The Silver Butterfly



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Mrs. Wilson Woodrow

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THE SILVER BUTTERFLY ***



The
Silver Butterfly

By
MRS. WILSON WOODROW

With Illustrations by
HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY

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CHAPTER I

Hayden was back in New York again after several years spent in the uttermost parts of the earth. He had been building railroads in South America, Africa, and China, and had maintained so many lodges in this or that wilderness that he really feared he might be curiously awkward in adapting himself to the conventional requirements of civilization. In his long roundabout journey home he had stopped for a few weeks in both London and Paris; but to his mental discomfort, they had but served to accentuate his loneliness and whet his longings for the dear, unforgotten life of his native city, that intimate, easy existence, wherein relatives, not too near, congenial friends and familiar haunts played so important a part.

On the journey from London he had felt like a boy going home for the most delightful holidays after a long period in school, and to calm and render more normal his elation, he told himself frequently as he drew nearer his native shores that he was letting himself in for a terrible disappointment; that all this happy anticipation, this belief, an intuition almost, that some delightful surprise awaited him, was the result of many lonely musings under the cold remote

stars in virgin forests and wide deserts, a fleeting mirage born of homesickness.

But all these cautions and warnings and efforts to stifle this irrepressible and joyous expectation were quite unavailing and, as he decided after he had been home a week, equally unnecessary, for the unaccustomed, piquant sense of anticipation remained with him and gave a flavor to his days which in themselves were not lacking in flavor; for merely to look, to loiter, to play at an exquisite and to him exotic leisure was infinitely agreeable. The more delightful, indeed, because it was merely temporary. Hayden had come to New York with a definite purpose in view and his recreations were purely incidental.

His cousin, Kitty Hampton, was expressing her envy of him one winter morning as they were strolling down the Avenue together. Now it should be explained that Mrs. Warren Hampton, even if she was small to insignificance and blond to towness, thus increasing her resemblance to a naughty little boy, was nevertheless a very important person socially.

"I wish I could get up some of your nice, fresh enthusiasm, Robert," she said discontentedly. "Everything seems awfully stupid to me."

"That's because you've no imagination, Kitty. Fancy this seeming stupid!" He drew in the cold air of the sparkling morning with a long breath of satisfaction. "If your eyes had been traveling over the glare of deserts or plunging into the gloom of tangled forests for several years, you would think people and all this glitter and life and motion a very delightful change. Why, everywhere I look I see wonders. I

expect anything to happen. Really, it would not surprise me in the least to turn a corner and meet a fairy princess any minute."

Kitty fell in with what she supposed was his mood. "We will turn the very next corner and see," she said. "But how will you know her even if we should meet her."

"I shall know her, never fear," he affirmed triumphantly, "whether she wear a shabby little gown, or gauzes and diamonds. I shall look into her eyes and know her at once."

He was laughing and yet there was something in his voice, a sort of ring of hope or conviction, that caused Kitty to lift her pretty sulky little face and look at him with a new interest. And Hayden was not at all bad to look at. He was well set-up, with a brown, square face, brown hair, gray eyes full of expression and good humor and an unusually delightful smile, a smile that had won friends for him, of every race and in every clime, and had more than once been effective in extricating him from some difficulty into which his impulsive and non-calculating nature had plunged him.

"The fairy princess," she repeated slowly and quite seriously. "Sure enough, there should be one." She gazed at him appraisingly: "Young—moderately young and good-looking enough. You haven't got fat, And all that tan is becoming, and—how are you off anyway, Bobby?"

He looked down at her amusedly. "The fairy princess would never ask that question."

"Oh, yes, she would. Do not dream that she

wouldn't—to-day."

"Very well, then. To be perfectly truthful, I have 'opes. I believe I have found my pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Yes, I do. Oh, it's nothing very definite yet, but I believe, I truly believe I've struck it."

"How?" she asked curiously.

"Ah, my dear, I'm not quite ready to tell. It's a romance, as you will agree when you hear it. What's the matter?"

For Kitty instead of showing any proper, cousinly enthusiasm was looking at him with a frown of petulant vexation.

"Then why couldn't you have come home six months, even three months earlier? Young, good-looking, and, as I now discover, rich, or about to be. Oh, it is too bad!"

He gazed at her in amazement. "My dear Kitty," in playful humility, "even if your flattering estimate of me is true, I don't see why you should be so disgruntled about it."

Her April face broke into smiles, and yet she sighed. "Oh, Bobby, because, because I'm afraid the fairy princess is bespoke. Yes," nodding at his astonishment, "I have a fairy princess in mind, one in whose welfare I am deeply interested."

"Oh," comprehendingly, "one of your protégées, whom you are trying to marry off. I assure you once and for all, Kitty, that such will not do for me. I want the real thing in fairy princesses; under an enchantment, detained in the home of a wicked ogre;

all that, you know, and lovely and forlorn."

She looked at him oddly. "If you only knew how you confirm my impression."

"Of what?"

She paid no attention to him. "I wish I knew certainly. She won't tell until she gets ready, but it looks very much as if she were engaged to Wilfred Ames. You remember him, do you not?"

Hayden thought deeply a moment. "A big fellow? Very light hair, blue eyes?"

"Yes, yes," she nodded, "'the flanneled fool at the wicket, muddied oaf at the goal' type, you know. One of those lumbering, good-looking babies of men that women like Marcia always attract. Every one thinks it's an awfully good thing, and I dare say I'd agree with them, if you hadn't happened along. But his mother! My patience, his mother! And she's behaving like a cat about the whole affair. Just as if Marcia's mother were not enough! Oh," in a burst of impatience, "why do not things ever arrange themselves properly?"

He laughed, Kitty always made him laugh; but his curiosity was aroused sufficiently to ask: "Have I ever in my remote past met this paragon of a fairy princess?"

"No-o, no, I don't believe you have. Her mother took her to Europe when she was quite young and she has lived over there most of her life."

"What is her name?" he asked idly.

"Marcia, Marcia Oldham."

"But Oldham," with more show of interest. "Oldham! I seem to remember that. Isn't her father an old curmudgeon of a millionaire?"

"He was before he went to smash and died," she returned briefly. "He left a wife and one daughter."

"And the daughter is the fairy princess," he was evidently amused at Kitty's match-making proclivities. "But, Kitten, unless I am assured that she is under an enchantment, she will not do."

Again his cousin looked at him with that untranslatable expression in her eyes, a little, half-bitter smile on her lips. "I'm only too afraid we shall be able to satisfy you in that regard," she stared before her with somber eyes. "Marcia is very lovely and very gifted. She paints wonderfully well. I have some of her water colors. You must see them." She spoke with a complete change of tone, evidently not caring to discuss her friends' distresses whatever they might be. "By the way, Bobby, don't you want to dine with me this evening? I'll be all alone. Warren is still in the West, you know. Dine with me, and we will go on to Bea Habersham's afterward."

"Thank you, Kitty dear, but I'm going to see Mary Garden in *Thaïs*, this evening, so I'll be dining early. But why won't you take tea with me somewhere this afternoon, or else give me a cup or so?"

"No. Can not." She shook her head decisively.

"Bridge?" he asked whimsically.

"For a wonder, no. Something far more interesting. I'm taking two women to a wonderful

fortune-teller. Quite the most remarkable creature you ever heard of. Why, Bea Habersham lost a big sapphire ring last week and this woman told her exactly where to find it, and Bea went right home and laid her hands on it."

"What's her name? Where is she?" Hayden asked, with mock eagerness. "Perhaps she will find the fairy princess for me."

They had reached Mrs. Hampton's home by this time, and she took occasion to look at him scornfully before entering. "Doubtless she will if you pay her enough," she said. "And her name is —— Oh," wrinkling her forehead in perplexity, "I've got it down somewhere, but for the moment, it's gone out of my head. Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle —— Oh, an odd name. I'll remember it sooner or later. Good-by."

"Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle—" he teased her, imitating her voice. "Oh, an odd name," And he laughed. "But, Kitty, do beg her to find me the fairy princess."

CHAPTER II

When the curtain fell on the first act of *Thaïs*, that evening, Hayden drew a long sigh. He had been enjoying it with that keen, pleasant appreciation, that boyish glow of enthusiasm which still remained with him. Then he turned his attention to the house and amused himself by picking out an occasional

familiar face, and admiring the carefully dressed heads and charming gowns of the women about him, and the whole brilliant flower-garden effect of the audience.

Presently, he noticed with some surprise that in spite of a crowded house the two seats next him remained unoccupied; but just before the curtain rose again he turned his head suddenly to discover that one of the seats at least, the one farthest from him, was filled. The recognition of this fact came almost with a shock, a pleasurable shock, for the new arrival was a young and beautiful woman and his first feeling of surprise was shot with approbation at the noiselessness of her entrance, an approbation that he longed to express verbally.

She had slipped past several people, and taken her seat without any of the jingling of chains, rattling of draperies and dropping of small articles which usually proclaim the disturbing appearance of the late feminine arrival, and seem, in fact, her necessary concomitant. But this young woman though she had so recently entered yet managed by some magic at her command to convey the impression of having been in her seat all evening.

Hayden hated to stare at her. He was, in fact, entirely too well bred to do anything of the sort, and yet, quite disgracefully, he longed to do nothing on earth so much, and further he was inclined to justify himself in this social lawlessness.

If women, either wilfully or unconsciously, succeeded in making pictures of themselves, they must expect to be gazed at. That was all there was to the matter. Only, and there was the rub, Hayden couldn't very well profit by the courage of his

convictions, in spite of his truculent self-assurance, for the simple reason that he wasn't capable of it.

The lady was, he decided by virtue of his stolen glances, about twenty-five years old, although her poise of manner indicated a composure beyond her years. And she was tall and slender, with a straight, regular profile, and dark hair which fell back from her face in soft natural waves, and was very simply arranged. She had, in fact, a simplicity, almost an austerity of what one might call personal effect, which formed a contrast, certainly interesting and to Hayden at least as certainly fascinating, between herself as she impressed one and her very elaborate and striking costume.

Her wonderful gown—even Hayden's untutored masculine senses appreciated its wonderfulness—was of some clinging green material which embraced her in certain faultless lines and folds of consummate art. About the hem it was embroidered with silver butterflies, irregularly disposed yet all seeming to flutter upward as if in the effort to reach her knees. These also decorated her low corsage and spread their wings upon her sleeves. She wore no jewels; and her only ornament was a large butterfly in silver, upon her breast, with diamond- and ruby-studded wings and ruby eyes.

A butterfly! Was he dreaming? Had he thought so much of butterflies that he saw them everywhere? For since his return from South America, Hayden had exhibited a marked interest in butterflies, although, curiously enough, this enthusiasm was not in the least entomological.

But to return to the lady. One foot was thrust a little from her gown, and Hayden was quick to notice

that it was encased in a green satin slipper with a buckle which was a replica of the butterfly on her breast, only smaller in size. The whole idea of her costume struck him as fanciful, original and charming; and then—and then—it was only a coincidence, of course; but it started a train of thought which gradually merged into giddier hopes.

His admiration of her seemed to be universal, at least within the confines of the opera-house, for it was evident that either the lady or her gown, or both, attracted a vast deal of attention to which she on her part was either entirely oblivious or else so accustomed as to be indifferent. At last, she turned toward Hayden a little with a slight change in her expression which he translated as annoyance. He was at once overcome with a swift feeling of embarrassment, of compunction. It seemed to him that he must have sat with his eyes riveted on her. Resolutely, he turned them toward the stage until the poignant sweetness of the intermezzo began to dream through his consciousness as an echo of "that melody born of melody which melts the world into a sea," and then, involuntarily, without premeditation, obeying a seemingly enforced impulse, he had turned toward her and she had lifted her eyes, violet eyes, touched with all regret; and a sudden surprised ecstasy had invaded every corner of his heart and filled it with sweetness and warmth, for the music, that enchanting, never-to-be-forgotten intermezzo, had revealed to him—the fairy princess.

