow Dog Papillon looked up and saw something he had of late seen several times, his beloved master standing by the Girl Who Had Sometimes Just Come from a Cat.

The girl had water in her eyes, too.

"I am very sorry, Victor," she was saying, "but I cannot, and will not. I can't see why you should care."

"But I do care. You know that I have always hated it. And Tommy told me himself that she let him go with the express purpose of making up with you. It is your duty to go back."

She drew away from him.

"I cannot."

"You mean you will not."

"Exactly; I will not."

Yellow Dog did not understand all of this dialogue, but he knew his master's face as well as his voice, and because he liked the Girl Who Had Sometimes Just Come from a Cat, he would have liked to advise her to lay down her arms at once. "No good opposing him when his eyes are like that," he said to himself; "if it was *me*, I'd just sit up and beg and make him laugh."

But Brigit would not condescend to sit up and beg.

"There's no use in discussing it," she said very coldly, "for I will not go back."

Joyselle watched her in silence for a long time. "Not even if I entreat you?" he asked in a gentle voice.

Her lips tightened, for tenderness with coercion behind it had no delusions for her.

"Not even if you entreat me. I have told you that I dislike my mother and I do not wish to see her. I will not tell you why, and that, at least, you ought to approve of."

"It is horrible for a daughter to say that she does not like her mother-----"

"It is horrible for me not to like her, but I can't help it. And it is not horrible for me to tell---anything to you."

But his face did not soften. "I wish you to go to Kingsmead, Brigit."

"I will not go to Kingsmead, Victor."

"Then," his anger now finally blazed up, "I can say only---good-bye."

Her face was as white and as hard as his own, and being a woman she could even laugh.

"*Adieu, donc---Beau-pere!*"

"What do you mean by that? You will not---surely you cannot mean that you will-----"

"But I do!" He himself had suggested a revenge to her. "If you and I quarrel, I will most certainly not marry your son."

For a moment the father in him dominated the mere man, and his eloquence was great as he reproached her.

"No---no, I am not cruel," she answered cruelly, her anger reinforced by a wave of jealousy anent Theo, "but as I do not love him, why should I marry him? And this kind of thing had far better cease. After all, you care for him far more than you care for me."

"*Grand Dieu!*"

"Yes, of course you do," she went on in the tone of gentle, unimpassioned reason that women sometimes use in violent anger, to the utter amazement and undoing of their male opponents. "And moreover, I daresay if I really loved you as much as I thought I did, I should be unable to refuse to do what you wish about my mother."

Joyselle's face was very white.

"What do you mean? Do you mean that your love for me was a mere caprice, and that---it has gone?"

His agony was unconcealed, and as she gazed she smiled, for her own torture was nearly unbearable.

"I shouldn't like to say it was only a caprice-----" She hesitated, and he sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Suddenly he rose and seizing her arm roughly, gave her another cue, which she remorselessly and instantly took.

"There is someone else," he cried, utterly forgetting that the very day before she had loved him madly, "you love some other man. Tell me who it is!"

And with the extraordinary fortitude common to fanatics and furious women, she smiled and answered:

"Perhaps! *Tout passe, mon cher.*"

It was a cheap and melodramatic bit of acting, and any unprejudiced onlooker must have seen the agony in her face, but Joyselle was blinded by his own pain and fled from the room without another word.

She heard a door slam and knew that he had gone out. And the world came to an end for her.

It was about six o'clock, and Tommy had gone out with Theo. They would not be back until about eight.

Felicite, too, was out. She was alone. She saw Papillon, who was sitting up, looking at her with a world of sympathy in the cock of his ear.

Suddenly Brigit burst into tears, nervous, hysterical, noisy sobbing, as she had done that day in the olive grove at the Villa Arcadie. She had been living under great nervous strain for months, and these breakdowns were of appalling violence. She *could* not stop crying, and she could not reason and tell herself that he would come back and forgive her.

All she could realise was her hideous misery and sense of desolation. She was utterly alone, she was hungry, she was cold, she was hopeless.

Presently someone touched her shoulder very gently. It was Felicite.

"What is it, my dear?" the elder woman asked. "What has happened?"

And Brigit, too unstrung to tell the usual conventional lies, simply sobbed on, her whole body shaking with agony.

Madame Joyselle sat patiently by her, stroking her shoulders with a kind hand, murmuring little broken phrases in French, patting her hair.

"*Oui, oui, ma mie---Pauvre petite, ca te soulagera---Pleures, ma cocotte, pleures!*"

And at last the girl was quiet, and reached for her handkerchief.

"I---I am sorry to have been so idiotic, I don't know why I am such a fool-----"

Felicite smoothed back her wet hair and smiled at her.

"Poor child," she answered quietly. "I am so sorry. I have seen it for some time-----"

Brigit stared at her.

"Seen--?"

"That you have fallen in love with Victor. It is really too bad of him, the old rascal."

Her gentle face was so undisturbed, so calmly acceptant of the heinous fact that Brigit could do nothing but stare. "I am glad poor Theo does not suspect," went on Felicite, untying the strings of her old-fashioned bonnet, "we must not let him know, *n'est ce pas*?"

"I---I don't see-----" stammered the girl, blankly.

"No, he must not know. Nor Victor either, if we can help it. Though he is very vain, and vain men always see. On the whole," she added with a kind of gentle amusement, "you have all been absurdly blind but me. And I did not like to warn you."

"This is---very extraordinary," began Brigit, rising. "I don't quite see-----"

But Felicite drew her down to her chair again. "That is just it, *ma pauvre petite*. I did see. I saw his little fancy for you, too. It began the evening of the dragon-skin frock, and it lasted, oh---–about a month. And you never noticed it, poor child. And now you are miserable about him. I am so sorry."

There was such convincing sincerity in her every tone that Brigit could not even pretend to be angry.

"You must think me very silly," she murmured.

But the little woman shook her head, "*Non, non*, it is not silly to love. It is unwise, or wrong, or heavenly, or mad, but silly, *non*. And he is very attractive, *mon homme*." This tribute she added reluctantly, as if from a sense of fairness. "And many have loved him."

Suddenly Brigit's anger flamed up.

"And---–I am so insignificant that you are not afraid of me," she cried. "What if he had *not* got over it? What if he loved me as much---–*more* than I love him?"

Felicite smiled serenely and sweetly.

"No, I know him. I saw it come---–and go. But do not be angry and proud, my dear. I wish only to help you."

And Brigit, touched by her kindness as well as terrified by her own indiscretion, sat down by her.

CHAPTER TWENTY

When Joyselle came in at eight o'clock he went straight to his room to dress. He was still very angry, but his anger was less poignant than his sense of helpless defeat. Brigit's attitude was absolutely incomprehensible to him, and hurt him in an almost unbearable degree. That she should defy him, grow as angry as he himself, he had already learned was not impossible; but the cruel hardness of her face as she had sent him away had shocked him more than anything in his whole experience.

He was a shrewd man, and his love for her had never blinded him as to her faults; often he had corrected her for unfilial behaviour, for a too sharp word, for selfishness. But the one quality which to a strong and tender man is unendurable in the woman he loves, cruelty, he had never before realised in the girl, and his discovery that it lay in her to hurt him as she had done, had nearly broken his heart.

For hours he had walked rapidly through the streets, seeing no one, avoiding being knocked down by a kind of subconscious attention and alertness of mind, his brain struggling desperately with its problem.

In a few words, all life seemed to him to have reduced itself to the question, "How could she?" As yet he had not got further than this, and it did not occur to him to wonder whether or no her mental attitude was definite or only temporary. "How could she? How could she so rend him? Of what was her heart made that it could allow her so to wound his?"

When he reached home the incomprehensibility of this problem was fast outweighing his anger, and Felicite, who came in as he stood in the middle of the room brushing his hair, smiled at the misery in his face.

"So she was cruel, the little one?" she asked gently, sitting down and folding her hands in her characteristic way.

"She was---abominable. But how did you know?"

"I found her in tears. You must be gentle with her, my man."

He stared. "Gentle? But she is a demon when she is angry. Tell me to be gentle with an enraged lioness."

Felicite's smile was good to see. "She is not an enraged lioness,
Victor. She is---very unhappy, and we must help her."

He went to the dressing-table and put down his brushes. "I am tired, wife," he said quietly; "let us talk of something else. Besides, it is nearly half-past eight."

She nodded.

"Yes. But---Victor, you remember the Polish girl?"

"Franska? Yes."

"Well? And the pantomimiste, and Miss Belton, and Lady Paula-----"

Joyselle started in the act of shaking scent on his handkerchief. "Of course I remember them. But what have they to do with Brigitte?"

"Only this, Victor. The poor child is in love with you, *vieux vaurien*! And that is why she is so savage."

She sat quite still, looking up at him with an indulgent smile, into which the maternal element largely entered. He was a fatal person, this great fiddler of hers; but to her he was also a child to be cared for, and a not quite normal being, to whose absent mind much must be explained.

Her charming face, almost old in spite of its fresh colour, was touched, as she watched his back, with a flicker of kindly mischief.

"And to think that you did not know, blind one," she teased.

"It---it is your imagination," he returned with a slight stammer, turning and facing her.

"No, no. Also I did not imagine that at first you, too, were a little *epris*. It was most natural, my dear. She is so very beautiful. I was glad when it passed. It was the day of the long discussion about the wedding---the day of the letter from your mother---do you remember? When you rushed away like a whirlwind?"

"Yes---I remember."

"Well, when you returned, you were quiet and a little pale, and I understood. The talk about Theo's wedding had put things into their right places in your mind, silly old child, *pas*? And then you brought her back here after the dance, and---all was well."

Joyselle stood quite still. He was bitterly ashamed of himself for deceiving this dear, good woman, who was so innocently believing in him, but he could say nothing. All was well, she said, when he came home that evening after

Brigit had come to him in the studio. Yes, but it was because he knew then that she loved him; because his scruples were for the time overwhelmed by the irresistible force of their passion for each other; because the glory of the present blinded his eyes to any visualising of the future.

That love, like everything else, must go through a series of mathematically exact evolutions, Joyselle of course, in his present frame of mind, could not realise. To him, as to every lover, the happenings and exigencies of his situation seemed those of pure hazard, and this phase, as he listened to his wife's interpretation of it, appeared to him absolutely the result of a chance quarrel with Brigit.

"She is distressed and very tragic about it all," continued Felicite. "Of course she *would* be tragic; it is her nature. She no doubt believes that she will never get over it. It is a pity, isn't it?"

"*Oui, oui.*" He had again turned away, and stood by the window polishing his nails, of which he was very vain, in the palm of his hand.

"The only thing that troubles me is---Theo. It would break his heart, poor child. He, too," she added, still with her kindly cynicism, "would think she will never get over it. It is thus that all lovers think. But---what are we to do, Victor? I have been thinking much about it. Shall we try separation---from you---for her? Or would that make it worse? She is not patient, and she has no discipline or self-control. She might do something foolish."

"Why should she do something foolish, if it is only a---passionette?" he asked harshly, for he did not enjoy his wife's hypothesis.

"It is not the greatest loves that are the most desperate, my dear. But we must go down. Be kind to her. Remember that she is young, and that her imagination has made a king of you."

Joyselle frowned ferociously as he followed his wife downstairs. He did not like being taken into her confidence in this way, and her calm assumption that he, too, regarded Brigit as a silly schoolgirl who must be managed into giving up a childish fancy for an old man cut him to the quick. When they reached his study they found Theo sitting at the piano playing with the parrot, while Brigit stood, looking like a thunder cloud, at an open window. Joyselle started as he saw her face. Surely its expression must rouse even Felicite's slow suspicion!

And never, for his sins, he told himself grimly, had she been more beautiful. Her storm of tears had left her eyes unswollen, but shadowy and unusually melting, while her face, as white as paper, was the face of one who had been face to face with a horrible death.

"I beg your pardon for having been---rude," she said to him sulkily, holding out her hand, which was as cold as ice.

"But it is I," he murmured, touching his lips to her fingers and feeling her quiver as he did so. "It is that we both have what you English call bad tempers, *pas*?"

"You must have been very bad this time, papa," commented Theo, closing the cage door on le Conquerant and joining them. "Brigit is very angry. Look at her!"

"I am not angry, Theo. But---quarrelling is disgusting."

Why she had stayed the girl hardly knew. She had not forgiven Joyselle, and her apology was a mere concession to the feelings of Felicite and Theo.

Joyselle had hurt her, but her treatment of him had so wounded herself that she could not forgive him. All of which is quite illogical and quite feminine.

"I will go away---anywhere---to-morrow," she told herself as she ate her supper. "Theo will not know why, and Felicite will not tell. This sort of thing cannot go on. This is the fifth row in the last month. We are both too pig-headed. It's no use trying to keep the peace. I suppose if I were his mistress he would be easier to manage---or I should. The truth is, we are both struggling for supremacy, and we can neither of us drive the other."

Joyselle, with a great effort, chattered gaily throughout the meal. His thoughts, too, were in a turmoil, for he knew that her apology had been offered merely on Theo's account, and he also knew that something was going to happen.

Felicite, sincerely sorry for Brigit and anxious anent Theo, talked more than usual, so that the uncongenial gathering was more voluble and noisy than usual.

At its close Felicite called her son to her room under some pretext or other, and Joyselle and Brigit went alone to his study. He closed the door very quietly, and then turning to her, caught her hands threateningly.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Do?" She raised her eyebrows. "I am going, of course."

"Where?"

She smiled.

"*Sais pas.* Let go my hands, please; you hurt me---Beau-papa!"

He flung away from her and stood by the window, staring with blinded eyes into the street.

"This is really no good, you know," she went on in a conversational tone; "we quarrel and squabble and are no earthly use to each other---the whole position is bad. I think I will tell Theo, and go."

He did not answer, and after a pause she added: "Or marry him by special license the day after to-morrow, and make him take me---somewhere---for a few months."

"A---ah!"

She smiled at his groan.

"You and I have made fools of ourselves, haven't we? But it was natural. I am very beautiful, and you are a very great genius, so-----"

Maddened at her tone of indifferent justice, he turned, his face drawn with pain.

"So it was natural? A childish fancy on your part, a senile one on mine? A thing to---laugh at already! Oh, how *can* you torture me like this? You---you-----"

"Devil? Or demon?" Her voice was mocking, but her lips had paled, and she gasped a little as if breathless.

"Let's not be melodramatic, *please*. Call it what you like. I was at least perfectly sincere."

"You were sincere-----–"

"Yes. Listen." Advancing swiftly to where he stood, she had the amazing courage to give a little laugh. Then she laid her hand on his shoulder. "Seriously, let's be good friends and forget all---–the rest. I have been a fool, but you have not; for after all, I am fairly attractive, and you are not the first! So let's make a bargain: I will never again attract you; you will never again *play at me*. And then things will be quite comfy. Shall we? I have been an awful pig to Theo, who is a darling, and from now on I shall try to make up to him."