In a moment that he dreamed not of, around some unexpected corner of life, she had turned her feet and he, crass fool that he was, was not sure that it was she; like all faithless generations, he had waited for a sign, until at last, in the ebb and flow of

the music, she had lifted her sweet eyes and he had known her finally, irrevocably, and for ever.

He could not gratify his own insistent longing to move nearer her, or to gaze and gaze at her, so during the next act he confined his glances rigorously to the stage. Almost immediately, however, after the curtain fell, he happened to glance, by mere chance, toward one of the boxes, and his heart stood still, for there far back in the shadowy depths, she was standing talking earnestly to a dark, thin woman in rose-color with drooping cerise wings in her shining black hair.

He turned involuntarily, half believing himself the victim of some hallucination and expecting to see her still sitting in her seat, only to find that she really had gone. For a moment, a cold chill ran down his back. How could she have vanished without his knowing it? It seemed incredible. What an uncanny way she had of coming and going! He glanced up at the box again where he fancied he had seen her; but the lady in cerise was now seated, talking to two or three men.

Good heavens! He began seriously to doubt the evidence of his senses. Had she, his fairy princess, ever really been in the house at all or had he dreamed her—her and her butterflies? Was she, after all, some fantasy born of the music and his dreaming imagination? And would it ever be possible to dream her again; or, if she were real, where, where could he find her? To discover a fairy princess and to lose her, lose her, as he ruefully confessed, like a needle in a haystack, was worse than never to have found her.

The final curtain fell. He rose with the rest of the house, dejectedly enough, let it be said, when,

glancing at his feet, he saw one of the small butterflies that had evidently fallen from her shoe. He almost shouted. Cinderella had left her glass slipper at the ball, or what, in this case symbolized it, and he had found it. He slipped it carefully into his pocket and wasted no time in hastening home; but once in the seclusion of his own apartment, he drew it forth and carefully examined it. It was an exquisite trinket fashioned with infinite care and perfectly conceived, with delicate threadlike antennæ, wings so thin as to be almost transparent, and ruby eyes. He smiled afresh with a kind of triumphant satisfaction.

Before him stretched a vista of golden opportunities, for this valuable and unique ornament must be returned. Naturally, it was a commission that he could intrust to no one but himself. Any one would concede that; and she, of course, in accepting it, would have to show a decent appreciation of his good offices; and they would probably discover mutual friends or acquaintances, or if they did not happen to possess such a thing as a friend or even an acquaintance in common, he would find exercise for his ingenuity by very speedily rectifying that difficulty. Either to invent or to discover some kind of a mutual friend or acquaintance was a task to which he felt himself fully equal, and with this comforting reflection uppermost in his mind, Hayden finally composed himself to slumber. Only, and this was his last conscious thought, he did wish she had looked happier. She was like a flower, exactly like the violets that drooped below the silver butterfly on her breast.

"Oh, faint, delicious, springtime violet!" But again—that little pang was like a stab at his heart—

he did wish that her sweet eyes had not been touched with all regret.

CHAPTER III

Hayden wasted no time, the next morning, in putting an advertisement in the "Lost and Found" columns of the various newspapers, signing his full name and address. Two lagging days passed, and then, just as hope was beginning to fade, he received a letter written in the third person, stating with what seemed to him rather cruel succinctness, that if Mr. Robert Hayden could find it convenient to be at the restaurant of the Gildersleeve Hotel that evening, the owner of the ornament described in his advertisement, namely a silver butterfly, would be there dining alone between the hours of eight and nine and would thus be able to receive her property in person.

With a vague feeling of disappointment through all his elation, Hayden turned the note over in his hand. At the head of the page was embossed a silver butterfly, but beyond this clue there was nothing to indicate the lady's identity; no name, no address. Again he read the brief words written in a clear, upright hand, which so plainly showed strength of character and unusual self-control, but gained no new light.

What an odd happening! He felt indefinably chilled. Why this appointment for a meeting at one of the large hotels? Curious. Why this mystery,

anyway, he thought irritably; why this excess of mystery? And yet, after all, he was forced to confess to his inmost soul that, mystery though it was, he did not find it any the less delightful for that, rather the more so.

He had never known so slow a day. The minutes lagged unaccountably, the hours crawled forward at the most snail-like pace, and his impatience at this was tempered to a satirical amusement by the fact that the entire world of his friends seemed banded together in a conspiracy to engage his society for that particular evening.

He had, as night drew on, a breathless and excited sense of eluding and escaping them, and dressed with the emotions of the criminal who realizes that the sleuths are hard upon his trail. It is unnecessary to say that he was early at the Gildersleeve, and managed to secure a table which commanded a view of the entire room. He had an hour and a half before eight o'clock, and he put as much of it in as possible in ordering a carefully chosen dinner, taking an incredible time over it, for, as the fever of his anticipation ran high, his manner became the more cool and leisurely, a temperamental trait of his.

He ate his soup as slowly as possible, and glanced about at the tables now rapidly filling up with all the laughing groups of men and women who would be going on to the theater and the opera a little later. The music was charmingly subdued; a whiff of fragrance from the flowers on his table reached him. He liked the atmosphere of this hotel, quiet, restful, and handsome after a restrained and sober fashion; and then, all at once, the

surroundings, the groups at the tables, the waiters passing to and fro, the appealing music, the noise and hum of conversation lost life and motion and color, and became the mere tapestry against which she alone moved.

It was about half-after seven when the vigilant eye which Hayden had kept so persistently on the door was rewarded; but to his disappointment, she was not alone, but was accompanied by an elderly, gray-haired man. However, his spirit was somewhat restored by the fact that they took a table immediately within the line of his vision. She wore black to-night, gauzy and diaphanous black. A small black toque with some upstanding silver trimming rested on her hair, and the silver butterfly on her breast seemed to flutter its delicate, shining wings; but depending from it almost to her waist and encircling her neck, was an exquisite chain of small, enameled butterflies. They were in all shades of yellow and orange, with touches of black, and were held together by tiny, jeweled links. Butterflies, more butterflies! Could it be? Was it a possibility? Hayden cautioned himself lest his imagination ran away with him.

He could not fail to notice that here, as at the opera, she was again an object of interest. Every one in the room seemed to be either openly or furtively gazing at her. In this, he reflected, there was nothing very peculiar, as her beauty, which was sufficiently marked to compel interest anywhere, was not more noticeable than the unique and remarkably beautiful ornaments she was wearing.

The man with her, unobtrusive and gray enough in all conscience to escape any attention whatever,

yet made a peculiar impression on Hayden. As he sat, apparently ordering dinner in haste, with his watch in his hand, so to speak, Hayden was struck by the deference he displayed to the lady he accompanied, and the lack of ease in his manner. He was like a man who had been unwittingly drawn into a situation which rendered him extremely uncomfortable, and he was distinctly not of her world. On the other hand, the lady of the silver butterfly, as Hayden was forced to call her, in lieu of any other name, exhibited her usual calm, unruffled composure.

Hayden could not notice, watch her as closely as he would, that she showed even curiosity as to whether or not he was in the room. Not once did he succeed in surprising the smallest glance in his direction. Instead, for the most part, she talked earnestly to the man opposite, who had evidently ordered his dinner of dishes ready to be served, and was hastily consuming them, while she had given more time to her order, and did not really begin her dinner until her vis-à-vis had disposed of his. Then, with a final and hasty glance at his watch, the gray and elderly man arose, bowed awkwardly and formally to her and left the room.

The first course of the lady's dinner had just been placed before her, and Hayden could not fail to admire the way in which she bore herself. Although, as at the opera, she must have been conscious of the many admiring eyes cast in her direction, she gave no evidence of it, and he was almost equally piqued by the fact that she manifested no apparent interest in his presence. Not once did she turn her head toward the door, not once did she incline her eyes in his direction.

She had just finished her soup when, the clock indicating one minute of eight, Hayden took a last sip of his black coffee, the last whiff of his cigarette, and walked down the room toward her. As he reached her table and stood before her, she looked up with a charming smile, which yet held a touch of shyness, an embarrassment she struggled to conceal, and nodded toward the chair so recently vacated by her elderly companion. To his surprise, Hayden saw that she was younger than he had at first thought her, and wondered afresh at her apparent isolation.

"Won't you sit there, please? You are very prompt. It is just eight o'clock."

He seated himself opposite her. "A proof of my desire to escape the responsibility of your ornament," he replied, taking from his pocket the box enclosing the silver butterfly and holding it out toward her.

"Oh, thank you." She laid it on the table beside her without opening it. "It is extremely good of you to forgo any engagement you may have had merely to return this to me with your own hands." But although her words showed composure, her voice, the color that came and went, exhibited an agitation she could not wholly overcome.

"Good! Not at all," he returned. "There may have been several reasons which would make me wish to deliver the buckle to you in person—its beauty and value for one thing; but to be perfectly frank, let me confess that there was one overmastering reason, that my interest in this matter has been enormously increased by one of the most potent of factors; a factor that might be called the greatest stimulant in the world to even a tepid interest."

She looked up at him with surprise, even, he fancied, a slight alarm. "What can you possibly mean?" she asked coldly.

He had leaned his arms upon the table, and now he smiled up at her like a mischievous, cheeky school-boy. Even the most prejudiced person could but acknowledge that Hayden had a most delightful smile.

"Mystery," he replied.

Her eyelashes lay on her cheek, long, black eyelashes on a cheek of cream, with the faintest, the very faintest stain of carnation. She was drawing designs on the tablecloth with her fork. She started slightly, but if she felt any perturbation of spirit, she gave no sign further of it, and yet Hayden knew intuitively that he had said just the thing he should have been most careful to avoid.

"Ah, yes," she said at last slowly. "I dare say it does look like that. I did not think of it in that way. I'm afraid I was thinking only of expediency."

"And expediency to you apparently spells mystery to me," he said.

She made an impatient gesture. It struck him now that she was really annoyed. "I can not help it if you see it that way." She strove to make her voice icy.

"Wouldn't any one?" he persisted.

"Perhaps." She appeared to waver.

"You must admit," he continued, perversely pursuing the subject, "that you are rather mysterious

yourself. Why, you appeared so suddenly and noiselessly beside me at the opera the other night—"

"My mother was to meet me there," she interrupted him, "but she disappointed me."

"And then as suddenly and noiselessly you disappeared, that truly, if I had not found the buckle of your shoe, I should never afterward have been successful in assuring myself that you had really been there."

She looked at him now with a sparkle of amusement in her eyes, and he experienced a quick sense of delight that violet eyes could be merry.

"Perhaps I was not really there at all," she laughed. It was evident that she had thrown aside the distrust and distress of a few moments before. "Listen"—leaning forward and speaking with more animation and assurance than she had yet shown—"I will construct a romance for you, a romance of mystery, since you seem determined to have mystery. Can you not fancy a woman, young, eager, interested in all sorts of things, and shut off from them all, living somewhere in the depths of the woods and consumed with longing for the intense and changing life of the city, whose varied phases only seem the more vivid and interesting when heightened by distance; and she dreams of this—this lonely girl—until her longing becomes so great and so vast and overmastering that her thought goes slipping away—away from the gloomy woods to enjoy stolen, brief, bright glimpses of the world? Is that beyond your imagination?"

"It is not at all beyond my imagination," he said

modestly, "but if you are trying to impress upon me the fact that you are no more real than my fancy has once or twice suggested, it brings up a nice moral question. Am I justified in handing over to a chilly ghost a valuable and beautiful ornament belonging to some one else?"

She laughed outright, frankly amused. "That is a question you will have to decide for yourself," she said demurely. "You can't expect me to help you."

"Very well," he replied with equal promptitude. "I refuse any further responsibility and leave it entirely to your conscience."

"Are you—do you live in New York?" The carnation deepened slightly in her cheek at this personal question.

"I was born here," he replied. "I've lived here all my life that I haven't been away from it." They both burst out laughing at this proof of his ancestry.

"Let's talk on the two most interesting subjects in the world," he said, leaning forward as if struck by a sudden inspiration, "yourself and myself. I will begin at the beginning and tell you everything I know or have ever heard about myself and then you do the same."

"But no one ever knows when to stop when he or she begins to talk about himself or herself," she objected, and again the shyness crept into her voice. "You would occupy a thousand and one nights in the recital, and you have only"—she glanced at a tiny watch—"you have only ten minutes."

"Must Cinderella leave the ball exactly on the stroke of nine?"

"Certainly. Her pumpkin coach awaits her at that hour, and you know what happens to the pumpkin coach and the coachman and footmen if she keeps them waiting a minute overtime."

He sighed. "Well, I see that I must be dreadfully brief in what I have to say; and this is it. I have asked no reward for returning you your trinket, have I? But that does not absolve you from the courtesy of offering one; now, it seems to me that it is not at all amiss, in fact it is quite fitting, that I should dictate the terms of it. I am sure that this attitude of mine appeals, if not to your generosity, to your sense of justice," He paused politely.

"I can at least see the position I put myself in if I decline to admit it," she parried.

"Oh, I am sure of your position," he assured her. "I take that for granted. No one with a spark of kindly feeling could look at this matter except in one way. Now, you must admit that I have behaved beautifully. I have made no attempt to surprise your reticence, or even to discover your name. Truly, I haven't made the faintest effort to entrap you into any revelations, have I? Now, I am sure that we must know quantities of the same people, and all I ask is that you mention some of your engagements to me for the coming fortnight. Suppose, for instance, you were to say: 'I am going to be at the Goddards to-morrow afternoon about five. Wednesday, I am to dine at the Symmeses. Thursday, at the Hamptons.'"

Did she give a little start, or was it his fancy? At any rate she followed him with unmistakable interest, and when he had finished she leaned back in her chair with a ripple of low laughter.

"I do not believe we will begin that," she said. "It's like a game and we could go on indefinitely mentioning names on the strength of finding a mutual acquaintance. No, I am something of a fatalist. I think I will let events take their course. If we are to meet again, why, we are. If not, why, all our poor efforts can not compass it. Ah, it is nine o'clock, on the very stroke! Good night." She smiled graciously, charmingly. "And thank you again for so kindly restoring my property."

It was a very distinct dismissal. Hayden rose at once. "But," he protested before he took a step to depart, "you can not leave me this way. The only way I can think of you is as 'The Lady with the Butterflies,' and it is too cumbersome a title. It sounds like the name of a picture. It is such a catalogue-y title."

"It is really," she agreed with him. "There is no doubt about it. I am sorry," demurely, black lashes again on cheeks of cream, no, carnation. She did not mention her name and Hayden's face fell.

"I wonder if you know my cousin, Kitty Hampton," he said at a venture.

"My pumpkin coach!" she exclaimed, moving toward the door.

"But my reward!" he cried. "I refuse to let you go without bestowing it. It is not honest."

She sighed and she smiled, she flushed and wavered. "Then take this assurance," she said, as one driven to a corner. "Believe me when I tell you that when you wish to see me I shall not be hard to find. I have reason to think that you will find it very easy."



CHAPTER IV

Although Hayden proved himself reluctantly regardful of the butterfly lady's very evident desire to be left alone, he did not at once leave the hotel. Instead, he strolled into the office and after loitering

about there for a few moments, he was just leaving when he encountered Penfield, Horace Penfield. Ordinarily, Hayden would have avoided him as he would fire and pestilence; but to-night he rather went out of his way to secure Penfield's society.

Penfield was a thin man with slightly stooping shoulders and a neck that craned forward. He had a long pale face as narrow as a wedge, a nose as sharp as a fox's, keen, ferret-like eyes, and white lashes. No longer young, he yet managed to achieve this effect and retain the manner of youth. His claims to social distinction rested on the solid basis of fear. He was a walking bureau of information, a daily newspaper. When the harsh vituperation of those who, having nothing more to lose, had nothing more to gain, occasionally assailed him, he had been heard callously to assert that he preferred being dangerous to being ineffective, and that he would infinitely rather be a menace to society than its victim. In short, the profession of scandal-mongering he pursued with concentration, finesse, and infinite tact. If for himself he achieved eminence, became master of his craft, it was doubtless sufficient recompense.

"Hello, Hayden," he said in his thin, satirical voice. "How are you and your affairs?"

"All right, I guess," said Hayden indifferently.

For a season they talked on various subjects, falling gradually into a discussion of the merits of certain mining propositions, until Hayden said with premeditated suddenness:

"By the way, Penfield, have you ever heard of the Butterfly mine or estate?"

"The Butterfly!" repeated Penfield slowly. "The Butterfly!" He pinched his lower lip meditatively. "Let me see! One of those Mexican mines, isn't it? Or wait a moment," shrewdly. "I may have mines on the brain because we've been talking about them. Upon my word, Hayden," his face flushing with shame, his professional pride sadly wounded, "I'm awfully sorry; but to tell the truth, I can't just put my finger on it. Yet somewhere, lately, I've heard of it. Did I read of it or hear people speaking of it?" He drew his hand over his brow, looking really worried. "Come on and walk down the Avenue with me," he said. "Maybe the night air will refresh my memory, and I'll be able to think it out as we move along."

But the night air could hardly be regarded as a potent factor in restoring Penfield's recollections, for they walked some distance and he had succeeded in offering no answer to Hayden's question; and although he strove lightly to discuss the various topics which arose between them, he was manifestly so perturbed and dismayed that Hayden felt his contempt mitigated by a faint touch of pity.

Finally, when about to cross from one side of the street to the other, they paused to give an oncoming motor the right of way. As it went flying past them, a woman leaned forward and bowed and smiled. It was the lady of the butterflies, and in the white light of the electric lamp Hayden saw seated beside her the same gray, elderly, unobtrusive man with whom she had entered the Gildersleeve.

"By George! Marcia Oldham!" cried Penfield.

Marcia Oldham! What a coincidence! What luck! Hayden exulted. So Kitty's Fairy princess and his fairy princess were identical. It was surely one of the

most incredible and delightful of happenings. Now Kitty Hampton should have an opportunity to prove that cousinly affection of which she was always assuring him.

"You know her, of course?" asked Penfield.

"I have recently met her," replied Hayden briefly.

"Queer thing about that family," meditated Penfield.

"Queer? How? What do you mean?" exclaimed Hayden involuntarily, although he bitterly reproached himself a moment later, for having, as he expressed it, so far forgotten himself as to ask any questions of Penfield.

Penfield chuckled, an arid, biting chuckle it was, too. His face brightened up, his crestfallen manner merged happily into jauntiness, his self-respect was restored. He was again the authoritative gossip.

"You know, of course, of old Oldham. One of the millionaires of the last decade. Well, with changing times, changing methods of finance, he lost his grip, and about five years ago he died, heavily involved, leaving a widow and one young daughter, Marcia. Mrs. Oldham had been a Southern woman of the old régime, and was a pretty, absolutely helpless creature, and Marcia was still at school.

"Of course it raised a storm of talk. They had been used to every luxury, all the ease of wealth; they relied on the machinery, you know, to look after them, and it never entered into their heads that the wheels could stop. When they did stop, as you can imagine, every one was discussing the poor

Oldhams. There was the greatest raising of hands and lowering of voices and mopping of eyes whenever their names were mentioned." His arid chuckle seemed to strike Hayden like the spatter of hail.

"'What will become of them?' 'What can they do?' 'A helpless woman like Mrs. Oldham and a young daughter!'" He mimicked feminine voices. "You heard that sort of thing bleated on every side. All the women advanced positive opinions on just what they ought to do. The consensus, I believe, amounted to this, that it was the part of wisdom for the Oldhams to sell everything they had left and depart for some obscure German or French town where Marcia might perfect herself in the languages and fit herself for a nursery governess or something of that kind.

"But"—again a fit of laughing which almost choked him—"to the disapproval, even horror and disgust of all kind friends, the eccentric Oldhams did nothing of the kind. They went along as they always had, and certainly they did not then display nor ever have displayed any lack of money. They live simply, entertain very little; but Marcia who is considered a beauty goes out constantly. She is seen everywhere, dresses quite as well as her school friends, Kitty Hampton and Bea Habersham, with whom she always appears, and who, as of course you know, have both married enormous amounts of money. Her extravagance is hardly discreet, considering a watchful and censorious world; but when one has such powerful and extremely loyal friends, discretion is unnecessary."

"She paints beautifully, I understand," said

Hayden indignantly.

Penfield's thin laughter stabbed his ear-drums. "If she sold in a year all the pretty little pictures she paints it would barely pay for her gowns. No, that won't do. But," and a new note crept into Penfield's voice, "did you see that old duffer who was with her? That's where she shows her discretion. He is kept very much in the background. It is only occasionally that she appears with him."

"Who is he?" asked Hayden gruffly, desperately ashamed of himself for stooping to question Penfield.

Penfield elevated his eyebrows and spread his hands. "Let us hope that he is the rich uncle from Australia," he said gently. "Ah, Hayden, Bea and Kitty have managed the affair with Wilfred Ames beautifully so far. They Have almost succeeded in pulling it off in spite of the reluctant lady and Wilfred's raving mother; but Wilfred, good, old, thick-witted Wilfred, is becoming daily more uncomfortable. Fido won't lie down and go to sleep on the hearth-rug as Kitty and Bea wish him to. On the contrary, owing to his mother's watchful vigilance, he is sniffing around quite suspiciously, and," with a series of chuckles, "I believe, although I am not sure yet, that the fair Marcia has a rival, and a rival to be reckoned with, I assure you."

Hayden felt he had stood all that he could. Penfield really was too offensive. His first impulse was to turn on his heel and leave his companion without a word; but on second thoughts, he decided to retain Penfield's company, and put into execution a little plan which was rapidly maturing in his brain, and which appealed to his hazard-loving fancy. It was a mere chance, one in a million, but he

considered it worth taking. Penfield knew all the world and its affairs. He, more than any one Hayden could think of, might be of use to him in a certain Argonautic expedition he was adventuring upon. He decided to put it to the test, anyway.

"So you, too, are interested in mines," he said, with an easy change of subject. "Well," with a short laugh, "as far as they are concerned, I happen to be in the position of a man who sees a spring of water in the desert and may not stoop to drink of it."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Horace. His head shot forward, his nose twitched. He scented a fresh piece of news as a dog scents truffles. "Have you found a fortune?" His curiosity was as fully aroused as Hayden hoped.

They had reached the latter's apartment by this time and Hayden paused a moment on the step. "Come in," he said, "and I will tell you. You have not seen my diggings, anyway."

By what he considered a sheer stroke of luck, he, Hayden, had not been two days in New York, when an old friend, who was under the necessity of taking a long journey with the expectation of being absent several months, urged him to take possession of the apartment he and his wife were temporarily vacating. After a sight of it, Hayden gladly embraced the opportunity and now, he and his Japanese servant, Tatsu, the companion of ten wandering years, were installed in beautiful and luxurious quarters which had come without the lifting of a finger to secure them.

Here was a fresh field for Penfield's inevitable investigations, and Hayden's disclosures of his

private affairs, deeply as they interested him, could wait a bit. Horace was patient by nature and training. "One thing at a time," was a favorite motto, and it was not until he had exhausted the possibilities of the apartment and had peered into every nook and corner, that he consented to sit down in the comfortable library and express his commendation of the place and envy Hayden's luck.

Robert, on his part, had followed his guest about, replying mechanically to his questions and endeavoring to throw off a depression which had crept over him.

The night had been cold, and to one with any decency of feeling, Penfield was a disagreeable companion; but if noxious he also had his uses, and the more Hayden pondered the matter, the more he was strengthened in his decision to secure Penfield's assistance. The humor for it grew upon him as the reassuring comfort and cheer of his surroundings gradually permeated his consciousness.