He shrank back from her.

"What are you?" he whispered painfully. "What are you made of? And do you want to make me hate my own son?"

"*Eh, bien*, are things all right?"

Madame Joyselle had come in, followed by Theo. Joyselle, standing in the shadow, did not answer, but Brigit laughed gaily, and her gaiety was unfeigned, for she had assured herself, by watching him under torture, of the strength of Joyselle's love for her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The next morning at half-past six Madame Joyselle, creeping quietly downstairs, was, to her amazement, overtaken by Brigit.

"I have not slept," the girl explained, "and am going for a walk. I have promised to take Tommy to see 'Peter Pan' this afternoon and must feel better when I do."

"I am sorry you did not sleep. I am going marketing---–and to Mass."

They opened the door and went out into the fresh morning air. Golden Square was asleep as yet, and the well-kept grass in the garden looked pleasantly fresh behind the brown railings.

"Come with me; it will do you good," said the older woman suddenly, "and it will amuse you to see France in this old dark London of ours."

She carried a large basket, and looked, in her trim dark dress and bonnet, so exactly what she was that it occurred to Brigit, by force of contrast, how remarkably few people nowadays *do* look what they are.

"I will come with pleasure," she said gently, as they turned to the left. "Where do you go first?"

"To Notre Dame de France in Leicester Street. There's a Low Mass at seven. Then I must go to the butcher in Pulteney Street, and to the Ile de Java for coffee. Toinon," she continued, reflecting, pausing to give a penny to a beggar, "is a very good girl, but she cannot *buy*. She simply takes what they offer her, and no housekeeper can stand that, of course."

Leicester Street is but a ten minutes' walk from Golden Square, and Brigit felt as she walked that the world was meant for better things than tragedy, after all.

Her torture of Joyselle the evening before had been infinitely cruel, and yet her love for him had grown as she tortured him. She was as yet quite unused to the dominion of her own emotions, and they, being so much stronger than her self-control, had carried her away with them. It had been a kind of mental fakirism, and as fakirs smile as they burn and cut themselves, so she had been able to smile as she burnt and cut at her own heart in Joyselle. Yet she was not an altogether cruel woman.

And this quiet walk with the homely, good, little Felicite tranquillised and steadied her maddened nerves and brought reason to her mind.

Felicite left her basket in the vestibule of the church, and going in dipped her fingers into the holy water fountain and held her hand out to Brigit.

Unconsciously the girl touched it, and then, as the other woman turned and knelt at one of the worn praying-desks, Brigit hastily touched her own forehead and breast.

The drop of water stayed for some seconds on her forehead, and in its coolness seemed to burn her.

After a short pause she walked down the aisle and sat down in the second row of seats.

The priest came out as she took her place, and the Mass began.

Its very silence was restful to the girl, and as she watched, the sleep that had refused to come to her all through the night touched her eyelids and they closed wearily.

When she opened them it was as if a cool hand had been laid on her aching heart. Here was peace.

The Good Shepherd in the round window seemed to mean much as he looked down at her, and even the statue of the Mother and Child in the altar to her left looked beautiful to her. "Salve Regina, Mater Misericordiae," she read.

To the right of the main altar a group of tiny votive candles were burning; an old nun in a kind of white sunbonnet, draped with a black gauze veil, dropped her rosary with a little clatter to the wooden floor.

There were only a dozen or so people in the church, but this made no difference. The priest would not feel slighted, as an Anglican curate might. He had a serious ascetic face, and seemed not to know that any was present beside his God and himself.

"I am a brute," Brigit told herself, "a perfect fiend to torture him so. Why cannot we be good to each other? And how will it all end? I will be good to him in the future."

Then she shivered, for she was not a child and realised perfectly that her "being good" to Joyselle was by no means altogether safe.

"It is playing with fire," she thought. "That is one reason why I *am* so horrid, perhaps."

The priest had gone, and the little congregation, with last genuflections, were hurrying out of the church. Busy people, these; workers who before their day's labour begins have always time to say *Bonjour* to their God.

"A beautiful church, *hein*?" asked Felicite, as they came out of the church. "You liked it, my daughter?"

"Yes. I liked it. Where do we go now, *petite mere*?"

More than one passerby turned to stare at the beautiful girl with the weary eyes and her humble companion as they made their way towards Rupert Street. With the violently sudden change of mood that was part of her character, Brigit's spirits had gone up. She would be kind to Joyselle; that would be being kind to herself, and therefore she would be happy. In an hour they would be at home and she would see him. A great longing to feel his strong arms round her came to her, and her face flushed as she decided to go to him frankly and ask to be taken back.

"It is a beautiful day," she said softly.

Felicite smiled up at her.

"Yes. And it is good to begin a day by going to Mass. It clears one's mind of yesterday, and to-day is---ours, Brigitte."

For all her native shrewdness, it would not at all have surprised Felicite if Brigit had suddenly become *devote*, and even now as she watched the girl's radiant face it seemed to the Norman that the Mass had helped even more than she had ventured to hope. "She is going to try to fight it down," she thought gratefully, "and that is all that is necessary."

M. Bourbon, charcutier, in Rupert Street, has a beautiful shop full of wonderful things. Felicite bought a pound of galantine de volaille truffee, for which she paid two-and-six, and for which in Piccadilly she would have paid five shillings; she bought half a pound of jellied eel; she bought Pont l'Eveque cheese; flat little Parisian sausages; she bought a glass jar of preserved pears, brown with cinnamon.

Then they made their way to the Ile de Java, where they acquired a large tin of coffee, on to the Boucherie Francaise, where Felicite had a long discussion with M. Perigot *lui-meme*, whom she insisted on seeing, to the disgust of the young man in attendance, who wished to look at Brigit, and whom fate assigned to an ancient dame from Brewer Street.

There were other errands to be done, but at last they reached home, and in the passage Felicite paused and set down the basket.

"You will find my husband in his study," she said, looking earnestly at Brigit. "Go to him, my dear, and be happy. Remember, he is nearly an old man, and loves you like his daughter. And remember, also, that because it is not fitting in any way, your love for him will change sooner or later, and become that of a daughter for her father. So don't worry."

Brigit stood looking after her for a moment, and then went slowly upstairs. Joyselle, in the crimson-velvet garment, was writing a letter as she entered; he looked ill and miserably unhappy.

"Victor," she began without preamble, laying her arm across his shoulders and pressing her cheek to his hair. "Will you forgive me? I---I love you."

Then she broke down and cried in an old-fashioned and weakly feminine way that she could not combat, although she quite realised its absolute inappropriateness to her character.

"How could you?" he whispered, holding her close with the greatest tenderness, the torturing formula of yesterday coming to his lips. "How could you?"

His eyes, too, were wet, but her breakdown had given him his strength back. "I thought you did not care."

"Not care!"

"But you said so," he persisted, manlike.

"Victor---–you don't know how much I love you, and I don't know how I can be such a brute as I am. But---–it hurts me the worst. It---–it kills me. Say you forgive me."

"Dear child---–I forget," he answered, as gently as a father. And Felicite, on her way upstairs, heard him through the half-open door, and smiled.

PART THREE

CHAPTER ONE

Madame Bathilde Chalumeau, her black cotton frock tucked up round her plump figure over her scarlet-flannel petticoat, was dusting the windows of her shop in the Rue Dessous l'Arche.

It was only six o'clock and the air as yet was cool, but the trees leaning over the wall of Avocat Millot's garden opposite were grey with dust and parched with the heat of an exceptionally warm September.

Madame Chalumeau, who was standing on a chair energetically flopping her feather-brush over the panes of her double shop-front, sighed as she looked up at the brilliant sky. "It is to be a heat of the devil," she thought.

Next door to her, *chez* Bouillard, nothing was stirring. Poor Desire, being a widower, was apt to oversleep himself, and it was bad for his trade. Even now a small child in a black smock stood at his door, waiting to fill his carafe with the black wine that had stained its sides to such a beautiful violet hue.

"*Bonjour*, Christophe-----–"

"*Bonjour*, madame."

"You want wine?"

"*Oui*, madame."

"Then wait a moment and I will get it for thee."

Good Madame Chalumeau climbed down from her chair with a generous display of fat, black woollen legs and unpinned her skirt.

"*Bon!* M. Bouillard sleeps the fat morning, but I can get in, and you will get a beating if you keep your excellent father waiting."

Taking the carafe, she passed under the archway that separated her house from her neighbour's, and, her broad figure actually touching the wall on either side, went to Bouillard's side-door and entered the house.

When she came out, the carafe full, Bouillard himself, fat and rosy with sleep, was standing in his shop door. "Madame Bathilde, good day to you! So you have again saved me from a commercial loss!" Desire Bouillard had a witty way with

him, his far shrewder neighbour thought---–had thought for years.

And then, quite without consciousness or amusement, they enacted the little comedy that had been played by them every morning since poor Madame Bouillard died.

"And your morning coffee, M. Bouillard?"

"*Tiens, mon cafe! Helas non*, Madame Bathilde, I am but this moment awake---–what time is it?"

Just inside the door of Madame Chalumeau's shop, Au Gout Parisien, hung a clock.

"It is ten minutes to seven."

"*Eh, bien, au revoir*, Madame Bathilde---–I must go and set things going in my small household. Alas, poor Josephine!"

Madame Chalumeau shook her head with great gravity.

"A great loss, M. Bouillard; an irreparable loss. But---–my coffee is nearly ready. Will you not let me give you a cup? There are also an Auvergnat" (a double twist of well-made bread) "and a Bourdon sent me by my cousin, Madame Decomplet, of the Rue d'Argentan-----–"

And ten minutes later the two gossips, as the pleasant old phrase runs, were seated in Madame Chalumeau's little sitting-room behind her shop, breakfasting together.

Monsieur Bouillard's Josephine had been dead for seven long years, and in her life she had tormented the good man full sore; even as the Church invariably defers canonisation until long after the death of the saint, so Desire's appreciation of his wife's splendour of character was a post-mortem tribute to be accepted without a murmur by all the faithful.

"I recall to myself every morning, Madame Bathilde," he began, removing a large blob of honey from the dimple in his pink chin, "how that angel used to arise and prepare herself for her day's work. And of an economy! Charcoal did for her four times what it will for me. And times are hard!"

Bathilde sighed sympathetically. "My faith, yes; she was a wonderful manager, *pauvre ange*. The milk is at your elbow, M. Desire-----–"

Outside in her tiny garden a bee boomed somnolently among the red and yellow flowers, and somewhere near at hand a church bell jerked its unmusical summons to prayer.

Madame Chalumeau's face, glossy and red-and-white like a Norman apple, wore an expression of anxious expectation. Moreover, she had put on a narrow lace collar and pinned it with a coral brooch. It was the fifth of the month.

M. Desire ate his way through the generously laid meal with comfort and deliberation, his small blue eyes, deeply embedded in pink flesh, twinkling with ease.

As the clock struck half-past seven he laid his knife down and wiped his beardless mouth.

"Bathilde," he said, "you are very kind to a poor afflicted mourner."

"Ah---Desire!"

She was a woman of much sense, and she did not try to be coy.

"My heart, as you know, lies in the grave with my poor Josephine-----"

"But of course, my dear friend-----"

"But---man is not fit to live all alone. And I am convinced that if I could ask her, that angel would-----" He paused and looked approvingly round the tidy, comfortable little room.

"Yes---Desire? She would-----"

"I think she would---wish me to do the best I can for myself. And that, of course---I mean to say I imagine-----"

Poor Bathilde's hopes died suddenly.

"She was always so generous-minded," she murmured, folding her plump hands.

He rose and walked to the shop door.

"Anything new to show me, *chere* Madame Chalumeau?" he asked briskly.

"Yes; some coloured tablecloths, very pretty, at one franc seventy-five---and---some other things. But, Desire, you were saying about living alone---that you thought Josephine would be glad-----"

"I did not say she would be glad, Madame Chalumeau. My wife was never *glad* about anything. I said---in fact, I may as well be quite frank," he continued, turning to her, "I am a lonely man, and I am---greatly attracted to you, dear friend. But as I have told you before, I---I cannot quite make up my mind as to whether I should be happier if I married you."

"I could make you very comfortable, Desire, and I, too, am lonely. Besides, your accounts are very confused, and I could save you much money in that way."

A shrewd woman, this, but greatly mistaken in her methods. A useless, lazy, coquettish woman would have married the man years before, but poor Bathilde's very frankness was her undoing.

"Yes, yes," he returned impatiently, "I know all that, and my affection for you is great. But as to marriage---I cannot yet make up my mind. And in the meantime I must leave you, dear friend, for it is late. A thousand thanks for the delicious breakfast-----" and he was gone.

CHAPTER TWO

The tragedy of M. Bouillard's indecision was very real to Madame Chalumeau, but it was also one to which the good woman was thoroughly accustomed. For over three years M. Bouillard had twice yearly, on the fifth of March and the fifth of September, tried to bring himself to make up his mind, but he had always failed, and after his attempts things had continued as before.

Every morning he breakfasted with her, every Sunday and Feast-day he accompanied her to Mass, and occasionally he took her to drink a glass of Hydromel at the Cafe du Musee. He was a prosperous man in a small way, and considered attractive by the widows and elderly maidens of Falaise; but no one dreamed of disputing Madame Chalumeau's sway over his heart. In time, Falaise thought, the two excellent people would become one. But time is long.

So Bathilde, that fifth of September, felt a little sad as she worked in her neat little shop. And so it is that Love is a troublesome little vagabond, who ought to have his wings clipped and his bow broken.

There were few customers, for although her wools and silks were of excellent quality, and her baby-linen most practical, the Rue Dessous l'Arche is, after all, not the Rue d'Argentin. A little girl with a bandage round her face came and bought six needles, and a Young Person, whom Madame Chalumeau did not approve, spent several moments selecting a pair of red stockings. Otherwise the shopkeeper's solitude remained undisturbed until towards noon, when the door opened and a short, brown-faced man, carrying a long whip, came in with a good deal of noise, and waked her as she dozed over her knitting.

"*Bonjour*, Thildette! Frightened you, did I?"

"Oh, Colibris, it is you! And what brings you? You will breakfast with me? But I am glad to see you, dear brother? How is Marie?"

"Ta, ta, ta, ta!" laughed M. Colibris, who looked like nothing in the world less than he looked like a humming-bird, "so many questions, my excellent Thildette! Yes, I will breakfast---a cheese omelet, my dear, and a glass of cider---and Marie is as well as one could expect. Ah, these children, these children! It is a boy, of course. A boy with fists as big as his head."