He was, as he felt, really risking very little. As he had said to Horace, he was in the position of a man who has found a spring in the desert, but may not stoop to drink. No, all the publicity Penfield could give to the fact of his, Hayden's, discovery of the spring might be of incalculable benefit to him in his search for the owners of a certain property, and could, under no circumstances work him an injury, so long as he kept the secret of the situation inviolably locked in his breast, and no matter whose imagination might be fired by the tale, he felt a reasonable security. Experienced prospectors, experts in their line, had been seeking this symbolic well in the desert for twenty-five years and he, not by virtue

of his skill or knowledge, but by a mere fluke, a glorious accident, had stumbled on it. It was hardly likely that another should have a similar experience, within the space of the next few months at any rate, and the next few months were all he asked.

The wood-fire on the hearth flickered redly over the walls, the lamps were lighted in anticipation of his arrival; easy chairs were drawn near the fire; books, papers and magazines were temptingly displayed on the table.

"What were we talking about before we came up?" said Hayden, with the effect of mental effort.

"Mines," Horace replied promptly. "You were about to tell me of a big find you've made. Go on."

"Ah, yes. But"—Hayden laughed a little ruefully—"you've put the thing entirely too definitely when you say 'a big find I've made.' The bother of it is that I have and I haven't."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Horace, cocking his head sidewise and looking at his host speculatively.

"Just what I say," replied the latter. "You see, it happened down in South America, several months ago. We were running a railroad through a great estate, oh, an enormous estate in the mountains. You could get about any variation of climate and soil you wanted. Well, there was a tradition about the place which I heard again and again, and which gradually grew to haunt my imagination; it was that somewhere on this estate was a lost mine of stupendous value; and that although no one had apparently any idea where it might be located, or

had succeeded in finding a trace of it, nevertheless, according to current report, it had been worked within the last quarter of a century, that is, worked in a primitive and intermittent sort of way."

"But," interrupted Penfield, "twenty-five years! That of course is within the memory of dozens of people. What on earth—"

"Wait," said Hayden. "Your part of this game is to listen calmly, not interrupt. Don't you suppose I considered all those points? Now to go back into the history of the thing; this is the story that I gathered, here a little, there a little, and gradually pieced together.

"This vast estate was one of the holdings of a very ancient and noble Spanish family. It was, as I have said, situated in the mountains, and naturally comprised great tracts of valueless land, barren and rocky, although there were also fertile valleys and broad cultivated plateaus. A great mansion, the home of Don Raimond De Leon, the owner of the estate, was situated on one of these plateaus and commanded one of the most beautiful views one could dream of. One gazes down the mountain side on fields of corn and alfalfa, green as emerald, and orchards of blooming fruit-trees; down, down these terraces fall until at their feet lie the tropical valleys with their orange and pineapple groves, and wild, luxuriant vegetation; and then, one turns and glances upward; above him the barren mountain sides, the summits austere, remote, covered with perpetual snow.

"Well, here surrounded by every form of natural scenery, there lived, I say, this old don and his only daughter, Lolita. Of course she had a name a mile

long, Maria Annunciata Mercedes Eugénie and all the rest, but they called her Lolita for convenience. The traditions of their rank were always rigidly maintained. They lived in feudal state and splendor, occasionally journeying to Spain; and the daughter, in addition to her beauty, was possessed of all the graces and accomplishments of a young woman of her class.

"But while yet in the flower of her beauty and youth, an American adventurer, a soldier of fortune, appeared upon the scene. He had either come by design or strayed there by mistake, probably the former; but that, however, is immaterial. He happened to possess those first requisites of the successful soldier of fortune—a charming personality, a pretty wit, and a most ready address. In a very short time, the hacienda and all that it contained were his. He captured not only the daughter but the old don himself, and to him the latter confided the source of the family's almost illimitable wealth, the source, but not its location; and this source was a hidden mine, called oddly enough 'The Veiled Mariposa.'"

Penfield started as if he had been shot. "What did you say that name was?" he cried, his ferret-face sharpened with eagerness.

"The Veiled Mariposa," repeated Hayden, watching him keenly, and overjoyed at the success of his plan. It was evident that Horace knew something. "Mariposa is the Spanish name for butterfly, you know."

"By Jove, what a coincidence!" muttered Penfield.

"A coincidence? How? What do you mean?" It was Robert's turn to be eager now. "Have you heard of it? Have you?"

Penfield shook his head. "Not of it exactly, but—but—"

"But—but—" repeated Hayden impatiently. He felt injured and showed it. "You evidently know something, but you won't tell me. Do you think that is playing quite fair, Horace?"

"Bosh! I'm playing fair all right. I'll tell you fast enough when there's anything to tell. What I have in mind may be the merest coincidence, probably is. I want to do a bit of thinking first before I say anything. But go on with your story. What has all this to do with you?"

"Where was I? Oh, yes." Hayden took up the thread of his narrative again. "Well, the soldier of fortune married the don's lovely daughter with the old father's entire approval. They had a great wedding, the festivities lasting for days. Don Raimond bestowed bags and bags of gold and silver on them, and they sailed away for France.

"Now, contrary to the customary fate of such unions, the marriage although childless turned out happily. For the next ten years or so, the American and his Spanish wife, his name by the way was Willoughby, lived in great magnificence in the various capitals of Europe, maintaining an almost royal state and entertaining constantly on a grand scale. Occasionally, they visited the father in South America, and once or twice he visited them, and the bags of gold were always punctually forthcoming.

"Then suddenly, a most appalling thing happened. The district in which the old don lived was swept by a plague of unusual virulence. De Leon succumbed before he had time to make any disposition of his property, even write a line to his daughter. His Yankee overseer in charge of the mine was also stricken the same day and followed his employer within a few hours, and the Indian and Spanish laborers on the estate went like sheep. There is a rumor that misfortunes did not cease here, but that the plague was followed by an earthquake of a most devastating nature, and thus the population of that especial district was almost wiped out.

"As soon as the news of these disasters reached the Willoughbys they took passage at once for South America to verify the terrible rumors. They found their worst fears confirmed, and to crown their sorrows, Willoughby, after going over De Leon's papers again and again, could find no map of the mine, nor any directions as to its location. There were records enough of the ore mined and shipped, all in the old don's handwriting, but nothing to aid his son-in-law in rediscovering the mine.

"Willoughby immediately put some experienced prospectors to work and secured the services of several geological experts, but to no avail. The mine, mentioned always in the don's documents as The Veiled Mariposa, seemed to have vanished as completely as if it had never existed, or to have been sunk by the earthquake into the very bowels of the earth.

"All his efforts to find it having proved useless—efforts extending over several years—Willoughby put a young nephew of De Leon's, who had recently

arrived from Spain, in temporary charge of the estate and returned with his wife to France. Accustomed now for many years to a vast, unconditioned expenditure, he found it impossible to contemplate the comparative poverty which stared him in the face and he resolved to try to dispose of the whole estate, which a will of De Leon's made at the time of her marriage conferred intact upon his daughter Lolita.

"He hoped to sell at a magnificent figure. He trusted to his own magnetic eloquence and his indisputable proofs of the enormous revenues of the mine to inflame the cupidity of the purchaser or purchasers to such a degree that he would find no difficulty in securing a sum which would enable him to live in comfort, even luxury, for the remainder of his days. He was not successful in arranging the matter abroad and he came to this country about six years ago hoping to make a better bargain. He remained here in New York several months and then sailed for France on *The Princess Verona*."

"*The Princess Verona*," interrupted Penfield. "Why, she was lost at sea; went down with a terrible loss of life."

Hayden nodded. "And neither Willoughby nor his wife was among the saved. But just before sailing, he wrote to the Spanish nephew on the old estate, and also to his lawyers in France, announcing exultantly that he had been successful in his mission, having sold the property at a great figure, and that he would shortly write of all the details of the purchase. But from that day to this, the nephew has heard nothing further of the matter. There has been no effort to claim or to take possession of the

property. That is, with this exception. Within the last six years, foreign prospectors have twice appeared on the estate, and on being questioned as to their business have said they came from the owners of the property. In both instances, however, they withheld the names of the people they were supposed to represent, and little credence was given to their story.

"But nevertheless, the French lawyers believe that the estate was sold, for just before sailing Willoughby purchased drafts in New York for a large sum of money.

"But where are the owners? Why should any one person or group of persons consider a property sufficiently desirable as to pay such a sum for it and then apparently drop the whole matter? It's unthinkable, incredible." Hayden sprang to his feet and began to walk the floor. "That's the question that has been puzzling me for months. What is their game? What does their waiting mean? But that is what I am here for—to try and trace up those owners. I'm prepared to give time and money to the task, for, Horace"—a passionate exultation rang through his voice—"I—I—have discovered the mine, the wonderful, lost Veiled Mariposa."

"The deuce you have!" exclaimed Penfield, actually showing something like excitement. "And is it really all that tradition says of it?"

"More," affirmed Robert solemnly. "I tell you, Horace, it makes the fabled treasures of the Incas look like thirty cents. Ah, it's—" He paused on the hearth-rug and looked down on the gossip in the chair. "I have told you the story because you know everybody and everything about everybody, and I

hoped you might be able to help me in my investigations. Your exclamation a while ago shows that you do know something."

Penfield gazed at the fire through narrowed lids, then he shook his head. "No," he said, "truly I know nothing. What I jumped at a while ago is something that you are bound to run across yourself. I'm not telling all that I know, but I'm willing to bet that within a very short time you will hear of The Veiled Mariposa, and that, too, from a most unexpected source."

"What are you driving at now?" cried Hayden. "Come, speak up. What's the use of being mysterious?"

"It amuses me, that's all," grinned Penfield. "But truly, Hayden, if I could be of any assistance to you I would. As I can not, at present, I shall just sit tight and look on, occasionally putting my finger just far enough in the pie to stir things up and make them merry." He rose and getting into his coat and hat sauntered toward the door.

"But, Horace"—Hayden started after him—"what do you mean by predicting that I shall soon hear of The Veiled Mariposa?"

But Penfield only grinned more inscrutably than ever and closed the door behind him.

Hayden glared irritably after his departing guest and then shook his fist in the direction Penfield had taken. Having thus relieved his feelings, he threw himself into a chair and moodily lighted a cigarette. He was suffering one of the swift reactions of the optimistic and mercurial temperament, which, if it

suns itself upon the slope of Olympus pays for the privilege by an occasional sojourn in Avernus. He was disgusted with Penfield, with himself, with the world.

But wait, even in Avernus the darkness is sometimes penetrated by a ray of light. His quest, so far, had been fruitless. In the various cities of Europe where the Willoughbys had lived and where he had made the most patient investigations, he had discovered practically nothing; and yet, here in New York, he had seen Penfield, the imperturbable, literally jump when he had mentioned The Veiled Mariposa; and further, he had assured him that he would hear some word regarding it within a short time. Come! Hayden cheered visibly. That was something, at any rate. Things were not so bad, after all. He was well out of Avernus and beginning to scale Olympus, and his mind reverted to the earlier and happier part of the evening.

Then he had met and talked with Marcia Oldham. Marcia! What a charming name! It was certainly a tremendous piece of luck that he had discovered it. Of course, he had been disturbed by Penfield's revelations and innuendoes. No one who took an interest in Miss Oldham could fail to be so. Nevertheless, Penfield's statements should always be thoroughly discounted. That was understood.

Robert mechanically lighted another cigarette, still deep in thought. Penfield had spoken of the Oldham family fortunes. "Nothing left," he had asserted, and yet they continued a manner of life which involved large expenditures. How could one account with some show of probability for these circumstances?

A number of hypotheses flashed through his brain. Could it not be possible that this strong, self-reliant girl might have been aware of certain resources of her father's; or might not some old friend greatly indebted to the father have come forward in the hour of need? That was not so incredible. Only, only, and this question recurred to him with an insistence diabolical and mocking. Why should a woman, young, beautiful, luxurious to the point of extravagance, preserve these mysteries? Aye, there was the rub.

And as he sat there in the fire-light, alone with his disturbing meditations, trying to find some solution of this haunting puzzle, he felt more strongly than ever the spell of her presence. He did not wish to throw it off, he would not have been able to do so if he willed. It seemed to him that he had but to lift his eyes to see her standing there in her black gown, the butterflies shining in the fire-light. Again he looked into her sweet eyes, and he knew that from his soul he believed in her. That whatever circumstances entangled her they were not of her choosing, and that whatever mysteries enmeshed her the web was not of her weaving.

CHAPTER V

Some business matters connected with his profession occupied the greater part of Hayden's time for the next day or so; but in his first moments of leisure, he hastened to look up Kitty Hampton.

About five o'clock of a raw winter afternoon, he stopped at her house, intending under a pretense of a craving for hot tea to win Kitty to speech of her friend Marcia. Well-simulated shivers, a reference to the biting air, would secure his cousin's solicitude, then, at perhaps the third cup, he would in a spontaneous burst of confidence confess to a more than passing interest. This would at once gain Kitty's warm if unstable attention, her impulsive sympathy, and ——. At this moment, the severe and forbidding butler informed him that Mrs. Hampton was not at home, was out of town, and all further inquiries were met by a polite and non-committal "I don't know, sir."

Hayden turned away both disappointed and resentful. On the occasion of their walk, a few days before, Kitty had not mentioned to him any contemplated journey, and now, just as he was counting on enlisting her good offices, she had left him completely in the lurch, and all his plans for again meeting Marcia Oldham were, as he expressed it, up in the air.

To add to his general sense of disappointment and injury, he had had a brief line from Penfield saying that he had so far made no progress in some investigations he was making, but felt, nevertheless, that he was on the correct trail and hoped to turn up something within a short time.

Three or four days passed, the end of the week arrived, and still Kitty had not returned. Hayden felt like a man on a desert island who watches ships passing back and forth laden with merry pleasure-parties, too much absorbed in their own amusements or too indifferent to his sufferings to

rescue him; and his sense of isolation and depression was greatly increased by the one, last, unnecessary, bitter drop in his cup—for the lady of his dreams had wantonly mocked him. Her promises had been idle as the wind. She had assured him that she would be anything but difficult to discover, had given the impression that he might chance to meet her at any moment, but the hopes she had held out were cheats, and she had succeeded either wilfully or by force of circumstances in very successfully eluding him. She had vanished as completely as if she had been that shadowy astral wraith they had jestingly discussed, and he was not only baffled and perplexed but wounded.

His pride, very sore pride at present, was touched, and he told himself that since she chose thus to withdraw he would certainly not make a definite and overt attempt to follow. Then, by way of adhering strictly to this very good resolution, he proceeded to accept every social invitation which came his way, went religiously to luncheons, dinners, dances, anything that offered. He even invaded shops and strolled up and down Fifth Avenue; but New York was empty of her. She had vanished as suddenly as she had appeared.

One evening, just as he was really beginning to despair of ever seeing her again and feeling more dejected and miserable every minute in consequence, he stopped in at one of the theaters to see an act or two of a new play in which an English actress of great reputation, not only because of her beauty but also for the artistic quality of her acting, was appearing. To his own surprise, the first act interested him sufficiently to remain, a resolution that later he could not sufficiently commend, for,

when the actress appeared in the second act, the street dress she had worn previously had been changed for a superb evening gown.

As she came forward to the footlights Hayden started as if he had received an electric shock and leaned eagerly forward fumbling for his glasses, for there upon her bosom, gleaming against the lace of her gown, was a great silver butterfly glittering with diamonds, while about her beautiful shoulders fell a familiar chain of tiny, enameled butterflies, azure, deep purple, yellow and orange, and strung together with jewels.

Hayden sat through the rest of the play in a daze. To his excited fancy there were butterflies, butterflies everywhere, the air seemed full of them. They served to bring up the image of Marcia Oldham very vividly before him. He turned now and again and carefully scanned the house, half believing that she was present and he might at any moment encounter her eyes. But no such luck awaited him, and his surprise was all the more marked when just as he was leaving the theater after the play was finished he felt a light touch on his arm and looked down to see the laughing face of Kitty Hampton.

"Kitty!" Hayden clutched her with such a grip that she winced. "Where have you been? Although I have daily beaten on your doors and rung you up on the telephone, I couldn't find a trace of you."

She laughed. "Who says I haven't well-trained servants! Come, drive home with me," stepping into her waiting electric brougham. "Warren will be there. He just got back this afternoon, and he will be so glad to have you. You see, I was becoming so bored and cross, and I got to hate the sight of everything

and everybody to such an extent, that I just ran away from it all, down into the country; and the best part of it was, that I actually persuaded Marcia Oldham to go with me. Think of that! But I succeeded in convincing her that it was her duty to go with me, that I was really on the verge of an illness and needed her care. Marcia is strong on duty, you know. I tried my best to persuade her to do the play with me to-night, but she wouldn't. She said she had no end of things to look after.

"Oh, I am so glad I met you! It is sheer luck. You see there were some people to dinner, and afterward, there were enough for bridge without me, so I just slipped away without a word to anybody and hid myself in a box. And I do hope you're hungry, Bobby. I am dreadfully. Nothing makes me so hungry as a play. Well, we'll all have some supper after a bit."

Hayden's heart sang. He had sought and sought and all his seeking had been vain, and here, by a mere chance, at an unlooked-for moment, the knowledge he had so ardently sought was his. He could afford to wait now; he leaned back comfortably and listened with an air of most eager interest to his cousin's chatter.

Kitty had quite recovered her spirits, and when they stopped before her door she was in the full tide of some gay reminiscences, and she continued her animated recital until they reached her drawing-room.

There were a number of people present who seemed just to have left the bridge-tables and were still discussing the game. Warren Hampton, a tall, quiet, rather elderly man, welcomed Hayden cordially. They had always been good friends, and

this was the first time they had met for several years. The rest, Hayden had either met casually or had to make the acquaintance of. Among this latter group was Mrs. Habersham, mentioned by Penfield as one of Marcia Oldham's most loyal friends, and Hayden was tremendously interested in discovering in her the dark woman with the rose-colored gown and the cerise wings in her hair with whom Marcia had talked that night at the opera.

Somewhat to his disappointment, he was not seated near her at the very jolly little supper which was served later, but was placed instead between Kitty and a sallow, angular, vivacious woman with an unbecoming blue fillet in her hair. He had been talking to Mrs. Habersham and Hampton, and had not really happened to glance at Kitty since they had entered the room, but after they were seated at the table, he turned to speak to her and was absolutely struck dumb.

He drew his hand across his brow as if to brush away the cobwebs in his brain. What was this? From what sort of an obsession was he suffering? He had been thinking so much of those butterflies that he saw them wherever he looked; but, poor victim of delusion that he was, he could swear that on Kitty's breast, gleaming against the laces of her gown, was the same silver butterfly which had earlier adorned the English actress, the same unique and beautiful chain of tiny, brilliant, enameled butterflies. He felt an imperative desire to put out his finger and touch them, to ask Kitty if she really wore them, or if he but dreamed them.

"Bobby," murmured his cousin solicitously, "what on earth is the matter with you? You look as if

you had just seen a ghost. Your eyes are popping out of your head, and you're staring at my butterflies as if they positively frightened you."

He drew a long breath of relief. "They're enough to make any one's eyes pop out."

She touched the huge silver insect on her breast. "Are they not dreams?" she said complacently. "One is simply nobody this winter unless one has them; and the beauty of it is they are so difficult to secure."

"Miss Oldham wears a set," he announced boldly.

"Oh, of course." She shot him a quick, rather surprised glance. "Have you met Marcia yet?"

"Yes—just met her, not very long ago."

"How odd that she didn't speak of it!" exclaimed Kitty. "But," enthusiastically, "isn't she a dear? Do you know, Bobby, I do not believe that there is any one in the world, with the possible exception of Warren, that I am half so fond of as I am Marcia? She is everything, the most all-around person you can imagine, and so gifted. She did the loveliest little water-color for me while we were away. I will show it to you some time."

At this moment, their conversation was interrupted by the lady with the blue fillet. She had not succeeded in getting even a hearing from the man on the other side of her. He showed a marked preference for his lobster in aspic, entirely ignoring the charms of her conversation and giving her very definitely to understand that he longed to be left to a silent contemplation and appreciation of the merits of the Hampton's chef.

"Oh, Kitty!" The blue fillet leaned across Hayden. "Bea Habersham was telling us that you had been to see this new fortune-teller. Is she really as good as Bea says?"

"Indeed she is!" cried Kitty, plunging into this new subject with her usual enthusiasm. "She's the most remarkable thing you ever heard of, and the beauty of it is that you don't have to go into any dens and caves to find her—none of the black holes where you tremble for your life and begin to fear that you'll never get out again. And she has the most charming studio."

"Bea said it was the dreamiest thing you ever saw and that she herself was a vision. Do you suppose she gets herself up that way really to conceal her identity, or is it to arouse more interest and enthusiasm?"

"How does she get herself up?" asked Hayden, with, however, no particular interest in his tones.

"Tell him, Kitty. I haven't been fortunate enough to see her yet," replied the blue fillet—Mrs. Edith Symmes, by the way.

"Oh, it is too fascinating for anything." Kitty was eager to discuss her own particular find. "She is tall and graceful, oh, grace itself, and she wears a long black gown, Paris unmistakably, and"—Kitty threw great emphasis on this "and," and paused a moment for dramatic effect—"she wears a mantilla about her head, and a little black mask, with fringe falling from it so that even her mouth is concealed. It gives you the queerest creepy feeling when she comes into the room."

"How odd! How deliciously dreadful!" Mrs. Symmes shivered luxuriously. "Do write or telephone her and make an appointment for me, Kitty, dear. They say that if I do so on my own account I shall have to wait weeks and weeks, there are so many ahead of me; but you've been such an awfully efficient press-agent that she will do anything for you."

"But her prices! Her dreadful prices!" sighed a plaintive feminine voice from the other side of the table. "Have you seen her, Mr. Hayden?"

"Indeed I have not," returned Hayden, "and I haven't the faintest intention of seeing her. I can't understand why you waste your money on those people. They have absolutely nothing to tell you, and they are fakers and worse, in every instance. You know it, each one of you, and yet you continue to patronize them."

"Hear him preach!" scoffed his cousin.

"Kitty, you are the source of all our information this evening," broke in a woman on her left. "Do tell us if it is true that Marcia Oldham's engagement to Wilfred Ames is really announced."

Hayden, his eyes on Kitty's face, could positively see it stiffen. "I really know nothing about it," she answered coldly.

"But they are together so much."

"There are always a lot of men about Marcia." Kitty's tone was ominously curt.

"Oh, it is perfectly useless to try to get either Kitty or Bea Habersham to talk about Marcia,"

murmured Edith Symmes in Hayden's ear. "They simply will not do it, and it is sheer waste of breath to ask them any questions. Now, I happen to know that the engagement is not definitely announced." Hayden drew a long breath. It was as if some weight had been lifted from him. "Marcia is odd, you know, awfully odd; but just the same, in that slow, unyielding way of his, Wilfred is determined to marry her, and"—she lifted her eyes—"his mother is crazy, simply crazy about it. For a while she contented herself with merely clawing the air whenever Marcia's name was mentioned; but after her nice, quiet, stupid worm of a Wilfred turned and definitely announced to her his intentions, she hustled herself into her black bombazine and has literally made a house-to-house canvas, telling everywhere her tale of woe. Poor old dame, it is rather hard on her!"

"Why?" asked Hayden, ice in his voice. "I should think that she would consider her son an especially fortunate man."

His companion gave a short laugh of irrepressible amusement. "I wish she could hear you say that, and might I be there to see the fun, from a safe corner, mind you! 'The shouting and the tumult' would be worth while, I can assure you. Oh-h," with one of her affected little shivers, "I wish you could hear some of the things she says about Marcia! Of course, one can not exactly blame the poor old soul, for to say the least, Marcia, dear as she is, certainly lays herself open to conjecture."

Hayden did not reply. He was rudely and unmistakably giving the impression of not having heard a word she said; but this attempt on his part,

instead of offending his thin and voluble companion, only seemed to amuse her inordinately.