Madame Chalumeau had risen, and had led her guest through the sitting-room into her immaculate kitchen.

"And you have seen papa and maman?" she asked.

"Yes, I come from there. Papa is much pleased that it is a boy. His eleventh great-grandson! One would think," continued the good man garrulously, "that it was his own son. Maman is looking much better, *pas*?"

"Mama is quite wonderful. But amazing! And the preparations are something splendid. I suppose this new boy will contribute his share to the wedding ring for maman?"

"But certainly. It is lucky there are no more of us men to contribute, or we should have had to have the ring studded with diamonds. A fine sight it will be, Bathilde. Think of papa and mama married at St. Gervais by the same cure that married them fifty years ago! And twenty grandchildren, to say nothing of their seven children, and counting this boy of my Marie's, sixteen great-grandchildren. Falaise has certainly much to be proud of."

Madame Chalumeau flopped her omelet again, slid it to a platter and set a carafe of cider on the table.

"*La!* Now eat, Colibris, and tell me more. How is Louis? And Henriette?"

"All well, all well," returned her brother-in-law, who was apparently full of the quality, the name of which is so often abused by English people, *joie-de-vivre*. "Henriette has new upper teeth, and looks ten years younger. Louis is as usual very silent, but otherwise is well. I am curious to see Victor. It was a misfortune, my being away when he was here last. He must have been greatly disappointed. He has always been very fond of me, you will remember. Even as boys, we

had much in common."

Madame Chalumeau's eyes twinkled as she nodded. Colibris' harmless vanity always amused her.

"Yes, yes, I know. He inquired very particularly for you. A great man, Victor."

"Yes, yes. I remember once when we were boys a man came who felt the skull and read the character. He said to Victor, 'You have great talent, my little one,' and to me he said, 'You are going to be a very great man, Colibris.' But I did not care to develop my talents. I was always very modest and domestic. The cure at home always says, 'Now, Jacques Colibris---*there's* a man who is a model husband and father.'" He drank a deep draught of cider.

"They arrive to-morrow," interpolated Madame Chalumeau hastily, with a hunted expression, "Victor and Felicite and Theodore. Also Theo's *fiancee*, an English girl. I have a letter from Victor---I will read it to you."

Taking the letter from her pocket, and ruthlessly interrupting his remarks on the English as viewed by himself, she began to read:

"My dear Sister---On Tuesday we shall arrive, I, my wife, our boy, and his *fiancee*, Lady Brigit Mead. She is a very beautiful and charming young lady, and I am sure you will all admire her. Felicite, who is very wise, fears that she, Lady Brigit, may not care for Falaise, for she is, my dear sister, the daughter of a Count. But I, who am even wiser, know that she will. Dear Falaise, to me always the most beautiful town in the world, who could help loving thee? Now, my good Bathilde, I wish you to go to Berton of the Chevreuil d'Or and engage rooms for Lady Brigit. Two rooms, one without a bed, for a *salon*. Tell him they must be very nice, and you, I know, will see that they are clean. We, of course, will lodge in the Rue Victor Hugo with the old people. My affectionate salutations to you all, my dear sister, from your devoted brother,

"Victor."

"He is a charming personality, isn't he, Colibris?" asked Madame Chalumeau, folding the letter and beaming with satisfaction. "I am curious to see this lady. The daughter of a Count, *fichtre*! And very beautiful. That must please Victor; he has an eye for beauty."

"Yes, yes," returned Jacques Colibris absently, filling his glass with cider, "it is an excellent thing. I, too, have it, the eye for beauty. Only the other day, looking at the new blue wash I have put on the walls, old Madame Thibaut was saying-----"

"What an eye for beauty you have!" cut short Madame Chalumeau ruthlessly. "Well, Jacques, I must now make myself presentable and go to the Rue d'Argentin. Berton will no doubt be very proud to have a lady in his inn---although many English people stop there. It is curious," she added, putting her plate on his and carrying them to a distant table, "what an interest *ces Anglais* take in le Conquerant. As an enemy, one who conquered their country, one would think they would dislike his memory, but they do not. Very generous of them, I always think."

CHAPTER THREE

Joyselle's party arrived at Falaise the next evening, and leaving Brigit at the inn in the Rue d'Argentin, the others drove on to old M. Joyselle's house in the Rue Victor Hugo.

Brigit was very tired and glad to rest, for the day's journey had been long, and Joyselle's interest in her interest in his country had taken the form of a restless desire to have her see everything possible from both sides of the compartment. For hours, therefore, she had been springing from one window to another, admiring everything to which he pointed, in a mad attempt to satisfy his pride in *ici-bas*.

Her coming at all had been entirely his idea, and her faint refusals he had laughed to scorn, easily enlisting Theo, and, with a trifle more difficulty, his wife, to his cause.

"Of course you will go with us," he had cried, beaming with joy and tossing Papillon nearly to the ceiling as some outlet for his feelings, "and it will be glorious; and think of the ecstasy of my old people and the rest!"

"Remember, Victor---–they are simple people," Felicite had ventured, but he had laughed again.

"And so is she! They are peasants, and she is a great lady. *Ca se comprend.* But extremes meet, and Brigit has none of the British middle-class snobbism. It is well that she should see the people from whom we come. She shall go with us."

And she had come.

Things had gone very well of late, and as she lay on her narrow bed resting and waiting for Theo to fetch her, she reviewed the events that had occurred since her great quarrel with Victor, and drew a deep breath of satisfaction at the state of affairs.

She and Joyselle, both of them remembering the horror of the quarrel, had been exceptionally gentle to each other, and as so often happens when a situation is apparently unbearable, it had suddenly become quite smooth and pleasant. Restraining himself from demonstrativeness, Joyselle had been able to keep his emotions well in hand, and the tacit avoidance of *tetes-a-tete* had also proved most helpful.

Felicite's innocent interpretation of their feelings had gone far, too, towards quieting those feelings almost to her conception of them. There were times, Brigit had seen, not without amusement, when Victor had nearly felt for her the paternal solicitude his wife believed him to feel, and even though she smiled at this susceptibility to impression in him, the girl more than once caught herself semi-unconsciously playing the *role* of youthful hero-worshipper cast for her by the older woman.

The position should have been untenable, but it was not. As yet no remorse had come to Brigit regarding Felicite, although she frequently experienced a pang of self-loathing on meeting Theo's honest and trusting eyes. Her upbringing had been such that she really believed herself to be as yet quite guiltless of anything more than an almost inevitable deceit, and even when she did regret the deceit, the thought that she was going to marry Theo gave her instant comfort, as though she were contemplating some noble act of atonement.

"Victor is very good now," she thought, turning her flat, hard pillow, "and I am much less nervous and irritable. Things always do straighten themselves out, I suppose---–for those who know how to wait. Mere waiting does no good, it's the knowing how that counts. And I think we are learning now. If only Theo would fall in love with someone else. The minute he becomes unhappy or even impatient Victor will grow paternal, and that is horrible. Theo seems happy enough now-----–"

Her room was small and high, with orange-coloured stencillings on a grey ground, and thin, dangerously movable strips of carpet on the slippery floor. The curtains were of blue flannel and thoroughly unbeautiful.

The sitting-room was exactly like the bedroom, except that its stencilling was bright green and that it had no bed. There was in each room a big bunch of dahlias of gorgeous hues---offerings from Madame Chalumeau.

Yellow Dog Papillon, who had been left with Brigit to keep her company, lay on one of the rugs and snapped rudely at flies. It was very warm, and the tea had proved quite undrinkable. Brigit thought that she did not greatly care for the Chevreuil d'Or.

Then eight o'clock struck and she rose and rang for hot water. The "maid," who was incidentally a grandmother, wore a blue skirt and a red blouse and smiled cheerfully and toothlessly.

"Yes, yes, mademoiselle, *de l'eau chaude*. I have brought it! *Je connais ma clientele, moi.*" With a proud smile she set down a jug about as large as a milk-jug for two coffee-drinkers, and withdrew.

Smiling to herself, Brigit dressed and then went into her sitting-room, and opening a window looked down into the street.

It is a most important thoroughfare, this Rue d'Argentin; the Rue de la Paix de Falaise.

Leaning out the window and looking to her left Brigit beheld the Place St. Gervais, with its fountain, its market-place, now of course empty, and its church steps, on which beggars sleep by day. Opposite her was a *cafe*, at present enlivened by the dashing presence of two foot-soldiers and an old man playing dominoes with himself.

Above the houses the sky was pale and clear, and from a garden off to the right at the end of the street came a cooing of wood-pigeons.

Two little boys in black blouses came running up the street, their sabots clacking against the rough cobbles. Someone was playing a mandolin, and at the foot of the street, near the bridge, a girl in a pink apron was flirting with a youth with curly red hair.

People stood by their shop doors, the men smoking small clay pipes, the women usually with a child or two at their skirts. A quiet scene, dull and homely, this birthplace of the Conqueror, and at this humble end of the great street rather pathetic in its aspect of simple relaxation.

Suddenly a little ripple of excited interest touched the groups in the street. The two soldiers rose and stared hard to their left; M. Perret of the Pharmacie Normale came out at a quick call from his wife, and stood, pestle in hand, as she struggled with a maddening knot in the strings of her black apron.

Brigit, leaning out still further, laughed aloud.

"Victor," she said under her breath. "Oh, *look* at him! You old sabreur!"

Joyselle, a great purple flower in his coat, came swinging down the street, bowing right and left, his grey felt hat in his gloved hand. He looked amazingly young and amazingly handsome, and there was no mistaking the fact that, great man though he undoubtedly was, he was hugely enjoying the homage of his townspeople.

When he reached the Pharmacie Normale he paused, and shaking hands politely with Madame Perret, he met M. Perret with open arms, and the little apothecary, bounding at him, was caught and kissed on either cheek.

"*Ce cher* Anatole!" Brigit heard him exclaim, "and how art thou, old one?"

Perret, greatly delighted, skipped about in rapture, inquiring in a high piping voice for Felicite and the boy, and asking many questions for which he waited for no answer.

Then there was a lady from the shop, *Au Bonheur des chers Petits*, to be greeted very cordially, and the old domino-player, who, Brigit learned, was a cousin.

There was something very charming in the simplicity of Joyselle's pleasure in seeing his boyhood's friends, and something almost ludicrous in his perfectly obvious joy in their homage.

Looking down at him in his oft-interrupted progress, Brigit told herself that things must turn out all right. "He is so good-natured and generous and strong," she reflected, with glad shifting of all responsibility, "he will surely find some way out."

When at last she heard his light, regular footfall coming down the passage she rose and went to meet him.

"So the Conquering Hero has come," she teased. "I have been watching your advance down the street. Such a strut!"

"Did I strut? I daresay. They are my own people and I love their affection. Also, as you say, it pleases my vanity. *Helas*, my dear, I am very vain."

She put on her hat and took up her gloves.

"I thought Theo was coming for me, Glorieux."

His face changed. "No, my dear love. It is *my* town, this. Here I was born, here I lived as a child. I must show it to you."

Taking her hand he laid it on his arm with a gentle little pat and led her proudly downstairs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Opposite No. 6 Rue Victor Hugo is a long black wall, and in the middle of this wall an old-fashioned gas lantern was glowing red when Joyselle and Brigit arrived.

The moon had risen, and mingling with the red of the gas made that part of the narrow street almost as light as if it had been high noon.

"There is the house, ma Brigitte," murmured Joyselle, pressing her hand close to his side. When she had left the inn arm-in-arm with him, she had felt as though they must look perilously like a German bride and groom, but there was in his old-fashioned bearing as he guided her through the streets a kind of chivalrous courtesy that she liked, and she began to feel like a princess being presented to his people by her lord.

"There is their house. I gave it to them twenty-five years ago. It is their palace, their country-place, their world, to my old people."

Through a half-door in the opposite wall the girl could just catch a glimpse of the left side of the house. It was hung with trumpet flowers.

Beyond, a clearly defined square of moonlight showed her a smooth patch of lawn, beyond which the side of a creeper-clad arbour blocked the view.

"The dinner is to be in the garden; they are to sit in the arbour, and there will be many narrow tables all over the lawn, which is rather large behind the house. They are very much interested in it; all of us will be there, and our children, and---theirs. I am old, ma Brigitte-----"

His voice fell sadly as this idea occurred to him, and she pressed his arm and smiled up at him, her face ruddy in the gaslight.

"You are young, my man; you will never grow old. And you will play at the dinner? And you will play to me? I always know when you play to me."

"Yes, for it is always. You are good to me now, *bien-aimee*."

His gentleness was wonderfully appealing, as it always was to her. The long respite from nerve-racking misunderstandings had allowed her to see more clearly the real beauty of his faulty character, and a wave of compunction came over her as she thought how little she, with her bad qualities of jealousy, selfishness and cruelty, deserved this beautiful love.

For she fully understood that only a deep, real love could so vanquish the lower part of his nature as to let the nobler triumph as it had of late.

"I adore you, my great man," she said, very low, and their eyes met.

Then they crossed the street and he, leaning over the closed half of the door in the wall, opened it and they went in.

It was nine o'clock, and the old people had had their supper. Brigit who had, thinking of their great age, rather expected to find them more or less mummy-like, sitting in comfortable chairs tended by a middle-aged relation, was somewhat amused to find them squabbling fiercely over a game of dominoes, each with a glass of cider at hand.

"*Mon pere---la voici*," announced Joyselle, with a kind of simple pomposity eminently fitted to the occasion.

Old Joyselle finished his act of adding a domino to the long line before him and then looked up. He was a rather small, bent old man, with quantities of rough, curly grey hair and a petulant expression.

"Ugh!" he said rudely.

"Shake hands with him, Brigit," suggested Victor pulling his moustache to suppress a smile. Brigit held out her hand.

"I am very glad to meet you," she said in French.

The old man stared. Then he smiled, showing one snow-white tooth. "*Tu parles*," he murmured. Then he went back to his game.

The old woman, more polite, had risen, and was waiting her turn. She was very tall and had a heavy moustache.

"They told me you were beautiful," she began courteously, whereupon the old man interrupted, repeating her words but, by a change in emphasis, casting derisive doubts on whoever "they" might be. "They *told* me you were *beautiful*."

Brigit burst out laughing, and leaning forward smiled at the speaker.

"Well---am I not beautiful?" she asked with an infectious chuckle of sincere amusement.

But old Joyselle was a man of character, apparently, and not to be beguiled.

"*Belle? Non, non. Pas ca. Mais*---Victor, *petit*, surely you can't be going to marry a real lady?"

Joyselle flushed, and she knew his flush had to do only with his father's lapse of memory, not his reference to her ladyhood.

"Not I, *mon pere*. I married Felicite, you know. It is our boy who is going to marry this---ugly lady."