"Do you know, Kitty," announced the plaintive-voiced lady across the table, "that your butterflies are really the prettiest ones I've seen, prettier than Mrs. ——," mentioning the English actress, "for I got a good look at them at a reception the other day, and yours are quite as lovely as Bea's. Dear me!" in almost weeping envy. "I wish I could afford a chain of them."

Edith Symmes had a positive explosion of her noiseless, faintly malicious laughter. "Did you hear that?" she whispered to Hayden. "Whine-y Minnie over there is as rich as cream; and yet, she can't afford those dreamy butterflies, while Marcia Oldham, who hasn't a cent in the whole world, wears a set which, as usual, surpasses every other woman's. It is a most amazing and amusing social riddle. Even you, who are evidently one of her admirers, must admit that."

"I can't really afford anything worth while this year," sighed the dolorous lady characterized as whine-y Minnie, "but I must try and get an appointment with that fortune-teller, even if it is hideously expensive. What did you say her name is, Kitty?"

"An odd name," mimicked Hayden, catching his cousin's eye and unable to resist a school-boy temptation to tease her. "An odd name." He reproduced Kitty's high lisping tones perfectly.

"Bobby, if you mock me, I'll give you something that will make you laugh on the other side of your mouth," she said rapidly under her breath, and

reverting to the phraseology of childhood. "Did you ask her name, Minnie? It *is* an odd name. Mademoiselle Mariposa. Sometimes called 'The Veiled Mariposa.'"

Hayden's laughing face stiffened as if he had received a shock from an electric battery. Mariposa! Mariposa!—the butterfly. Horace Penfield's words recurred to him; "I am willing to bet now that you will hear of The Veiled Mariposa in a very short time, and that, too, from a most unexpected source."

CHAPTER VI

Hayden had elected to spend one evening at home, a most unusual decision for him, but one which the night fully justified, for a February gale was in full progress and was forcing every citizen whether comfortably housed or uncomfortably out in it, to stand at attention and listen to its shrieking iterations of "a mad night, my masters."

But to be quite accurate, the state of the weather had nothing whatever to do with the state of Hayden's mind. Let it be said, by way of explanation, that since his return to New York, he had been going out so steadily, accepting so many invitations, meeting so many people, pursuing the social game so ardently, that the thought of a quiet evening at home, recommended itself very alluringly to his imagination, and by sheer virtue of contrast, assumed almost the proportions of an exciting diversion.

Tatsu had, as usual, deftly, silently and with incredible rapidity arranged everything for his comfort; and his leisurely dinner completed, Robert settled himself for a long solitary evening undisturbed by any men dropping in to interrupt his meditations, or by any vagrant desires to wander out. The gale precluded both possibilities. It had risen to its height now, and filled the air with the steady roar of artillery. Great dashes of rain spattered sharply against the window panes, and Hayden would lift his head to listen and then sink back more luxuriously than ever into the depths of his easy chair. It was the sort of night to throw, occasionally, another log on the fire and watch the flames dance higher—illuminate with their glowing radiance the dim corridors and the vast and stately apartments of a *Chateau en Espagne*. What an addition those new pictures are to the noble gallery! And the vast library with the windows opening on the Moorish court! But some of the tapestries need renovating, those priceless tapestries!



Then, surfeited with gazing on so much beauty and splendor, one turns to more homely comforts, and while the logs sink to a bed of glowing ashes, dreams over one's favorite essays, or skims the cream of the last new novel.

It was such an evening as this that Hayden had planned; but plans, as immemorial experience has taught us, but never quite convinced us, "gang aft a-gley," and Robert's were no exception to the rule. Between him and the open page before him, he saw

continually the face of Marcia Oldham. The sweet, wistful, violet eyes gazed earnestly at him, the delicately cut mouth with the dimple in one corner smiled at him and his book presently dropped from his fingers and lay unheeded on the rug while he dreamed dreams and saw visions. Gradually, his thoughts wandered from the future and its hopes to the past, and for the first time since his return the old wanderlust stole over him, the wanderlust temporarily lulled and quiescent, but always there, that passion for change which was so integral a part of his nature. But he no longer wished for new scenes with no companionship but that of a man friend or so, he dreamed instead of a season of wandering with Marcia, with her to travel the uncharted, with her to "follow October around the earth." He wondered if the lovely lady of the silver butterfly cared only to breathe the air of cities, or if she, like himself, delighted in gazing upon the strange and unaccustomed, in getting,

> "Out in the world's wide spaces,
> Where the sky and the desert meet,
> Where we shake from our feet all
> traces
> Of the dust of the city street?"

He believed she did. He could not be so strongly conscious of some secret and indefinable sympathy existing between them if their tastes were not similar. Ah well, whatever her tastes might be he could gratify them,—providing, of course, that she chose to look kindly upon him, and if things only came his way, a little, just a little, and surely he had reason to be gratified by the turn events had taken since he had come to New York.

He had, of course, taken a chance in telling Horace Penfield as much as he had about The Veiled Mariposa, the lost mine on which he had founded his hopes. Hayden drew his shoulders up to his ears and pulled down the corners of his mouth, the picture of a school-boy convicted of stealing jam. He had had reason on many occasions to convict himself of such indiscretions. He reflected a little dolefully, that he would probably be a very poor business man, that is, if business depended on caution and a lack of confidence in his fellow-beings. But, bent on cheering himself, even if Horace should break faith with him and prattle to the limit—and Horace's limit was a long one, the blue canopy of heaven, when it came to gossip—what possible harm could it do? In fact, it might serve Hayden immeasurably, for the talk might reach the ears of those who held some interest in the property and thus get him into immediate communication with them. In any event, let Horace gossip as he would, it could do no possible injury, for Robert held the key of the situation with his carefully drawn maps and his many photographs. Blessings on his camera!

There was a wild dash of hail against the window, a shriek of the wind, and Hayden looked up surprised at the interruption and then fell again into his reverie. What an odd thing that had been for Penfield to say, that about hearing of the Veiled Mariposa, and how remarkably it had been confirmed. From a source, too, that he would least have expected it. That prophecy had certainly been literally fulfilled. Little Kitty Hampton was the last person he should have expected to mention The Veiled Mariposa.

A Fortune-teller! The Veiled Mariposa! There

was, there could be no question of coincidence here. It was design, beyond all peradventure, and design he meant very speedily to fathom. Hayden set his nice, square jaw firmly, and when Hayden set his jaw that way, you might look for things to happen. He might be over-impulsive and lacking in caution, but he had plenty of initiative, pluck and determination. Then, his face relaxed and softened. He threw his cigarette into the bed of ashes on the hearth and stretched his arms above his head. Ah-h-h! He felt like Monte Cristo. Surely, surely, the world was his. Had he not, all in the space of a few weeks, found his heart's love, and a clue to his fortune?

Again, he started, but this time not at the storm which seemed to be dying down a bit, but at a sharp ring from the telephone on a desk at the other side of the room.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Hayden getting on his feet. "Who on earth is calling me such a night as this?" He walked over and lifted the receiver with the usual curt, "Hello!"

"Is this Mr. Hayden's apartment?" asked a voice which made him start. It was low, full, deliciously musical and with an unmistakable Spanish accent.

"Yes, and this is Mr. Hayden speaking," was Robert's response, with a lightning change of tone. A quick, excited thrill of interest ran over him. He strove to place that voice, ransacked his memory in the effort to do so, but quite in vain. He was, however, in spite of such swift, momentary precautions, absolutely convinced that he was listening to those enchanting tones for the first time. "Who is this speaking?" he asked. But only a burst of low, rippling laughter with a faint hint of mockery in

it reached him.

"I'm afraid I'm rude enough to insist upon maintaining my incognito to-night," was the demure answer.

"But that puts me at once at a disadvantage," protested Hayden.

"Naturally," the laughter in her voice was irresistible now. "That is where a man ought to be."

"That is where he usually is anyway," he remarked. "But you must admit that there is something awfully uncanny about a situation like this. On so wild a night one would be justified in expecting almost any kind of a ghostly visitant."

"Bar them out," she advised. "Remember Poe's Raven who still is sitting, never flitting, on the pallid bust of Pallas, just above the chamber door."

Hayden glanced up involuntarily. "There isn't any pallid bust of Pallas," he announced. "But that jolly old raven's method of paying a visit was crude and commonplace compared to yours. He came tapping and rapping in the most old-fashioned way; but you reach me with a wonderful disembodied voice through the ever mysterious avenue of the telephone. It really makes me creepy. Won't you locate it? Give it a name?"

"Scientists," she reminded him in her delicious, broken English, "can reconstruct all kinds of extinct animals and birds from one small bone, or a tooth, or a beak, or hoof."

"So might I," Hayden valorously asserted, "if I had as much to go on; but a voice is different."

"Quite beyond your powers," she taunted.

"Not at all. I hadn't finished," Hayden was something of a Gascon at heart, "I will go the scientists one better and reconstruct you from a voice." He put back his hand and drew up a chair. He was enjoying himself immensely. "Now," impressively, "you are dark, dark and lovely and young, and you are sweet as chocolate and stimulating as coffee. And you wear a rose in your hair and silken skirts like poppy-petals, and the tiniest of black slippers over white silk stockings; and you flutter an enormous fan that sends the fragrance of the jasmine on your breast all through the air, and you have a beautiful name—oh a name as enchanting as your voice, have you not, Anita, Rosita, Chiquita, Pepita, Carmencita, and all the rest of it?"

"You are impertinent, much too bold," she admonished. "I will not talk to you any more if you are not quite respectful; but the first part of your description was pretty. Let me, if I can, do even half so well. You, señor, are rather tall and quite slender, no superfluous flesh, all muscle, and your eyes are a dark gray and your hair is brown, so is your face, by the way; and you have a cool, leisurely sort of manner, although your speech is quite rapid, and you have a charming, oh, a most unusually charming smile."

"But you know me!" cried Hayden naively. "Of course, of course," as her laughter swelled, "I know you've flattered me to death," the red rising in his tanned cheek, "with all that rot about my grin. But," speaking louder in the effort to drown those trills and ripples of melodious laughter, more elfishly

mocking and elusive than ever, "your portrait of me, no matter how grossly exaggerated, is in the main, correct."

"Still talking?" droned the menacing voice of Central.

"But it isn't fair," Hayden continued to protest to the Unknown. "You have me at a disadvantage, and I am going to drop all courtesy and any pretense of good manners. Now, are you ready? Yes? Well then, who are you and what do you want?"

"Who am I? Ah, señor, a waif of the wind, adrift on the night's Plutonian shore; but an hour or two ago, the gale caught me up in Spain and swept me over the seas. Regard me as a voice, merely a voice that would hold speech with so distinguished a naturalist."

"A naturalist!" exclaimed Hayden both disappointed and disconcerted. "You have mistaken your man. I can lay no claims to any scientific accomplishments or achievements."

"Oh, pardon!" There was an affected and exaggerated horror in her tones. "I have made a mistake, oh, a great mistake. I had fancied that you were a collector of butterflies."

Hayden nearly dropped the receiver. There was the smallest of pauses and then he spoke in his accustomed tone, a little cooler and more leisurely than usual, with some fleeting idea of caution.

"Ah, yes, yes, I am somewhat interested in that line. But the fact is known to few. Perhaps you will kindly tell me how you learned of my enthusiasm?"

"Are you quite sure that you may not have mentioned the subject to me yourself." Her voice was full of subtle emphasis.

"No, señorita," he laughed. "That will not do. You can not throw me off the track that way, by trying to make me doubt my memory."

"Then, truly, you do not recall the old glad days in Spain?" her voice questioned incredulously, doubted, took on a little fall of disappointment, almost of wounded vanity or sentiment.

"Señorita, emphatically, no. Had I, in the old glad days in Spain, or the old glad days anywhere else, ever met a woman with a voice like yours, I should never have forgotten her in a thousand years. No, señorita. Try something else. That will not do."

"Zip!" There was unmistakable temper in the exclamation.

"We were speaking of butterflies," said Hayden, alarmed lest she should ring him off. "Are you at all interested in that line?"