His father shook his head. "Not ugly, *mon fils*." he declared solemnly, "not ugly. Only *plain*."

This time Brigit did not laugh. Something in the old man's half-vacant face touched her. He was Victor's father; he had held, as a little baby, the man she loved; he had worked for him and helped to make him what he was. Laying her hand on his, she smiled down at him.

"You are quite right," she said gently, "only plain. Will you show me how to play dominoes?"

"He can't," retorted Madame Joyselle, eagerly, "he has forgotten, and, besides, he cheats."

Joyselle walked to the window, his shoulders shaking, and before the old man could retort, Theo came into the room carrying a lacquered tin tray with a jug of cider and some glasses on it.

"Ah, you have come? *Grand-pere, grand-mere*, what do you think of my *fiancee*?"

But Brigit drew him away and sat down on the ingeniously uncomfortable sofa with him.

"Fighting again, are they? Poor old dears, it really is quite dreadful. You see, grandfather used to be a fearful tyrant, though he is so little, and grandmother was deathly afraid of him until his health began to fail. So now she is getting even with him. They adore each other, however. Isn't the house quaint? Have you seen the garden?"

She shook her head. "No, show it to me."

Leaving the room they crossed to the oilclothed passage and went into the dining-room, a small apartment enlivened by an oleograph of Leo XIII., and some gay chromos.

The windows opened to the ground, and opening one the young people went out into the moonlight. Brigit was feeling very happy, and therefore very kind. When Theo put his arm round her and drew her to him she did not protest.

"Brigitte," he whispered, "I do so love you."

"Dear Theo-----–" Suddenly she remembered that other moonlight night, nearly a year before, when she had accepted him. She recalled the look of the beautiful old house, the sound of Tommy at the pianola, the splashing of the fountain, the sun-dial at which, in his boyish grief, he had knelt.

And she had accepted his love, not because she loved him but because she hated her home and because, besides being sufficiently rich to satisfy her needs, he was nice and straight and kind. She had taken everything he had, and what had she given him? Nothing.

In the moonlight she saw as if with new eyes that he had changed. The young contours of his cheek were less round, his eyes had a deeper expression. He had suffered, and he had not complained.

"Theo," she said suddenly, smitten with pity, "I---–have been horrid to you. I---–I am so frightfully selfish. Will you forgive me?"

His eyes glistened as he looked at her.

"Forgive you? You angel!"

"No, no. I *have* been horrid. But---–I will be nicer. And---–you are so good to me."

He was silent for a moment, then he said slowly:

"Brigitte---–you are never horrid. But---–if you do not---–care for me at all---–will you tell me now?"

She was abashed and then shivered. Here was the chance she had longed for. He would, she knew, give her up without a word if she asked him to; and she had also learned to know that whatever Joyselle might have done in like case a few months before, he would not refuse to see her now if she told him that she and Theo had agreed to separate.

Here was freedom to go her own way, unrebuked by her own conscience or the conscience of the man she loved.

Theo had turned away and stood with folded arms, awaiting her answer.

And she let her chance go by, for she could not bear to say the words that should hurt him, and in the quiet night under the shadow of the old house, it seemed to her that, after all, her happiness lay in this boy's hands. Not the wild rapture she had once or twice felt with Joyselle, but the kind of happiness that builds homes, and---–she wanted a home.

Inexplicably tangled with her feelings for Theo, too, was that anything binding her to him bound her to his father. They were more than father and son, these two, they belonged together.

"I---–do care for you," she said quietly. "I am not in love with you, but I will marry you."

As he turned and held out his arms to her, Joyselle appeared at the end of the lawn. Brigit did not see him, and going slowly to her lover allowed him to embrace her.

"Ma Brigitte, *mon ange*---–I---–how can I thank you. Ah, what I have felt these last five months! I have thought---–oh, many things, of late."

His voice shook and was good to hear in its sincere emotion. For the moment in her new-born wish to be good to him she felt that she had done the wise thing, and was happy. He was good, and she would marry him and---life would go on for ever, as it had been the last few weeks.

Joyselle, standing quite still in the shadow, watched them for a moment. Then he turned and went back into the house.

CHAPTER FIVE

The morning of the eighth of September dawned that year very gloriously, and Brigit Mead saw it dawn. Theo had begged her the evening before to go with him to the castle to see the sunrise, and pleased by the originality of the idea, she had accepted.

So while the sweet summer night still held sway over the pleasant Norman land, the two climbed the steep street leading to the gates under the ivy-grown bastions.

"The *concierge* always goes with visitors," the young man explained as they passed the little house and began mounting. "But father was at school with him, so I got a permit to go up alone."

"Is your father all right to-day, I wonder? Or will he be?" returned Brigit thoughtfully. "I never knew him to have a headache before."

"No more did I," answered Theo, running his words together as he did when he had been speaking much French. "He looked very seedy yesterday, but last night Tante Bathilde went in to see him while you and I were walking, and she said he was better."

They had reached the grassy ramparts and turned to the right. Night was now melting into day, only the great Tower of Talbot (who alas! never was in Falaise in his life) stood out against a faintly moonlit sky. And glancing over his right shoulder at the mantling west, Theo hurried Brigit past the Breach of Henri IV., with its crown of lilac trees, up the steep causeway to the Tower itself. "We must climb to see the sun, dearest," he said, "let us make haste. I am glad to be with you while you for the first time see it come up over the edge." He was very happy and looked rather splendid in his triumphant youth. Brigit smiled at him.

"I like your town," she answered, "and I like this view of it."

Through the little dungeon they ran and up the narrow crumbling stairs, laughing or crying out as they slipped or lost their breath, racing with the sun; a very remarkable thing for Brigit Mead to be doing, as she fully appreciated. And then, at the top, high in the splendid air, the town in its greenery looking like half a dozen eggs in a green nest, asleep below them.

And then, for the race was theirs, they watched the sun creep up until he set the east on fire.

Brigit, her hat off, her eyes bravely set to the east, stood motionless, and Theo, after saluting the risen king, drew back so that he got her profile against the sky and watched it.

She wore a short grey skirt and a grey silk shirt; there was about her not one touch of colour except for a beautiful pink the unwonted climbing had brought to her cheeks. Theo realised how great a mistake most women make in obliterating by bright tints the natural colours of their eyes and skins.

"You are so wonderful," he said suddenly.

She started, for there was in his tone something that vaguely disquieted her. It was like his father's voice, and like his father's when he was impatient and superficially stirred.

"A wonderful person, am I not?" she laughed, picking up her hat and putting it on, dashing a great cruel-looking hat-pin apparently straight through her brain. "I am also a hungry person, Theo. Are we to have food? I suppose no one will be awake for hours!"

It was indeed too early to hope for coffee, so they amused themselves by wandering up and down the stairs, throwing burning paper down the famous oubliette, and crossing perilously narrow ledges hand-in-hand.

"So William was born in this horrid little room? I don't believe it!"

"*On le dit.* And down there---–see? by the tan-yards, Arlette was washing clothes when Robert the Devil saw her and fell in love with her."

"Remarkably fine eyesight he must have had to see enough to fall in love with!"

"Exactly. But that is the story. My mother's father was a tanner down there somewhere. He was fairly well-to-do for his position, and father was considered most audacious for aspiring to her hand!"

He laughed tenderly. "My dear old father! I am so proud of him, dear love, I can't express it at all."

"I know."

"And I am proud of *petite mere*, too. She was so brave and patient always, and he has led her a sad life at times. They were desperately poor, for her father left most of his money to his other daughter, who married Jacques Colibris. You must see my Uncle Jacques, he is quite delightful---–and father was a gambler---–and so on. I can myself remember one morning when he came in and told her he had lost two hundred pounds, and that was a fortune then."

"She told me about those times," answered Brigit, slowly. "She is very dear and good."

They were now going slowly down towards the town. It was five o'clock, and the *concierge's* children were scampering about, uncombed, as they passed the cottage.

"We'll go to the Musee and knock up old Malaumain," declared Theo suddenly. "He won't mind, and she will give us a good *dejeuner*. I could eat a horse."

"And I a carriage! But why go to a museum for breakfast?"

"It is a *cafe*---–old Malaumain is a collector."

"Of what?"

"Of everything. From bird's eggs to souvenirs of Guillaume, whom he adores. The house is supposed to have been at one time lived in by the Conqueror, and old Malaumain has made busts of him, and pictures, and all kinds of things. He will talk to you about *l'Entente cordiale* and the crossing of the two races, and the Friendly Hand, until you muzzle him.

He is a dear old chap, and his wife is a very excellent cook. I used to run away when I was a little kid visiting *grand-mere*, and go and beg her for sandcakes with the Conqueror's head done on top in sugar!"

Madame Malaumain, contrary to expectation, appeared at an upper window at the first knock, came down in a neat white *peignoir*, and after a quick stare at Theo held out her hand.

"*C'est le petit Joyselle*," she said cordially, "*avec sa future?*"

"Yes---but if you don't give us breakfast, she will die, and then where shall I be?" he answered, laughing. "How is M. Malaumain?"

"He is well, thank you, M. Theo. He has made many more interesting discoveries about the Conqueror. He is very superior, M. Malaumain," she added, turning to Brigit. "He was in service with many great people, so he is never shy, as I am."

Chatting cheerfully, she set a small iron-table outside the door for them, and then looking thoughtfully at them and murmuring, "Coffee, boiled eggs, fresh bread and honey," disappeared, leaving them alone in the slowly awakening Palace St. Gervais.

"What time is the Mass?" asked Brigit, as a tall cart clattered up to the fountain and a brisk middle-aged woman climbed down from it and began setting up her stand for the day's market.

"At ten. I hope *grand-pere* will behave well. I sometimes think he is more mischievous than---than silly, poor old man. The cure who married them called yesterday and congratulated him, whereupon *grand-pere* looked up and remarked that he didn't mind being married again, but that most men got a new wife the second time! Poor old M. Clery almost died."

"And what did *grand-mere* say?" asked Brigit.

"Nothing. Just looked at him. *Petite mere* said it was a dreadful scene, but *grand-pere* was much pleased with himself, and chuckled all day."

"I rather suspect his---sincerity, too, since I saw him trying to make Papillon eat a domino. Oh, what's that?"

Up the street came a small procession; two brown-faced little boys, one of them ringing a bell, followed by a priest in a well-washed and darned white garment.

Theo rose and took off his hat. "It is the Viaticum," he said simply, crossing himself.

The town was waking now; everywhere shop shutters were being taken down and people in sabots clattered about, while a steady stream of high carts, each with a big-boned horse between its shafts, drew up near the fountain and deposited their owners in the market-place.

"A little later on in the year the apples make a splendid colour-effect," commented Theo, breaking off to add in surprise, "Why, here is father!"

It was indeed Joyselle hurrying towards them, a soft hat jammed down over his eyes, so that he did not see them till his son accosted him.

"Father!"

"Theo!"

"Is anything wrong?" asked the young man rising.

Joyselle shook his head with a frown. "Wrong? What should be wrong?" he returned harshly.

"But you look-----–"

"Hungry, probably. *Bonjour*, Brigitte. Yes, I *am* hungry. I have been walking for hours, and I am perished with hunger."

"Will you join us? Madame Malaumain is getting us some coffee-----–"

Theo obviously expected a refusal to this invitation, but Joyselle accepted it without hesitation, and drawing up a chair, sat down.

"Where have you two been?" he asked.

While Theo gave him a description of their walk, Brigit watched the violinist.

He had pushed back his hat and from under it his hair hung in curly disorder over his brow. He was very pale and his eyes were circled by violet rings. He looked very ill indeed, but Brigit knew that it was no physical pain that was tormenting him.

"Very pleasant," he murmured to his son with a visible effort, "delightful." Madame Malaumain arriving with a tablecloth announced the cheerful fact that the water was boiling, recognised him with delight, and told him in all innocence that he as well as she had grown no younger since their last meeting.

"M. Malaumain will be delighted to see you," she added; "it is not often that he meets one as cultivated as himself."

Joyselle bowed gravely. "Can you give me some coffee, too, Madame Malaumain?" he asked. "I am very---–hungry."

But when the coffee and eggs arrived, he did not eat; instead, he sat moodily playing with his spoon and staring at the tablecloth.

Brigit's appetite had fled, and she was most uneasy as she watched him, for she did not dare risk an explosion by putting the smallest question to him.

Something was very wrong, and she was alarmed. Suddenly, as a clock struck half-past six, he rose. "*Au revoir*, my children," he said, "I must get back home. Theo will call for you at ten minutes to ten, Brigitte, my---–my daughter!"

And he was gone, leaving Theo staring after him.

"What can be the matter?" the young man mused. "He looks very bad, doesn't he? It is too early for letters to have come. He can't-----–" He paused and a quick smile stirred his moustache and showed his white teeth.

"Can't what?" queried Brigit, vaguely annoyed by his smile.

"He can't have fallen in love-----–"

"Of course he can't!"

"No. But only because he hasn't seen anyone since the night before last. He is amazing about his love-affairs, dear, in and out before you can get your breath, and always madly sincere!"

"I know, 'He always cares for the time,'" she quoted softly, pushing away her cup. "Let's go, Theo, I want to get a sleep before we go to church."

He was surprised by the irritation in her voice, but rose obediently, and after disappearing for a moment to pay Madame Malaumain, led her back to the inn.

"I will come for you at ten to ten then---darling," he said, trying to coax her back into the humour of the earlier hours. But he failed, and she nodded gravely, not even trying to conceal her change of mood. "I shall be ready," she answered, "Good-bye."

CHAPTER SIX

The church of St. Gervais was packed with the majority of a crowd that extended well out down the broad steps and into the square, as the old bells rang a carillon for the old couple who, as a young man and a young woman, had been married under them fifty years ago.

In the carriage that was bringing the bridal pair to the church *Grand-pere* Joyselle was behaving very badly indeed. Carefully dressed by his daughter, Madame Chalumeau, gloves on his ancient hands, a new top hat on his ancient head, his ancient brain was busily plotting and executing all kinds of small pranks, and his unfortunate old bride had nearly burst into tears at a strong nip he had given her arm with his still muscular fingers.

"Now, father, please be good," pleaded Madame Chalumeau, to whom, together with Victor, belonged the uncomfortable honour of conducting the wayward groom to the altar. "You know you promised you would."

"How can you call me father, woman? Me a young lad on his way to be married!" The old man laughed shrilly, and producing an apple from his pocket began to eat it as best he could with his one tooth.

"And *where* are your teeth?" cried the overwrought Madame Chalumeau. "You promised to wear them. Mother, why don't you scold him."

"Because he likes being scolded, that's why," snapped the bride, jerking her bonnet over one ear. "He's been as bad as a devil all the morning."

Joyselle, who had not been listening, caught this phrase.