"Indeed, yes," she assured him, "although I doubt very much if my interest is anything like as scientific as yours. I fancy I am more interested in them because of their wonderful beauty, than for any more particular reason. And what in all the world, señor, is so beautiful as the butterflies of the tropics? Do you remember how they come floating out into the sunlight from the dark mysterious depths of the forests? Such colors! Such iridescence on their wings; but the most beautiful of all are the great gray ones, señor, the silver butterflies."

Again Hayden started violently and again

succeeded in controlling the surprise her words aroused in him. "I quite agree with you," he said politely. "The silver butterfly is one of the most beautiful of all the tropical varieties."

"Yes, truly." Again there was the hint of irresistible laughter in the lady's tones. "But there is a curious little fact that I fancy very few of you naturalists know, and that is that it is not confined absolutely to the tropics. Doubt the assertion if you will, but I make it calmly: I, señor, with my own eyes have seen silver butterflies at New York, and in the most unlikely places; oh, places you would never dream of, the opera, for instance."

"You surprise me!" Hayden was prepared for anything now, and his voice was carefully indifferent, almost drawling; but his mind was working like lightning. What on earth could this mean? Was it a possibility that it might be Marcia,—Marcia Oldham herself, thus cleverly disguising her voice? No, no, a thousand times, no. He hastily rejected the thought. Even if she possessed the skill—nevertheless the very tones themselves revealed a woman of a totally different type and temperament.

"I am so anxious to see your collection," continued the rich, warmly-colored voice. "I am wondering if you have been able to secure a specimen of a very rare butterfly indeed, one which some naturalists believe is quite extinct. It is called 'The Veiled Mariposa.'"

Hayden felt as if in some peculiar, intuitive sort of way, he had expected this from the first. For a moment or two, he could not control his excitement. His mouth felt curiously dry, and he noticed that his hand was trembling.

"I—I think I have heard of it," he said at last, and objurgated himself for his stammering banality.

"But," and the word seemed to express a pout, "I understood that it was in your collection."

"Ah, one must not trust too much to report and rumor," Hayden reminded her.

"Then it is not in your collection?" she persisted.

"Señorita, my collection is a large one." He smiled amusedly at the thought of this hypothetical collection, and the grandiloquent tone in which he referred to it. "I can not say, offhand, just what varieties it contains."

"True," assented the voice reasonably, and Hayden felt that its possessor was probably a person who was reasonable when one would naturally expect her to be capricious, and capricious when one would naturally expect her to be reasonable. "True," she repeated thoughtfully, "I only wanted to say, señor, that should you find that you have that particular butterfly, I am in touch with certain collectors who would be willing to pay a large price for it."

"I have no desire to sell outright, señorita, please understand that," Hayden spoke quickly, taking a high tone. "But should I care to consider your proposition, how am I to communicate with you? Shall I ring up Central and say: 'Please give me the delicious voice?'"

"Ah, señor, you are of an absurdity! Never fear, you will hear from me again, and soon. Good-by." Her voice died away like music.

Hayden mechanically hung up the receiver, and then sat for a moment or two staring rather stupidly before him. At last, he shook his head and laughed in whimsical perplexity: "Who would ever have considered New York the haunt and home of mystery?" he murmured. "Every day connects me with a new one, and the charming ladies who seem involved in them apparently take delight in leaving me completely in the air, suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, 'twixt Heaven and earth, with the pleasing promise that I shall hear from them again—and soon."

CHAPTER VII

An afternoon or two later, having perfected a little plan in his mind, Hayden again called on his cousin to be informed that she was not at home. Kitty, he reflected, was never at home when any one wanted to find her. Therefore, with time on his hands, he turned into the Park and decided to stroll there for an hour or so. It was an almost incredibly mild afternoon for the season of the year, mild and soft and gray; the leafless boughs of the trees upheld the black irregular network of their twigs against the gray sky, with its faint, dull reflection of sunset gold, and the twilight brooded in the mists on the edge of distance as if it awaited the hour to send its gray veils floating over the face of the earth.

Hayden walked slowly, and in this direction or that as his fancy dictated. It was not an afternoon for

violent exercise; but for loitering and reverie. Presently, he looked up from his musings, to see, to his infinite surprise and delight, Marcia Oldham approaching him down a twilight vista with the gold behind her.

She, too, was influenced by the day and the hour, for she seemed to walk in a dream, and came quite near him without seeing him. She was all in black, and her furs, also black, were slipping from her shoulders, while her muff dangled from a cord about her wrist. Hayden thought she looked a little tired and certainly pale; but that might have been due to the black hat and the lace veil she had thrown back from her face the better to enjoy the air.

She came quite close to him before she saw him, and as she lifted her eyes and met his she started slightly, a start of unmistakable amazement, and as it seemed to him, although perhaps this was but the reflection of his hopes, of pleasure.

"I began to fear that we were never going to meet again," he said after they had exchanged the conventional greetings, and he had asked and had received permission to walk with her in whatever direction she might be taking.

"I have been away for a week," she answered, "and there has been a number of things to see to since my return. I have been very busy. You know I have a studio away from my home where I paint all day. Your cousin has bought a number of my pictures."

"She spoke of them. I am anxious to see them; and I knew you were away," he said. "I knew it psychologically. The town was full of people and yet,

at the same time, it was very empty." That faint and lovely carnation on her cheek! "And Kitty Hampton told me that you had been away with her," he rather tamely concluded.

"Yes," she said, it seemed to him indifferently. Then with a change of tone, as if warning him from dangerous ground: "How absurd our acquaintance has been!"

"Does it strike you so?" he asked sadly. "To me it is the most delightful, the most beautiful thing that ever happened."

"I should not be at all surprised," she said calmly, almost too calmly, and with premeditated irrelevance, "if Kitty and Bea were both of them awaiting me now." His boldness was incapable of ruffling her composure; but, nevertheless, he saw with a secret joy the telltale and uncontrollable carnation again fly to her cheek.

But Hayden had not even approached the limits of his courage. He had been too much baffled in his attempts to find her, she had proved too elusive for him to permit her lightly to slip through his fingers again, as it were, now, when he had the opportunity to press his claims for further recognition. Should a man who had succeeded more than once through bold but not displeasing words in causing the scarlet to stain that cheek of cream, carelessly forgo any chance for future experiment?

"Surely, you won't leave me on your door-step this dreary afternoon," he pleaded. "I would never have suspected you of such hardness of heart. Why, it amounts almost to—to—brutality," casting about him for a good strong word. "You will pass on into

light and warmth and comfort; tea, the cheering cup, and cakes, no doubt cakes, while I am left out in this gray depressing atmosphere, night coming on, the rain falling—"

"Rain! Oh, nonsense. You have overshot your mark." She lifted her face to the sky. "Not a drop," scornfully.

He stripped his glove from his hand and held out the bare palm. "I thought so," with calm triumph. "A steady drizzle. You don't feel it yet because of your hat; but you will presently. It will very shortly turn to a drenching shower; that especial sort of cloud yonder," waving his stick toward the west, "always indicates a drenching shower. Oh," in answer to her incredulous smile, "you can't tell me anything about weather conditions, I've lived too much in the open not to be thoroughly conversant of them. So you see I know what I'm talking about when I say that a woman who would leave a man on a door-step on an afternoon like this is the kind that would shut up the house and go away for the summer leaving the cat to forage for itself."

"But think of your nice warm apartment, and the subways and street-cars and taxicabs and hansoms which will swiftly bear you thither."

His glance was a reproachful protest. "Every form of conveyance you have mentioned is drafty. Coming from the hot climates I have lived in so long —" He paused and coughed tentatively. "But what is the use of all this thrust and parry?" pressing his advantage. "Are you or are you not going to give me a cup of tea?"

At this very direct question, the laughter, the

gaiety vanished from her face. She looked thoughtful and seemed to consider so trivial a matter quite unnecessarily. Then, apparently arriving at a sudden decision, she said with a sort of sweet, prim courtesy: "I should be very glad to have you come in with me and meet my mother. I think it is very probable that we will find Kitty, and perhaps Bea, there before us."

"Thank you very much," he said, with equal formality. "I very much appreciate your letting me come."

The remainder of their walk he found delightful. Marcia was pleased to throw off, in a measure, the reserve, the absorption which seemed almost habitual with her, and she chatted with him frankly, occasionally even playfully, as they strolled along.

"Why," he asked her curiously, "did you put that hypothetical question to me that evening at the Gildersleeve, about the young woman living in the country and sending her astral body on little visits to town?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," she laughed. "It often amuses me to indulge in little fanciful flights like that."

"I think you were purposely trying to mystify me," he said. "You saw that I was going to be a bore and you pretended to be a ghost, trusting to your noiseless and mysterious manner of appearing and disappearing to work on my fears and frighten me off. And, truth to tell, there is something uncanny about your peculiarly soundless and rustleless movements."

"Oh, absurd!" she cried, the very tips of her ears

red. Hayden might well exult in his ability to make her blush. "How you do romance! The whole situation was an absolutely simple one. Old Mr. ——" He fancied she caught her breath sharply, but if it were so she recovered herself immediately and went on: "The man with whom I was dining—I had to see him that evening. He was leaving town. I was leaving him at the station when I bowed to you and Mr. Penfield from the motor, and, as I was saying, I had to see him before he left on a—a business matter, and naturally, it was much easier to talk it over with him at the Gildersleeve than any place else."

She smiled as she finished, and Hayden saw more in that smile than she intended or desired he should. It was in itself a full period, definitely closing the subject. It also held resentment, annoyance that she had permitted herself to fall into so egregious a blunder as an explanation.

"Oh, how I love a winter evening like this!" she went on hurriedly. "Once in a while, they stray into the heart of winter from the sun-warmed autumn, and they get so cold, poor little waifs from Indian Summer, that they wrap themselves in all the clouds and mists they can find. Ah, isn't it soft and dim and sweet and mysterious? The wind sings such an eerie little song, and the tiny, pale crescent moon is just rising. Look, it has a ring about it! It will rain to-morrow. Oh, dear!"

They had left the Park a few minutes before and turned in the direction of Riverside Drive, and a short walk brought them to the home in which Marcia's father had installed his family a few months before the crash came and his subsequent death. It was a handsome house, within as well as without;

dark, stately, and sumptuous in effect. The sound of voices and laughter reached their ears as they ascended the stairs, and when they entered the drawing-room they found a number of people there before them.

There was Kitty looking more than ever like a charming, if not very good little boy, and dressed beautifully, if incongruously, in a trailing limp gown of champagne color and wistaria most wonderfully blended, when her face, her figure, the way she wore her hair, seemed to cry aloud for knickerbockers; and there was Bea Habersham in velvet, of the cerise shade she so much affected, and Edith Symmes suggesting nothing so much as a distinguished but malevolent fairy, her keen, satirical, sallow face looking almost livid in contrast with a terrible gown which she spoke of with pride as "this sweet, gaslight-green frock of mine."

"Mother, Mr. Hayden has come in with me for a cup of tea. He doesn't know yet that you make the very best tea in all the world." Marcia's voice, in speaking to her mother, seemed to take on an added gentleness. It struck Hayden that so she might speak to a small child.

Mrs. Oldham greeted Hayden most graciously, but he could not fail to notice that she turned to her daughter with an indefinable displeasure in both glance and manner. She was a small woman, barely as high as Marcia's shoulder; a surprise always, when noted, for the carriage of her head and shoulders gave the impression of her being above medium height; she had evidently been an extremely pretty creature of the Dresden-china type, and she still bore the manner and assurance of beauty, fortifying this

mental attitude by a genius for dress. Thus she succeeded in maintaining an illusion perfectly satisfactory to herself, if not quite to others, for it was rather a hungry beast of an illusion and demanded constant oblation and sacrifice.

Her hair, like Marcia's, was dark with the same loose and heavy waves, and her features exhibited the same delicate regularity; but the strength and sweetness of character so marked in the daughter's face were lacking in the mother's. Two rather striking blemishes on the older woman's beauty, a wandering eye and a scar on the soft cheek, she took her own peculiar method of ignoring, thus completely and effectively discounting any unfavorable opinion in the mind of the beholder. Consequently, she frequently referred to them, never as blemishes, but as slight but significant evidences of a distinctive and distinguished individuality.