"Mother," he said gently, taking her hand, "don't be cross, dear. He is---forgetful, but try to remember the day you married him. You loved him,"---he winced, as if hurt by his own words, but went on in the same voice,---"and God has been good in---in allowing you to spend fifty years together."

The old woman nodded. "I know, my son. I can remember. It---rained and spoiled my cap, but I didn't care. We walked in a long procession and he wore a green coat that the old M. le Comte gave him."

"Yes, mother dear," put in the mistaken Madame Chalumeau, "and you promised to love him always---–even when he was---–cross."

Madame Joyselle sniffed. "People promise a lot, but fifty years is more than any woman expects," she answered, with considerable venom.

Joyselle sighed. "Perhaps, my dear Bathilde; you would not mind not interrupting me again? Yes---–think of the green coat. And that you did not mind about your cap. Your life has been very useful, *ma mere*, and you have devoted children to love you and care for you."

"Look at the crowd," cried out the old man suddenly. "It must be a funeral!"

"Father!" Madame Chalumeau crossed herself with fingers that fairly trembled with haste. "How *can* you? When it is your own wedding."

As the carriage stopped Victor leaned forward and laid his hand on his father's.

"Father---–this is a splendid and---–and most happy day for all of us. There are nearly fifty of us---–your descendants and their wives and husbands, and we are very *proud* of you. Will you give my mother your arm and follow Bathilde and me up the steps?"

Old Joyselle skipped with great agility from the carriage, and with a grand imitation of his son's manner followed that son into the church.

Brigit, standing near Felicite near the altar, felt her eyes fill with tears as the little group appeared. There was something infinitely touching in the sight of the ancient couple coming back to the altar to renew their vows after fifty years.

The priest's voice was very weak, but it carried well under the arched roof, and when the rings---–the one for the bride bought by her male, the one for the groom by his female descendants---–were blessed and exchanged, many people were frankly weeping.

Joyselle had not joined his wife and son, but stood opposite them, in front of a group of relations from the country, his fine figure in its perfect clothes contrasting strongly with them.

He was paler than Brigit had ever seen him, and his eyes, bent to the ground for the most part, even more deeply circled than they had been at the *cafe* a few hours before.

The priest droned on; a baby cried, causing the bridegroom to dart a furious glance in its direction; one of the country cousins blew his nose with simple-hearted zest; the old couple who had been kneeling were assisted to their feet. "*In nomine Patris, et Filii*-----–"

Brigit bowed her head with the rest, and then as she raised it, met Joyselle's miserable eyes; miserable, accusing, despairing eyes.

The ceremony was over. Old Joyselle gave his arm once more to his wife, and between two lines of buzzing admirers conducted her to the carriage, followed by his famous son, the rest of the family crowding after.

"Pathetic, wasn't it?" asked Theo. "I was so afraid *grand-pere* would not behave, but he is rather in awe of father. Did you see my uncles, Antoine and Guillaume? Come, *petite mere*, let's go on. Our carriage is waiting at the inn, to save time."

Brigit followed obediently, but her mind was in a whirl. What could be the matter with Victor?

CHAPTER SEVEN

The garden in the Rue Victor Hugo was full of long narrow tables covered with snowy cloths and as white china. In the pitiless noonday sun the display dazzled the eyes. In the middle of every table was a high vase of yellow flowers, and at intervals down each stood china bowls heaped with apples and grapes.

A carafe of cider stood at every plate, for Normans are thirsty and their heads strong.

Brigit stood in an upper window looking down as the crowd assorted itself and settled down on the benches by the tables. In a few moments Theo would fetch her and conduct her to the arbour where twelve people were to be seated; at present he was bustling about making himself agreeable to everybody, laughing with those few children who, being over twelve, were present, helping the old or unwieldly to dispose of themselves comfortably, darting to and fro, looking strangely out of place among the good people with whom he felt so thoroughly at home.

In the arbour, Brigit knew, were already assembled the bridal couple, Victor and Felicite, Antoine and Guillaume, and the wife of Guillaume, Madame Chalumeau, the ancient cure and M. Thibaut, the Mayor. She and Theo were to complete the dozen. For some reason the girl dreaded the feast. She had been unable to speak to Victor as yet, and since their eyes had met in the church she had been unable to shake off a haunting feeling of fear that had come to her at that moment. Something was impending.

And the sultry heat seemed to make matters worse. Down in the garden the guests were now all seated, and scraps of their conversation reached her as she leaned in the window.

"A magnificent dinner, I am told," M. Perret, the apothecary, was saying in his high voice like that of a grass-hopper chirping in the heat. "Thildette Chalumeau told me: Pot au feu, veal cooked in a casserole in its own juice, rabbits stewed in wine, gigot roti, patisserie---and many other things. Yvonne Gaude is cooking it, but Thildette prepared most of the things with her own hands-----"

"---And what is a poor man to think when a cow dies like that, from no reason whatever," murmured one of the humblest of the country cousins. "M. le cure can say what he likes about there being no witches!"

"Have you seen the *future* of *le petit de* Victor? They call her beautiful, I am told, in England, but-----"

"Victor is growing old, Maitre Leboeuf. He looked quite old in church-----"

"No, *ma chere*, positively only eighteen fifty, and as good as new! I always liked plush, too-----"

Brigit listened absently. What could be the matter with Victor? And why had he not come to her for only one minute before the long ordeal of the dinner began?

Then the door opened and Theo, beaming with a sense of duty artistically fulfilled, came in. "They are all as happy as possible," he laughed; "the pot au feu is a thing of the past, and they are beginning on the veal. Come, my Brigit, you

must be hungry."

Without answering, she accompanied him downstairs, and they threaded their way to the arbour.

"You are to sit here, Brigit, between grandfather and me," explained Theo, stopping opposite his father, who was listening to something Madame Guillaume was telling him.

Grandfather Joyselle, whose impish spirit had subsided, was busy with some minced veal, and shot a rather grudging look at his new neighbour. "Don't touch my glass, will you?" he said, "It's got flies in it, and I love to see 'em drown."

Theo laughed. "Some wine, *grand-mere*?"

The old woman shook her head. "No, thank you," she answered civilly. "I will teach you dominoes, mademoiselle."

Brigit thanked her and began her dinner.

"Listen to Jacques tell about how he converted a retrograde priest back to holiness by his great eloquence," laughed Antoine Joyselle, who was an old and soured edition of his famous brother. "*Gascon!*"

Madame Chalumeau, whose eyes were fixed on M. Bouillard as he sat far down one of the tables, dropped her knife to the ground, and disappearing under the table in search of it, gave her head a terrible thump, and emerged scarlet and agonised.

"Someone ought to propose a toast!" suggested Theo, "I suppose M. Thibaut, father?"

Victor nodded absently. "Yes, or M. le cure."

"How do you feel to-day---Master?" asked Brigit, suddenly, forcing him to look at her.

His eyes as her gaze met his were so profoundly tragic that she shuddered, and he did not answer.

"I think I might eat more if I had my teeth," observed the bridegroom, "and I hear there is to be rabbit."

"Hush, father! you *know* you can't eat with your teeth. You are to have *minced* rabbit, with plenty of gravy." Madame Chalumeau, whose bright blue dress was very tight and warm, wiped her face on her handkerchief.

Brigit looked round in despair. It was horrible; the heat, the smell of food, the clatter of knives and forks.

For a long time she heard nothing, and then found that M. Thibaut the Mayor was trying to persuade Victor to play. "It would be very pleasant," urged the good man, with evident pride in his own tact, "and the young people might dance."

Joyselle burst out laughing. "Yes, I will play---for the young people to dance. That is what fiddlers are for," he answered.

M. Thibaut bowed. "It will be very pleasant," he repeated.

Felicite rose quietly and went to the kitchen for a moment, coming back with a plate of minced rabbit for her father-in-law. "*Voila*, papa," she said gently, and the old man stopped poking at the flies in his cider with his fork and

began to eat.

Suddenly, in his evident agony, Joyselle again looked at Brigit, and all her misery of suspense and curiosity flew to her eyes. "What is it?" they asked him. "Why are you tortured, and why are you torturing me who love you?"

He looked long at her, and then seeing her sympathetic suffering and her passion of wounded love, his face cleared, and for the first time that day he looked like himself.

He began talking, and in a few moments was making everyone at the table roar with laughter.

Brigit, though deeply relieved, was more puzzled than ever. "I want to talk to you after dinner," she said, leaning towards him, and he bowed. "I, too, have things to say to you, my dear," he answered, and they were both wildly happy.

Then the Mayor rose, and in short and stereotyped phrase drank to the health of the bride and groom.

The bridegroom had fallen asleep and was not wakened, but the bride bowed with some dignity.

"M. le cure---will you say a few words?" asked Victor courteously.

The old priest rose in obedience to the summons, and murmured a kind of blessing on the two he had joined together in his own youth. He remembered them both very well as they had been in that day; far better than he could in the days of their middle age. Now their three lives were nearly over: "We are all very old," he faltered, fumbling at his snuff-box, "very old-----"

Someone outside thought he had finished and began to clap. He sat down abashed, and took snuff to hide his confusion. Yes, they were all very old.

The meal ended at length with coffee, calvados, a local liqueur, and cheese.

"You are tired, my daughter?" asked Felicite, as Brigit frowned with impatience.

"Yes, *petite mere*."

Felicite, who for the last half hour had been fanning the sleeping bridegroom to keep off the flies, sighed.

"It is very warm. Why not go? They will clear the table and dance on the grass, I think."

Everyone left the arbour except her and the old man, and Brigit, feeling that Joyselle was close on her heels, went into the house and into the sitting-room.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Joyselle closed the door, and, to her surprise, turned the key. Then he faced her.

"Brigit," he said, clearing his throat, "do you love me?"

"Love you?" she faltered. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that for thirty-six hours I have doubted you, and that I have been-----–" He broke off short, his vivid face intensely expressive.

"But why? Thirty-six hours? That means that---–but I did not even see you yesterday!"

He stood, his arms hanging by his sides, looking at her without a word. Then, when the pause had grown unbearable, he returned slowly: "The night before last I saw you with Theo---–on the lawn."

A painful blush burnt her face, and, unwontedly abashed, she turned away. It seemed to her almost monstrous that Joyselle should have witnessed the little scene in the moonlight.

"You---–you saw him kiss me?" she faltered.

"Yes. But that was not the worst. He held open his arms to you, and---–you went to him as if---–as if you were giving yourself to him."

"I was, Victor. Surely you understand. He is so good, Theo---–so very good. And I have promised to marry him, and he has been patient, and I have treated him horribly. The longer I know him the better---–I like him. Surely you can't mind that?"

Joyselle did not raise his hand. He was, she saw with a curious sensation of detachment, undergoing a severe struggle.

"Mind? I---–the situation is---–horrible," he began, after a pause. "God knows I love my son, and I should hate you if you hurt him-----–"

"I know that," she interrupted quickly, and he looked up.

"Perhaps that is why-----–"

"Why? No. Ah, Victor, you know that I love you. You must know that. And yet I have promised to marry him. What are we to do?"

Through the open windows came the sounds of laughter and loud talk, and someone was playing snatches of a waltz on a violin.

Brigit, feeling that things outside her own control had hastened an inevitable crisis, stood waiting with the immobility of one consciously in the hands of Fate.

At last Joyselle came to her and took her in his arms. "Tell me that you love me," he whispered, "and then---–I can bear anything."

His unexpected resignation came, as so often is the case, rather as a shock to her. It was true that she had of late, during the reign of peace that had followed the last quarrel, been unusually happy, and that the thought of marrying Theo had become more bearable than she would have believed possible; the future had taken on an aspect of happy family life with Joyselle and Felicite, in which Theo's part had been pleasantly subordinate; more or less, although her mind had not formulated it, that of a brother.

Yet now Joyselle's resigned attitude did not please her.

"Then---–you don't mind my marrying---–another man?" she retorted quickly, instinctively using words that would hurt him.

He wiped his forehead, which was covered with small drops of perspiration.

"Don't mind! But, *ma cherie*, you must not torture me. The situation as it now is, is absolutely impossible. You don't understand. I love my son, God knows! Yet I am not made of stone, and before the love paternal He created the love of man for woman. I believe, as He hears me, that you were meant for me; that you are my woman, and I your man; that you were meant for me and I for you. But---–I was born too soon or you too late. I cannot, must not, have you, without outraging certain laws which must be respected. The only thing, then, is to bow to these laws. I belong to a generation older than yours, and before I knew that you existed my boy had chosen---–and won---–you. So you must be his. We have dreamed, my Brigit, through the last few months, and now we must awaken. You must marry Theo, and he will take you away for a few months, and when you come back as his---–wife, I shall---–I *will* have learned to love you in the only way I can love you without shame---–as my daughter."

It is curious, but strictly according to the laws of the feminine logic, that as he made this speech, haltingly, painfully, but with resolution in every word of it, Brigit's mind should slowly change to a feeling of resentment.

She herself had made up her mind to marry Theo, and she had seen plainly that this was fitting and wise; yet Joyselle's acceptance of these facts stirred her to rebellion, and once more she protested against his voicing of her own determination. "You are quite right," she said coldly; "it is only a pity that we did not see all this before!"

And in his turn he winced.

"We have been very mad," she continued, her old barbaric love of seeing him suffer returning. Then in her own pain: "But from this moment on I shall do my part, as you suggest. No doubt in a month's time we shall both be laughing at our little tragic comedy."

He did not answer, but his brown face slowly changed colour and he closed his eyes for a second.

"No doubt. As for me---–there is no fool like an old fool, they say. However, we have come to our senses in time---–thank God!" The last two words came with a sharp, spasmodic sound, and when he had said them he took from his pocket the silver box, with Marie-Rose engraved on it, and taking from it paper and tobacco, began to roll a cigarette.

Brigit was dumfounded as well as deeply hurt. His strength filled her with terror. That he could bow to Fate, she had not expected, and forgetting, as women do, that men's training from early boyhood teaches them, as nothing ever teaches women, the trick of momentary self-control, a wild doubt of his love flashed through her and took her breath away.

"You are angry," she ventured, hoping, though subconsciously and without cruelty, to break down his resolution. But he smiled sadly, for he was sincere.

"No, my dear, I am not angry. I am sad, because I love you---–as yet---–far more than I should, but---–from this moment on I shall bend all my strength to the conquering of that love. You must help me. You will know how, for women always know. Now---–will you shake hands with me and bid God bless me? It is to be a hard struggle for me, but I will win, for my will is strong, and the cause is good---–Is that you, Theo?"

"Yes, father." Theo was trying the door. "Anything wrong?" he added.

Joyselle turned the key. "No," he said quietly as his son entered, "but we were tired of the good company. I will go now, my dear. Stay and talk to your *fiancee*."

CHAPTER NINE

An hour later Brigit slowly mounted the stairs at the inn. She was desperately tired, and as unhappy as she was tired. Joyselle's attitude, although she was bound in common justice to acknowledge its correctness, hurt her to an almost incredible degree. Nothing had ever so wounded her, and she felt the longing common to reserved people to hide her pain from everybody.

So she had escaped from the Rue Victor Hugo under pretext of a headache, and, bidding Felicite and Theo good-night, hastened back here, not allowing the young man to accompany her, as he desired.

"I am very seedy," she told him, "and my head aches; I shall be better alone."

So Theo, with the biddableness that was an integral and to her rather annoying quality of his character, had said no more, and returned to the other guests. The gaily attired chambermaid, bearing a small jug destined to strike dismay to some British admirers of the Conqueror, met the girl on the stairs.

"*Bon soir*, mademoiselle," she said; "there's a telegram for you in your *salon*."

Brigit stood still. A telegram! Bad news probably. And such was her mental turmoil that at the thought she shrugged her shoulders. Almost anything that would change the nature of her trouble would be welcome.

But the contents of the telegram were bad.

"Tommy very ill. Diphtheria. Wants you.

"Mother."

Tommy ill! Poor little boy, with all his joy of life and enthusiasms, struck down by diphtheria! Why could it not be she instead?

But it was not the girl's nature to waste time in useless reflections when any possible course of action lay before her.

Ringing, she sent for M. Berton, the proprietor, and finding that a train left in half an hour, threw her belongings into her box and a few minutes later was in a ramshackle cab clattering stationwards. She left a note for Theo, but she was sincerely glad that time was too short for her to make any attempt to see either him or Joyselle. They had faded into the background of her mind, and in the foreground stood, piteous and appealing, poor little Tommy.

It was a gruesome journey, never to be forgotten, and made more bearable by several little acts of kindness on the part of her fellow-travellers, as such journeys are apt to be.

Brigit never again saw the fat Jewish commercial traveller who rushed from the train at some station, and nearly missed the train in his efforts, successful at last, to get her some tea; but she never forgot him. Neither did she ever forget a woman in shabby mourning who insisted on giving her a packet of somebody's incomparable milk chocolate.

And for hours and hours and hours the trains (for she had to change twice) rushed on through the slow-dying autumn evening and night, and part of the next day. Then at last London---a rush in a hansom to Victoria from Charing Cross, and the familiar little journey homewards. It was about three o'clock when she reached Kingsmead, and raining hard.

"'Is lordship is---still alive, my lady," Jarvis told her, choking a little, "but---pretty bad, my lady." Tommy had always laughed at Jarvis' manner, but Brigit liked it now.

The drive seemed endless, but at length there was the lodge, and the carp-pond, and the tennis-court, and---the beautiful old house, all blurred in the driving rain.

"Her ladyship is upstairs, my lady." And Brigit ran up the shallow, red-carpeted steps. But who was this old woman wrapped in a white shawl.

"Brigit-----"

It was Lady Kingsmead, and Brigit, looking at her mother, almost fainted for the first time in her life.

"How is he?" she gasped, leaning against the wall and wondering why it was so unsteady.

"He---his throat is better, but---he is very weak and---delirious. His brain, they say, is---over-active." Poor Lady Kingsmead burst into tears, wiping her eyes on the fringe of her shawl.

Brigit patted the strangely shrunken head compassionately. "Don't cry, mother," she said. "Is he in his room?"

"No---in the boudoir. His chimney smokes so in the autumn, you know."

Tommy lay in his own brass bed in the silken nest of his mother, a white-capped nurse by his side. The little boy's face was flushed and his head tossing restlessly to and fro on the embroidered pillows. "There's no use," he was muttering. "I tell you, it's quite silly to waste time; you should have begun long ago. He always said so, and he's right."

Brigit sat down by him. "Here's Bicky," she said, "with the Master's love for you, Tommy."

"He's gone away. Ratting with the Prince of Wales. Let's play his fiddle before he comes back. I've got that last exercise beautifully---only my little finger is so beastly short. If I'd been whipped when I was a kid it might have grown---there it goes! Hi, Pincher, after him!"

The nurse rose and moistened her patient's lips with water.

"How is he, nurse?" asked Brigit shortly.

"His throat's better, miss---my lady. But he's very weak. These active-minded little boys-----"

"I know; I know," interrupted the girl hastily. "When will he know me?"

The nurse hesitated. How could she tell? The relations always *did* ask senseless questions. The Persian kitten, now grown to be a cat less Persian than had been expected, came into the room, and the nurse took it up and put it out. "He always comes; he's a perfect nuisance," she observed. "They get so used to places, cats, don't they?"

Brigit nodded. "I'll go and change," she said. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Better take something to eat, my lady. The danger of infection is great, you know, and the tireder one is-----–"

"I know."

When she came back, Brigit found her mother installed in the room while nurse had her tea. Lady Kingsmead was a good nurse, greatly to her daughter's surprise, and all her affectations seemed to have been left in her dressing-room with her false hair.

The three women took turns sitting up with the invalid, but he recognised none of them. It was a very long night, and only the greatest determination kept Brigit awake during her watches, for she was extremely tired after her journey.

But at last day came, and with it a short return of consciousness. "Where's Bicky?"

"Here I am, Tommy darling," she answered, taking his hand. "Are you better, love?"

"Yes, I think so. Where's my violin?"

She fetched it, and he went to sleep, his wasted hand lying across the strings.

When he next spoke it was to talk utter nonsense about a flying-machine, an account of which he had read in a newspaper.

CHAPTER TEN

Poor little Tommy's passion for knowing things showed up very clearly the next few days, his over-active brain working hard propounding to itself question on subjects that Brigit had never heard him even mention. And one of the most pathetic subjects was that of her relations with her mother. "If Brigit would only come back and live here again," he said over and over again, "like other fellows' sisters. Things are so much pleasanter when she is here."

"I'm here, Tommy darling," she told him a hundred times, but he only shook his head and frowned gently. "You are very nice, and I like your hands, because they are cool and dry, but you are not Bicky. Bicky is beautiful."

His mother, on the contrary, the child always recognised, and his manner to her was almost protecting.

"Don't cry, mother," he would say. "I'm not so bad, really I'm not. You had better go and lie down, or you will not look pretty to-night."

His idea of evenings was, of course, of a time when mothers must look their best at any cost, and when no mother ever stayed upstairs.

Every evening, therefore, he could not rest until Lady Kingsmead had gone "to dress."

Brigit had never known how much the little fellow noticed the details of dress, and so on, but now she learned, for his remarks about his mother usually took the form of appreciation or dislike of some particular toilette.

"Wear pink, mother---–it suits you best---–and pearls. The diamonds make you look older."

Poor Lady Kingsmead, more lovable in her distress than her daughter had ever seen her, obeyed him humbly, and promising to wear pink, or whatever the colour might be, crept away to her bedroom and cried until she was scarcely recognisable.

Two days passed thus, the doctor coming many times and shaking his head doubtfully over questions about his patient. "The throat is much better---–the danger from that is quite past; but---–the fever does not go down, and I can't quite tell what the complication is. He is too young to have had a mental shock, so I can only assume that the too great activity of his mind is now against us. I understand that he has been studying very hard?"

This Brigit denied, but the doctor, on insisting, was told to interview Mr. Babington, and to the girl's amazement she learned that only a day or two before he was taken ill Tommy had betrayed the fact that for weeks he had been in the habit of spending part of each night in the disused chapel, practising on his violin.

"He is quite mad about his music," the young man mourned. "I never could get him to take the least interest in anything else, and as he always worked as little as possible for me, I could not understand his looking so tired, until, finding that he had heard the stable clock strike four, and knowing that one cannot hear the clock from his room, I pinned him down and he told me."

Brigit's eyes filled with tears.

The chapel, disused for many years, had evolved into a sort of lumber-room, and she could see, in her imagination, the pathetic picture of her little brother fiddling away among the piled-up boxes and old furniture, trying to hasten the moment when his beloved master would find him worthy of personal instruction.

It was all clear to his sister. Left alone, the child's whole strength---–far more strength than he should have been allowed to expend---–had gone to his passion for his violin, and now, unless a change for the better should come very soon, he must die, burnt with fever. And the fault would be hers. For the first time she felt the meaning of the word "duty." Tommy had been her duty, and she had neglected him.

At length one day she made a further discovery.

She was sitting by the bed, and for over an hour the child had lain still, his eyes half shut. It was five o'clock and a dark afternoon, so that the room was full of shadows.

Suddenly Tommy turned and looked at her.

"Brigit," he asked, recognising her for the first time, "are you in love with Joyselle?"

For a full minute she could not answer, and then said very gently, "Darling Tommy---–you know me?"

"Yes, yes, of course I know you. But---–*are* you? Carron and mother think so."

"Do they, Tommy? Well---–I love him dearly---–and so do you, don't you?"

"I don't mean *that*," he returned, with a gesture of impatience; "I mean the way people are who are going to marry each other."

His eyes, so huge in his wasted face, looked eagerly at her.

"Carron and mother think you do," he repeated, "and it makes me sorry."

She did not answer for a long time, and then she said humbly, not knowing how far he understood that whereof he spoke, and therefore obliged to feel her way, "Tommy dear---you forget *petite mere*."

"No, I don't---but she is *old*."

"She is younger than he."

But ill though he was, Tommy's sense of humour was still alive. "*That* doesn't matter! Oh, Bick, darling, I am so tired! And I do hope you aren't---I mean, *that*."

So, of course, she lied, and the little boy went to sleep, his hand in hers.

When, an hour later, she went to her room, she found a wire from Theo, announcing their arrival in London, and in spite of herself her spirits rose. Things must be better now that *he* was near her.

But things were not better, and the doctor, the next morning, looked very grave. "I think it bad to allow him to have his violin," he said; "it excites him and increases the fever. And---I think I should like a consultation."

Lady Kingsmead burst into tears and hurried from the room, but Brigit wrote a telegram, as dictated by the old doctor who had brought the boy into the world, to a famous physician in London, and a groom was sent galloping to the station to send it.

"Who is this person he always takes me for?" asked the doctor, polishing his glasses. "This morning he insisted on my---on my playing for him. I have never played anything except the cornet, when I was a young man. I---it very nearly upset me, Lady Brigit. I love Tommy."

Brigit flushed. "Wanted you to play the violin?" she returned.

"Yes. He has not done so until this morning for several days, but he quite insisted to-day."

"It must be---Joyselle. We---we know him very well, and Tommy adores him."

As she spoke the nurse came in.

"Would you mind coming, my lady? He is very restless and insists on trying to play. I can't quiet him at all-----"

They went back into the sick-room and found Tommy sitting up in bed, holding his violin in the position for playing, and scolding in a sharp staccato voice because he couldn't find his bow.

"Tommy, dear," Brigit said quietly, suddenly seeing her way clear, "I am wiring the Master to come to see you. He will play for you. Now give me your violin and lie down like a good boy."

Under the impression that she was Mrs. Champion, the housekeeper, but perfectly satisfied with her words, he gave up the fiddle obediently and lay down. The doctor nodded his approval and left a few moments later to send the telegram to Joyselle. And Brigit sat down by the bed and waited.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The weather had changed suddenly, and although it was only the 14th of September, it was cold and cheerless that afternoon.

Brigit, who had been sent out for a walk, tramped steadily down the road towards the village, her hands in her jacket pockets, her chin buried in her little boa.

Tommy was very ill; the London doctor had confirmed old Dr. Long's opinion: an over-developed mind in an under-developed body. These words in themselves were not very alarming, but Brigit's heart had sunk as Sir George uttered them.

"Is he---is he going to die?" she asked abruptly. Sir George hesitated. "We scientists are supposed to be atheists, my dear young lady," he returned, looking at his watch, "but I believe in God. And in all reverence I can say in this case that only He can tell. Lord Kingsmead is very weak, and I greatly dislike the abnormal activity of his brain, but---God is good. So let us hope."

Then the great man had gone.

By the 5.10 express Joyselle was coming. He had been out of town the day before, and the delay had been maddening. But now he was coming, and Brigit pinned her faith to the effects of his presence with savage fanaticism.

"He *must* help him," she repeated over and over again; "he loves him so."

The darkness of the day was congenial to her; sunshine would have seemed an insult. She reached the village, with its little straight street and modern red-brick inn, and passing through it turned to the left towards the station. It was only three, and Joyselle could not arrive for two hours; yet she felt that she was going towards him.

A motor rushed past her, covering her with dust and causing her to clench her hands in anger. "Beastly thing!" she said aloud.

Then out of the cloud of dust emerged---Joyselle, on foot, his violin-case in his hand.

"You!"

"Yes. I---couldn't wait, so I cut an engagement and took the 1.45, Brigit---how is he?"

He was flushed with the effort of rapid walking in a long coat and his hat was on one side. He was smoking, and forgot to ask her leave to continue. Small things were swept from his mind by his evident anxiety.

"He is---very bad. But---oh, it was good of you to bring your violin!"

"Of course I did. If anything on earth can quiet him, that will. What *is* the trouble now that the throat is better?"

"I don't know. He thinks and thinks, and can't sleep, and the fever will not go. In a grown person I suppose they'd call it brain-fever."

"Poor little boy."

They had passed the village and struck out on the straight road by the park.

"I---I have missed you, Victor," she burst out suddenly, looking round and laying her gloved hand on his arm.

"Hush!" he answered in a stern voice.

A second later he broke the silence by asking her if Tommy drank milk.

"No," she returned sullenly, "he hates it."

"That is a pity."

When they reached the gate and turned into the avenue she found to her surprise that her eyes were full of tears. She had slept very little for nights, and her nerves were upset. She wanted a personal word from him, a look, but he gave her none.

"Theo sent you his love," he announced presently. "He is coming down to-morrow. How is your mother?"

"All right. Victor---are you glad to see me?"

She stood still as she spoke, but he walked on, and she had to rejoin him as he answered in a matter-of-fact voice:

"Of course I am, my dear child."

His mouth she saw was set and determined. Feeling as though he had struck her, she went on in silence, and the silence remained unbroken until they had reached the house.

"I may go to him at once?" Joyselle asked her, as Burton helped him take off his coat.

"Yes."

They went upstairs together, and outside the door of the boudoir he paused and took the violin out of its case.

Tommy, who was talking very loud about Alexander the Great, stared at him without recognition.

"Allo, Tommy; here I am," Joyselle began, taking the boy's hand. "Come to scold you for being ill and worrying us all."

"I don't want you---not that it isn't very kind of you to come. I want---him. And he won't come."

Joyselle frowned at Brigit, who was about to speak. "Well---I am going to play for you, and it may amuse you till he does come."

He tuned his violin and began to play.

Brigit sat down by the bed and laid her hand in Tommy's.

It was a simple nursery melody that Joyselle played:

"*Il etait une bergere, he ron ron ron, petit pa-ta-pon*-----–" She had known it all her life, but to Tommy, who had always sternly refused to have anything to do with the French governesses his mother had got for him, it was new.

He listened with an intent frown, the fingers of his left hand curled inwards and moving as though he were trying to follow the air on imaginary strings.

Then as Joyselle went on to the delightful Pont d'Avignon, his hand relaxed, and he closed his eyes for a moment.

The room was nearly dark, and rain beat in gusts on the windows.

"*Fais dodo*," sang the fiddle softly, "*fais dodo.*"

"I like that. Play it again. Ah, Master---–it is you. I am so glad-----–"

Joyselle did not stop, but he smiled down at the boy as he played on very softly. "Of course it is I. I am delighted to see you so much better. Do you know 'Ma Normandie'? This is it-----–"

Tommy moved a little and settled his head more comfortably.

The boudoir was in an angle of the house opposite to which, a floor higher, was the gallery. As he played, someone in the picture-gallery turned on the electric lights, and one long shaft, coming through the window, shone down on the player's head.

"See the Halo, Bicky?" asked the boy in a natural voice. "Isn't he splendid?" Then he added, with the frown she so dreaded: "Take me away before they begin to clap, will you?"

"No clapping allowed, Tommy," Joyselle assured him quietly. "Know this?"

And he played on.

His face, full of tender solicitude, was, Brigit thought, almost divinely beautiful as she watched it. And by some curious freak of the down-falling light only his head and shoulders were visible, and seemed almost to be floating in the gloom. Never had he been so handsome, and never so pitilessly remote. He had forgotten her; he had forgotten love; he was not even the Musician---–he was a Healer, a being miles above and beyond her and her weak human longing.

Tommy's eyes had closed, and the low music went on and on. The room was now quite dark, save for the light that encircled Joyselle's head. It was like a wonderful picture, and the innate nobility of the man obliterated for the time all else from his fine face.

Tommy was asleep, and still the music went on.

"*Salut demeure chaste et pure*," he was playing now, and Brigit recalled with a great heart throb the evening she had met him in the train. "*Salut demeure*-----–" The high note, pure and thrilling, lingered long, and then, as it had come, the light went, and it was dark.

The music ceased, and there was a long pause. Then, without a word, Joyselle left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The morning of the fifth day after his arrival Joyselle went downstairs early, and out into the garden.

He looked, as he felt, very tired, for he had been with Tommy most of the time, day and night, and played until even his great strength was nearly exhausted.

For Tommy had clung to his presence in a very piteous way, crying weakly, since the fever had gone, every time the Master left the room, restless and unable to sleep unless played to, capricious and naughty about his food unless the Master sat by him while he ate.

Many children are disquietingly good during serious illness, and Tommy had been very patient while at his worst; but once on the road to recovery, the natural imp in him revived and flourished, making the road a hard one for his fellow-travellers.

There had been a phase when he smuggled his food under the bedclothes, pretending with diabolical cleverness to eat it; when the milk left by his side was poured out of the window the moment he had been left alone. But Joyselle, discovering these crimes, had taken to sitting by the boy when his meals were brought, and with him Tommy was almost painfully eager to be good.

The danger, Dr. Long declared, was now over, and within a week the invalid was to be moved to Margate.

In a few hours Joyselle was returning to town, and he was glad, for the strains, more than one, to which his stay had subjected him, were telling on his nerves.

The rose-garden, even in mid-September, was a pleasant place, and as he walked along its broad grass paths the violinist wished it were July, and that the fine standard roses might be in bloom. He loved flowers, and with the curiously rapid assimilation of superficial knowledge common to artistic natures, had picked up a considerable amount of rose-lore at the house of some friends in Devonshire.

There was one big yellow rose on a bush near the middle of the garden, and bending over it, he buried his nose in it.

"Victor!"

Brigit had joined him unheard, and stood looking at him, her hand held out. "Let me give you that rose."

But he shook his head. "No, let it die there. It is so beautiful among the leaves. You are up early."

"Yes. I saw you from the window, and brought you your letters." She handed him several as she spoke.

"Thanks."

"And---I want to thank you for staying. It is you, and only you, who have saved Tommy."

He nodded gravely. "I love Tommy. We must not let him overwork again, Brigit."

"No."

Joyselle turned over his letters without looking at them. "Did Theo speak to you the other day about---our---that is to say, his plan?"

Her face stiffened. "No."

This was the first time she had succeeded in seeing Victor alone during all the five days of his stay. Unobtrusively but effectively he had avoided her, shutting himself, when he was not in the sick-room, in his own room, under the pretext of fatigue or correspondence. And she had not submitted to this without repeated efforts to foil his intentions.

Again and again she had made little plans to catch him alone, but she had invariably failed, and as the days passed and she realised his strength of determination, a dull, slow fire of anger had begun to burn in her.

Theo, who had been down twice, had found her manner very unsatisfactory; she was strikingly different from what she had been in Falaise, and the young man was puzzled and hurt. While Tommy was still very ill he had borne with her change of mood with great patience, but the time was coming when he must demand an explanation. All this she felt and resented.

She looked, as she stood by the rose-bush, very tired, and older than her years, but she looked remarkably handsome; pallor and heavy eyelids did not disfigure her as they do most women.

Joyselle took out his silver box and made a cigarette.

"He was talking to me about it," he went on, disregarding the final quality of her negative. "And I find it very good. It is that Tommy should live much with---*you*---when you are married. Your mother does not know how to bring him up; he is delicate and high-strung, and Theo is very fond of him."

"I am not going to marry Theo!" she burst out, exasperated beyond endurance.

He looked up. "Are you mad?" he asked quietly.

"No. But---you seem to be trying to make me mad. I can't understand you, Victor."

"Can't you, Brigit? I should think it was very easy. You remember what we agreed at Falaise? That-----"

"That I was to marry Theo and 'live happy ever after'? Oh, yes, I remember. But do you remember how miserable you were the day before---and the day of---the wedding? And why that was?"

He was silent for a moment.

"Yes," he answered humbly. "I know. I was---jealous."

"Well---and you expect me to be happy and content while you behave as you are doing now? You never speak to me; you never look at me; you fly from me as if I were an infectious disease. It is---unbearable," she ended passionately. "I can't bear it."

He smoked in silence for some seconds. "I am---sorry to have hurt you, Brigit."

"Sorry to have hurt me! I don't believe you love me. If you were jealous, so am I! I will *not* be treated like this."

His white face was like a mask. "I am sorry," he repeated, with a kind of dogged patience.

"Then if you are---be good to me. I love you, Victor."

He met her eyes and his did not falter in their steady gaze. "Please do not excite yourself," he said very gently, "and---I think I will go in now. It must be breakfast time."

Driven beyond her own control by his tone, she caught his arm and pleaded with him, her voice harsh and broken, and she could not stop, although she saw that she was, besides annoying him, injuring herself in his eyes.

"Please---Brigit-----"

"Then tell me that you love me. You can't have stopped---it is only a week since the wedding---I---can't bear this-----"

But her mistaken line of conduct brought its inevitable punishment. "This is---absurd," he said coldly, "and---undignified. I told you at Falaise that I was ashamed of myself for being jealous of my son. It was monstrous and hideous. I think I have been not quite in my right mind for some time. But I have a strong will and can force myself to anything-----"

"And you are forcing yourself to kill your love for me-----"

"No. I am trying to learn to love you as a---a daughter, and I am beginning to succeed. But if you insist in making scenes like this-----" He broke off and gave his shoulders an expressive shrug. "It is---not womanly."

Then, breaking the yellow rose from the bush, he drew its stem through his button-hole and strolled leisurely away, whistling under his breath.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

For two days Brigit Mead remained in her room, refusing to see anyone. Tommy, who had reached the period when convalescents sleep most of the time, was told that she was resting, and that he must be very good and eat a great deal, with a view to surprising her by his progress when she reappeared.

But the girl was not resting.

Up and down the two rooms she paced, day and night, her face set, her hands clenched, talking aloud to herself sometimes, sometimes silent, always thinking, thinking, thinking of Joyselle.

Had he ceased to love her, or was it merely a pose, or---ten thousand theories occurred to her, to drive her perilously near madness in her solitude. Things he had done, words he had said, characteristics she had observed in him, all these things flashed into her mind, upsetting and confirming each and every theory with an utter lack of logic, but with pitiless conclusiveness.

And the longer she thought the more hopeless things grew. Theo himself she dismissed with furious impatience; his letters remained unopened, an affectionate wire of congratulation on Tommy's improvement she did not answer. He and everyone else were swept aside by the flood of emotional analysis regarding Joyselle that, in its headlong course, threatened to carry her reason with it.

"If I had been married," she thought over and over again with cruel shrewdness, "things---would have been different, and then he *could* not have escaped."

She wrote to Joyselle long letters full of incoherent self-accusations, and made appeals for pity, but she knew that he would not answer her, and so burned the letters.

She could not eat; did not even try, and the little sleep she got from sheer exhaustion, after tramping up and down for hours, was heavy and unrestful. Lady Kingsmead came to her door once or twice, but was not allowed to enter, and went away unprotesting. And then, the third morning, Dr. Long insisted on seeing her.

"Humph! Tired, are you? You look it. Tommy is going to Margate to-morrow. You had better go too."

"Is my mother going?"

"No. Nurse is taking him. It will do him good---and you. Is anything specific the matter?"

She looked at him and shook her head. "I am tired," she repeated.

"Very well. I'll give you some phosphites---and you had better go for a walk. You need air."

The old man bustled away, and Brigit, after a few minutes' reflection, went to her mother's room.

"I am going to town, mother," she began, without preamble, "and in a day or so I shall join Tommy at Margate. Dr. Long says I had better go, but---I have some things to see to first."

Lady Kingsmead, who was blackening her eyebrows before her glass, turned, one eye made up, the other very undressed-looking in its natural condition.

"But---you'll come back, Brigit? You aren't angry any more?"

"I---I don't know, mother. I---am so tired, I can't think."

Lady Kingsmead took up a letter that lay beside her and handed it to her daughter. "Read this---dear," she said rather humbly. And Brigit read:

"Dear Tony," it ran, in a curious irregular, downward-trending hand, "I've been awfully bad again, or I should have written before. I was at the Joyselles' yesterday, and they told me that the danger is over. I am so glad, poor old girl. How are you? And how is Brigit? I hope she will believe you when you tell her about that day after I saw her in Tite Street. I told her that you did not believe me and went for me, but she wouldn't listen to me, and I don't blame her. I'm pretty bad. I shan't last long, I think. Heart's getting bad, too. May I come down and see you some time? Joyselle tells me the wedding is to be next month-----"

Brigit crushed the letter violently in her hand and threw it down, her face distorted with anger.

"Poor old Gerald," commented her mother absently. After a pause she turned. "Brigit---I give you my sacred word of honour that I did not believe him that day. I never doubted you for a second. But he was so queer---so ill---that I was alarmed, and was trying to comfort him when you came in.

"Do you believe me?" she added, after a long pause.

Brigit, who stood by the window, nodded without turning.

"Oh, yes, I believe you," she said indifferently.

Then, before her mother could again speak, the girl left the room.

On her own table she found another letter, and to her surprise recognised Carron's writing in the address. With a sudden foreboding of evil, she sat down and opened the letter.

It was very long, written in pencil, and began:

"Before God, I swear you wronged your mother in thinking she believed what I said about you that day in Pont Street. Before God, I give you my word. Brigit, I am going to die; I cannot live. I don't like to live. The world is abominable. I hate everybody. I hate you. I hate God. The only way I can forget is to take morphine, and it is beginning to go back on me. Sometimes I don't feel it at all. And it is only the last of many friends to desert me-----–"

There were four pages of this, growing more and more incoherent, and then at the last, the writer went on, his writing suddenly larger and more distinct, as if he had taken pains to render it legible:

"I am going to die, Brigit, so good-bye. If you would have married me I should not have done this. It is all your fault. "Gerald Carron."

For an instant her indignation at the incredible cowardice of the man crushed every other feeling. Then a thrill of horror came over her. Looking again at the last page she saw below the signature:

"If you will come to see me at five o'clock to-morrow, and are kind to me, I won't do it."

Returning to her mother's room the girl handed her the letter. "Read the last page," she said briefly.

Lady Kingsmead shuddered. "We must wire him. We'll tell him to come down here---–he must be mad---–I---–oh, Brigit!"

Brigit shook her head. "Of course he's mad. But we must go to him. We'll wire from the station."

Hurrying her distracted mother to the train, the girl settled into a corner and remained in unbroken silence until they reached town.

"It is odious, disgusting of him," she broke out in the hansom as they went up St. James Street. "When he is quieted down, mother, you must make him understand that I absolutely refuse to accept the responsibility of his deeds. I never could bear him."

Lady Kingsmead nodded. "It is the morphine he takes. He must go into one of these great cure places---–or no, that is for drinking, I believe-----–"

They had reached the house and gone up the stairs before she spoke again. "I hope he won't be violent," she declared, "I wish you hadn't insisted on coming. A wire would have done every bit as well-----–"

No one answering the ring, Brigit tried the door on which a card bearing Carron's name was neatly tacked.

To her surprise the door was open, and crossing the little ante-chamber the two women went into the sitting-room.

Lying on his face by the fireplace, in which red ashes still glowed, Gerald Carron lay dead, a revolver near him, his face in a small pool of blood.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Lady Kingsmead fainted dead away for once in her life, dropping in a huddled heap near the man she had loved and unloved.

Brigit stared at them for a moment, wondering vaguely which of them was dead, which only fainting. Then, just as she was kneeling to raise her mother to a better position, the door opened and two men, one of them Giacomo, Carron's valet, entered in great haste.

The second man was, he explained, a doctor, whom the valet had gone for on finding his master's body.

The next few minutes were minutes that Brigit never forgot. The Italian servant, chattering and weeping, the young doctor helping her to loosen Lady Kingsmead's tight clothes; his hurried explanations and questions; the very closeness of the air, with the smell of gunpowder still faintly perceptible.

Lady Kingsmead, laid upon Carron's bed, came to in a few minutes in violent hysterics, and the young doctor, when he had given her a soothing draught, insisted on the two women leaving.

"I must send for the coroner," he explained, "and it will be unpleasant. Your cab is still at the door, I think? May I have your address?"

He was very civil and sympathetic, this young medico, but he was also rather too obviously impressed by his own importance and this gruesome occasion. Brigit gave him the address of her flat, and helping her mother into a four-wheeler, as more suitable than a hansom, the two women drove away towards Kensington.

"I hadn't been in his room for years," sobbed Lady Kingsmead, forgetting her complexion. "Did you see the pastel of me on the wall between the windows? And I gave him the clock, too, for his thirty-fifth birthday. Oh, Brigit! He loved me insanely, poor Gerald, perfectly madly, and so did I." She broke off, to her daughter's relief, and sobbed again.

Brigit's flat was warm and smelt unaired. Two or three letters lay on the mat inside the door, a huge blue-bottle boomed at a window trying to get out.

Lady Kingsmead lay down on Maidie Compton's Chesterfield and wept loudly. "Oh, Gerald, Gerald, how we loved each other," she wailed. "He would have died for me. He very nearly killed himself-----–"

Suddenly the foolish woman sat up and pointed an accusing finger at her daughter. "And it is all your fault," she cried bitterly; "he said so in that letter---–my poor love. Your fault, and you my daughter. You broke his heart, you tortured him, and you took him from me. I---–I *hate* you."

Brigit stared coldly at her. "Don't make a fool of yourself, mother," she said. "You know perfectly well that there is not a word of truth in what you say."

"There is, there is! It was when you began to grow up that he ceased loving me. It is all your fault. He wrote it to you. You are to blame; you murdered him, his blood is on your head! And I scolded him when he told me about you and Joyselle. I refused to believe him. Oh, Gerald, Gerald!"

How much she believed of what she said it is impossible to say, but her lack of self-control and her immense egotism were such that together they made a formidable force to argue against.

Brigit sneered as she looked down at her. "For Heaven's sake, don't be so ridiculous," she said impatiently. "And don't---lie."

"I am *not* lying. He told me about you and Joyselle, and I believe him. Yes I do, I believe him. You are in love with the man, and that's why you don't marry his son-----"

"Look here, mother," Brigit's temper was rising fast. "Answer one question quietly, will you? Do you believe what Gerald Carron told you about me and Joyselle?"

And Lady Kingsmead, whose hysterical excitement was now well beyond control, screamed out that she did believe it.

Brigit rose. "Very well. Think as you like. And---good-bye."

She left the house without a word, and taking a hansom went straight to Golden Square.

Felicite, who was alone, kissed her kindly and insisted on giving her tea. This, however, Brigit refused. Desperate as she was, she had come to the point of feeling that she could never again accept the little woman's hospitality. What she was going to do she did not know, but she was not going to marry Theo, and she would never again come to Golden Square.

"No, thanks," she said gently, "I want to see your husband, so as you think he is there, I will rush up to Chelsea. You look tired---*petite mere*."

Felicite smiled. "I am. I have been turning out our room and re-hanging all the pictures. But I like doing it. How is dear Tommy?"

"Much better, thanks. He is going to Margate to-morrow---to the sea, you know."

Felicite went downstairs with her and kissed her again at parting. "Theo will be very glad you are in town," she said. "And you, my daughter---do things go better with you?"

Touched by the kind light in her innocent eyes, Brigit lied. "Ah, yes, much better, thank you," she returned; "everything is all right."

And when she was in her hansom hurrying Chelseawards, she felt with a sigh that it was a harmless lie.

"She is a dear, poor Felicite, and when Victor has told her that I will not marry Theo, and I have gone away---she will be less troubled."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

As she went up the stairs in the house in Tite Street, Brigit recalled the occasion of her other visit there and shuddered. Poor Carron. Could it have been partly her fault?

And that was her only tribute to his memory. Essentially selfish though the girl was, she was no hypocrite, and it did not occur to her now to make excuses for the man simply because he was dead.

But it had been just here at the turning of the dusty stairs that he had waylaid her on her way down after her first love scene with Joyselle, and she could not pass without recalling it.

Then she had been gloriously happy, feeling, because she and Victor loved each other, that the world was theirs; now she came a broken-willed, frightened woman, to plead with the man who had put her out of his life, to take her back. She would tell him that no matter what happened, she would never marry Theo, and---then, when he realised that she meant this, she would beg him to take her back.

And remembering the last days she trembled.

She knocked at his door, and a short, familiar bark answered the sound.
Papillon. But-ter-fly.

Joyselle opened the door, which had been locked, and when he saw her, his face, already sombre, darkened ominously.

"Brigitte---what do you want?" he asked, not offering to let her in. Behind him, on a table, she saw his violin-case---unopened, and her heart gave a glad hope. He had not been working. He had been, she hoped, unable to work.

"May I come in, Victor?" she asked.

Still he did not move. "Why?" he asked uncompromisingly.

"Because I have things to tell you. Don't be afraid. I am not going to make a scene-----"

He drew aside, and she went in and closed the door. Papillon sprang at her with delight, and she laughed sadly.

"*He* is glad to see me," she said; "aren't you, Yellow Dog?"

Joyselle shrugged his shoulders and sitting down on the sofa lit a cigarette. "Well?" he asked after a pause.

Brigit sat down by him and took off her gloves.

"Victor---why have things---been as they have been of late?"

"You know why."

"Because the father in you is stronger than the lover?"

"I have never been your lover," he retorted harshly, hurling the words at her as if they had been an accusation.

She winced. "I am speaking English. Well---was it your loyalty to Theo that---that changed you?"

"I have been loyal, have I not? *Juste ciel!*" Rising, he walked about the great room, his hands clasped behind him. "My conduct was magnificent, was it not? Don't quibble with words, Brigit. In plain language, I was a scoundrel, a beast, and now I am trying to behave---not like a gentleman, but like a decent man. And why you won't let me, I don't know."

He was suffering, she saw with a sigh of relief.

"Then you still love me?" she asked coolly.

"Yes. Does a man change in a week? You are a child. Now tell me what you have come for---if you have any object other than your usual one of seeing how much I can endure, and then---go. I am strong, and you cannot make me change my mind, and I---I despise you for trying to make of me---the---*thing* I was at one time. But I am not made of stone, and you hurt me---almost too much."

His voice was very even and low-pitched, but she shrank back in her corner and hastened to answer.

"You wrong me. I have not come to tempt you. I have come---to tell you that nothing in the world nor out of it can induce me to marry Theo."

"You will not-----"

"No, I will not marry him."

Papillon, who had unearthed a long-cherished bone in a dark corner under a Dutch cabinet, dragged his treasure across the floor and laid it at his master's feet with a pleased growl.

"You will not marry Theo?"

"No."

She had risen, and the two faced each other defiantly, while the little dog between them wagged his tail with joy.

"Why?" asked Joyselle sharply.

"Because---I cannot. I have dawdled and dallied, and refused to face things long enough. Now I see that the worst crime I could commit against him would be to marry him. I love you. Whether you love me or not, I love you, and I always shall. And I ask you as a great favour to tell Theo for me that I cannot marry him."

"But what are you going to do?"

His voice trembled and he spoke very slowly.

"I am---going away. I don't know where. To Italy, probably, with the Lenskys. And I shall, I daresay, marry in the course of time."

"Whom are you going to marry?" he cried furiously, forgetting that she had just said that she loved him, and mad with jealousy.

She laughed. "*Qui sait?* I don't. Possibly Lord Pontefract---he has just come back from the Andes---possibly someone whom---you do not know."

"Then," returned Joyselle very quietly, "I will kill him."

And she could have laughed aloud.

"You will tell Theo?" she asked, picking up her gloves.

"No, I will not. I cannot. And you shall not go. Or, yes---Brigit---you shall go---with me. If you will not marry him, then there is nothing between us. I have fought, I have done my best, but I can bear no more. We will go, you and I----"

Catching her in his arms he held her close, whispering incoherent, broken words in her ear, while the little yellow dog, thinking it was a game, snapped playfully at her trailing skirts.

"You will go with me, my woman? You and I alone, all alone? For ever and ever and ever?"

And putting her arms round his neck she answered, "Yes, I will go with you. For ever."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Brigit Mead did not go to bed at all that night. All night she worked in her little flat making her plans, packing, and writing letters.

She had burnt her boats and the relief was great. Having broken with her mother, there was no need for her to write to Kingsmead. To Tommy she sent a note, saying that she was going away, but would write soon and explain.

To Pam Lensky she wrote a rather long letter, for there were some few things she wanted made clear.

"Dear Pam,"---she began abruptly---"I am going away with Victor Joyselle. I wonder if you will blame me? In case you do, here is my only defence. I hate my present life, I am miserable without Joyselle, and he is miserable without me. My mother, with whom I have been on fairly decent terms since Tommy has been ill, is hopeless. Gerald Carron shot himself to-day, and mother, just, I honestly believe, to indulge her own taste for sentimental scenes, turned on me about him and pretended to believe a story he told her just before I left Pont Street---that I was Joyselle's mistress, in fact. If she believed the story I would forgive her, though it is not true, but I cannot forgive the kind of mind that can amuse itself with such vulgar melodrama. I have always disliked my mother, and now I simply cannot bear her any longer.

"And I have no other ties except Tommy. Tommy, to whom I shall write before long, is nearly well. He will be forbidden to come to see me, but he will come, and I do not think it will hurt him.

"As to Theo, Pam, I am deeply grieved. He is a remarkably nice young man, but I cannot marry him, and the mere fact of his father's loving me will not much hurt him. Whatever his father does, Theo in the long run thinks right, and he, too, will forgive us.

"Then there is poor Felicite. She has been very kind to me, but she has been stupid and over-self-confident, and I cannot consider her. I must consider him. She will suffer and I am indeed sorry, poor soul, but he---he shall be happy. So

good-bye, Pam. Remember your own father and mother, and understand. We go to Paris by the eleven o'clock train to-morrow, and thence---–to Arcadia, as your people used to say. My love to you. "Brigit."

Re-reading this letter, which she was far too self-engrossed to consider selfish, Brigit addressed it.

Then she looked over her clothes, packed them in three boxes, one of which she labelled, "To be called for," the other two of which were to go with her.

It was long after one when she had finished her work and sat down to rest. She was not tired, nor did she feel any special excitement. It had happened, that was all, and it seemed to her that she had always foreseen this night, with its letter writing and packing.

To-morrow at this time they, she and Victor, would be in Paris. And then they would go---–where-ever he chose. She did not care.

And, although she did not know it, this unformulated mental attitude was the first sign in her of any approach to an unselfish love.

Through the long hours she sat in her brilliantly lighted little sitting-room, waiting for day. At five o'clock she switched off the electricity and opened the blinds. A wan light came in.

"It is day. It is *to-day*," she told herself aloud, her beautiful mouth quivering with happiness. "In four hours he will come."

She made herself a cup of tea and then lay down on the sofa where her mother had lain the day before, and went to sleep.

She dreamed that she stood in a sloping, very green meadow; in the distance a flock of dingy sheep browsed, and some invisible person was playing a pipe! "*Il etait une bergere he ron, ron, ron*,"---–it was the nursery song Joyselle had played to Tommy when the little boy was ill. She smiled and moved her head.

Then suddenly she was awake, and Theo stood before her. "Brigit," he said quietly, "my mother is dead. Will you come to father?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Felicite had died in her sleep beside her husband. An hour before he had waked, and, lying quietly by her, thinking no doubt of the woman for whom he was going to desert her, he had by chance touched her hand as it lay on the counterpane, with the shabby black rosary in it, and---–the hand was cold.

They had not called a doctor, for there was no doubt that she was dead, and she had hated doctors. She had been very happy the day before, and in the evening she had asked Joyselle to play to her, a thing she very rarely did. He had played, they had drunk some Norman cider, and gone to bed early.

"Father was tired," Theo added, as the hansom stopped.

Brigit dared not speak. Could it be that Joyselle had told her, after they had gone to their room? He would have had to tell her either then or the next day---–to-day. He had not feared to tell her, for his delirium was such that he feared nothing, and besides, she was always very gentle.

"She will understand," he had told Brigit, "that I cannot help it."

Had he told her? Had the last beats of that gentle heart been unhappy ones, or had the Madonna, to whom she prayed with such simple confidence, spared her that supreme shock, and allowed her to die happy, with her man beside her?

"Father has not spoken since---since the first," Theo whispered as they crept up the stairs. "I---he rather frightens me."

The door of Felicite's room was closed, and for several seconds Brigit dared not open it. Then, very softly, she turned the handle, and motioning Theo not to follow her, went in.

On the bed, the counterpane drawn smoothly over it, the little figure, with the rosary still between its fingers; and kneeling by the pillow, his silvery hair flowing forward, Joyselle.

He started on hearing the door open, and after a pause, rose.

"She is dead," he said slowly. "My wife is dead."

Brigit caught at a chair as she saw his face, for it was the face of an old man, blanched and wrinkled and hollow-eyed.

"My wife is dead," he repeated.

Then he turned to the table, and seeing her shabby old red-lined work-basket, took it up and held it to his breast.

As he stood, his back to her, as to one who did not belong there, who was an intruder, he began to cry, great slow tears dropping into the basket, wetting the red lining, and, no doubt, rusting the very needle she had used yesterday.

Brigit saw his face in the glass.

"Oh, Victor," she faltered, her hands clasped.

He turned and pointed to the bed.

"You will excuse me," he said, with an evident effort to be polite, "but I cannot talk. My wife is dead."

And the girl turned and crept from the room. She understood. And she left him as he wished, alone with his wife, who was dead.

Going quietly downstairs, she went to the nearest flower shop and bought a great mass of the yellow-crumple-leaved roses that Joyselle had once told her grew in Normandy.

Then she went back to Golden Square.

"He will not leave her, Brigitte," Theo told her as he met her on the stairs, "and the doctor is troubled about him. He says---the shock has been almost too great for---for his mind. I---I knew he loved her---oh, *petite mere cherie*---but I never knew how much. Ah, my dear, they had grown together in the twenty-six years they were man and wife, and now she has left him-----" The young man put his arm on the balustrade and wept quite simply and unrestrainedly.

Joyselle, who was sitting by his wife, looked up when Brigit entered with the roses, but he did not speak.

"I have brought these---for *her*---Beau-papa," the girl faltered, and he rose.

"Thank you. Yes, she loved roses---ma Felicite."

Brigit noticed, with a thrill of horror, remembering what the doctor had said, that he spoke not quite distinctly; his tongue was a little thick.

"Let us," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, "thank God that she died so happily, with you by her side."

He passed his hand over his forehead where the halo of hair lay so untidy.

"Yes. Let us thank God. You see, *ma fille*---I have not been a good man. I have loved many women---or thought I did. I have betrayed her love for me; I have---*enfin*, I have not been good. But---it all meant nothing. She was the bride of my youth, the companion of my---of my young manhood." He stammered again, and went on with the slight difficulty she had noticed before, "and---I know now that after all, and in spite of all, I have loved only her. *Felicite, ma vieille, tu m'entends?*"

He laid the roses on the pillow near her little peaceful face, and then sat down again.

"My wife is---dead," he added.

THE END.