"Oh, Marcia! What a dream of a hat!" cried Kitty. "And new. It's a Henri Dondel or a Carlier."

Marcia laughed her gentle and charming laugh. "Yes, it's new and I'm so glad you like it."

"New, new, new," said her mother petulantly. "It's something new every day. I never saw such a spendthrift. It's a good thing my wants are so few."

Marcia did not appear to hear this, and almost immediately her attention was taken up by the entrance of Wilfred Ames, big, stolid and good-looking, while hard upon his heels followed Horace Penfield.

Mrs. Oldham, seeing that Penfield had gravitated toward the three women, Edith Symmes,

Kitty and Bea, and that Ames had drawn Marcia a little apart, urged Hayden to come and sit beside her tea-table and let her brew him a cup of fresh tea.

"It's really a rest for me, Mr. Hayden," she said pathetically, "for truly, it is very little rest I get. This big house to look after—Marcia is not the least assistance to me in housekeeping—and a daughter on one's mind." She sighed heavily. "It is enough to make Mr. Oldham turn over in his grave if he could see all the care and responsibility that is thrown on my shoulders. He couldn't endure the thought of such a thing. He always said to me: 'Those little feet were made to tread on flowers.' He was so absurd about my feet, you know. Not that they are anything remarkable; but I'm from the South, Mr. Hayden, and it's only natural that I should have beautiful feet.

"But then, as I often told him, he was just so constituted that he could see nothing in me but absolute perfection. Why, do you know, one of my eyes has a slight, oh, a very slight defect, you have probably not noticed it. Well, we had been married for years before he ever saw it. I happened to mention it and he simply would not believe me until I convinced him by standing before him in a very strong light with my eyes wide open. Do let me give you a little more tea. No? Then some sugar or lemon, just to freshen up a bit what you have. How handsome Marcia and Wilfred look standing together, she is so dark and he is so fair. He is a dear fellow and so steady and sedate. I love him like a son, and I consider his influence over Marcia excellent.

"She is, of course, the dearest thing in the world to me, Mr. Hayden. You will understand that, but I

feel a mother's solicitude, and she has certain traits which I fear may become exaggerated faults. She is inclined to be head-strong, heedless, wilful, and I'm afraid, sweet as Mrs. Hampton and Mrs. Habersham are—dear girls! I love them like my own daughters—that they encourage Marcia in her defiance of proper authority and her dreadful extravagance. But," sighing, "she is young and pretty and she does not think; although Mr. Oldham used often to say: 'Marcia will never have her mother's beauty.' What do you think of such an absurdity?"

"I think if Diogenes had met Mr. Oldham he would have blown out his light and gone back to the seclusion of his bath-tub for the rest of his life."

"Oh!" Mrs. Oldham looked puzzled. "Oh, Diogenes! Oh, yes, searching for an honest man. Mr. Hayden, what a charming thing of you to say! I must remember that, and so witty, too! Edith dear," as Mrs. Symmes approached them, "you can't fancy what a wit Mr. Hayden is."

"Oh, yes, I can," returned Mrs. Symmes, "and that is the reason I have come to drag him away from you. Here is Mr. Penfield to take his place, and tell you a lot of new scandals all springing directly from the seven deadly old sins. Come and sit on the sofa with me, Mr. Hayden."

"Rescued!" he muttered feebly when they had sat down in a remote corner. "I had an idea that I was never going to escape, that it would run on for ever and ever."

"Poor Marcia!" murmured Mrs. Symmes, glancing toward the window where Marcia and Ames stood, still engrossed in conversation. "And poor

Wilfred! You haven't seen his Old Man of the Sea yet —meaning his mother?"

"No, is she, too, a Venus with a bad eye?"

"Quite the reverse." Faint sparkles of amusement came into her eyes, amusement which was always touched with a slight malice. "Mr. Hayden, some people are coming to take luncheon with me next Wednesday, I may count on you, may I not?"

"Indeed, yes," he assured her. "I should like nothing better."

She rose and he with her. Every one was doing the same. With a purpose which had been maturing in his mind during the last hour, Hayden approached Kitty and Marcia, who stood together talking in low tones as Kitty caught her furs about her.

"Miss Oldham," Hayden's voice was delightfully ingratiating, "don't you or Kitty want to give me the address of this wonderful fortune-teller, Mademoiselle Mariposa?"

"But you said you took no interest in such things," Kitty spoke quickly. "You insisted that they were all fakers and frauds. Why do you want to go now?"

"But I have an idea that I have met the lady," he asserted.

Marcia gave a quick start; but Kitty laughed. "I defy you to pierce her disguise," she asserted, "and tell whether you have met her or not, unless, of course, she acknowledges the acquaintance. I will telephone you her address the moment I reach home. I do not remember the number."

CHAPTER VIII

Kitty was as good as her word and telephoned her cousin the address of Mademoiselle Mariposa that evening,—a fact that rather surprised Hayden, as he had a sort of indefinable idea that she would conveniently forget her promise.

On his part, he lost no time in seeking the Mariposa, calling at her apartment the next morning, only to be informed by a particularly trim and discreet maid that her mistress received no one save by appointment. Therefore, bowing to the inevitable with what philosophy he could summon, he went home and wrote a note to the seeress, requesting an early interview and signing an assumed name. He was gratified to receive an answer, dictated, the next morning in which Mademoiselle Mariposa stated that she would be pleased to receive him at three o'clock in the afternoon, on the following Thursday. Thursday, and this was Tuesday. Two days farther away than he desired, but there was nothing to do but curb his impatience, and he set about occupying his mind and incidentally his time until Thursday.

Fortunately, he discovered in glancing over his list of engagements that a number of events dovetailed admirably, thus filling up the hours, and among them was Edith Symmes' luncheon on Wednesday. He heaved a sigh of relief that there were enough things on hand to give time wings, even if artificial ones, when it seemed bent on perversely

dragging leaden feet along the ground. In consequence he betook himself to Mrs. Symmes' house on Wednesday with more eagerness than he would otherwise have shown had he not regarded her luncheon as a time-chaser.

Mrs. Symmes had been early widowed. Her experience of married life included a bare two years, her husband living a twelve-month longer than the friends of both had predicted. He was, so it was rumored, a charming fellow of rare artistic taste and discrimination, a dilettante, and a connoisseur of all things beautiful. So sensitively was he organized that inharmonies or discords of color, or any lack of artistic perception affected him acutely, often to the verge of illness, and always irritation. Although he permitted his wife no voice in the decoration and furnishing of either town or country house, almost desperately withheld it from her in fact, he could not control or even influence her taste in dress, and there were those who did not hesitate to whisper that Edith's costumes alone were quite sufficient to have caused his death.

After that event, Mrs. Symmes endured the low-toned harmonies of her husband's faultless taste for six months, and then declaring her environment depressing to her spirits, she refurnished the house from garret to cellar, perpetrating crimes in decoration which made the horrors of her toilets seem mere peccadillos.

Hayden was soon to realize this, for on arriving at her home on Wednesday he was shown to a drawing-room large in size but crowded with furniture. Little tables, chairs, footstools, anything which would serve as a stumbling-block, seemed to

be placed in the direct path of the guest advancing toward his hostess.

Robert, seeing that it behooved him to walk as delicately as Agag, reached Mrs. Symmes without misadventure, and after exchanging the usual light-weight coin of conventional greeting, looked about him for a familiar face. Most of the people he knew only casually; but presently, he spied Mrs. Habersham and made his way toward her as rapidly as the manifold objects in his path permitted.

She was, as usual, in one of the shades of American Beauty, which she so much affected, and which were admirably suited to her, giving depth and opulence, the rich restfulness of color to her too sharply defined and restless beauty. Upon her breast was her silver butterfly and the enameled chains were about her throat.

"I have walked twice across this room," said Hayden triumphantly, after shaking hands with her, "and I haven't fallen once. If I came here often I should bring an ax, notch the furniture and then clear a path. There goes some one!" as a heavy stumble was heard. "I did better than that."

"Don't boast. Remember that it's the wicked who stand in slippery places," said Bea, with meaning. "But indeed, I am glad you got here. There is some distorted, goggle-eyed Chinese monster at my elbow, and on the table before me is an ornament which chills the marrow of my bones. I dare not look up."

Hayden gazed bravely about him. "I don't think I ever saw such a hideous room in my life," he said slowly and with conviction.

"There is only one room in the world uglier," Bea assured him, "and that is the dining-room; but they do say that the wall-paper in her bed-room is of a bright scarlet, with large lozenges representing green and blue parrots swinging in gilded cages."

Hayden laughed and shivered. "It takes strong nerves," he said. "Do you suppose there are people who come often?"

"Oh, dear me, yes," returned Mrs. Habersham. "One would dine in Inferno if the food were good. Her table is as perfect as her house and gowns are dreadful, and then Edith herself is very clever and amusing. Here she comes."

"The cause of this delay," smiled Mrs. Symmes in passing, "is Mrs. Ames. I'll give her just one minute more."

Bea smiled perfunctorily, and then turned on Hayden an alarmed face. "I never would have come to-day—never, if I had fancied she would be present. She will be sure to launch out on Marcia Oldham before luncheon is over. She never misses an opportunity. She has a mania on the subject."

Hayden glanced toward the door with curiosity. "Where is this pepper and vitriol old dame?" he asked, with elaborate carelessness.

"She has not come yet. Did you not hear Edith say that it is she for whom we are waiting? You will see her in a moment, though. She is always late; but she will come, never fear."

Her words were prophetic, for at that moment Mrs. Ames hurried into the room, a wiry, spare old woman with a small hooked nose and a jaw like a

nut-cracker. The skin of her face was yellow and deeply wrinkled, her eyes were those of a fierce, untamed bird, and she was gowned—swathed is the more suitable word—in rusty black with a quantity of dangling fringes and many jingling chains.

Luncheon was announced immediately after her arrival, and to Hayden's dismay he found that it was served at small tables and that he was placed between Mrs. Ames and Mrs. Habersham, with Horace Penfield opposite smiling in faint satirical glee at the situation.

"I shall never forgive Edith Symmes for this, never," was Bea's indignant whisper in Hayden's ear. "But just the same, I shall not give that old witch a chance to air any of her grievances. You'll see. With your help and cooperation I intend to monopolize the conversation."

Robert hastily assured her that she could depend on him to the limit of his capacities, and together they seized and held the ball of conversation, occasionally tossing it from one to the other; but never permitting it for a moment to fall into either Penfield's or Mrs. Ames' hands.

Hayden pottered over this incident or that, dawdling through long-winded tales of travel, and when his recollection or invention flagged Mrs. Habersham introduced topics so inimical to Mrs. Ames' frequently aired views that this lady rose passionately to the fray. Woman's Suffrage, Socialism, the Decline of the Church, Bea, a conservative, flung upon the table and Mrs. Ames pounced upon them as a dog upon a bone, a radical of radicals.

Meantime, Horace Penfield had sat enjoying his luncheon with a cool placidity, and listening with a smile of faint amusement to the arguments which surged and eddied about him. He looked for the most part indifferent, although, perhaps, he was only patient.

At last, in an unguarded moment Mrs. Habersham paused for breath, and in the brief ensuing silence Penfield entered the conversation like a thin sharp wedge.

"What a fad those butterflies are among you lovely ladies," he said to Mrs. Habersham. "But yours are paler than most of them, more opaline. Why?"

"Because I wear red so frequently," she replied indifferently. "The purple and yellow butterflies would look horrid with my crimson frocks."

"I really think," said Penfield slowly, meeting her eyes with a cool, blank gaze, "that, saving your presence, Mrs. Habersham, Marcia Oldham has by far the handsomest set I have seen."

At this red rag, purposely fluttered as Hayden felt before the eyes of Mrs. Ames, that lady sniffed audibly and tossed her head, emitting at the same moment a faint, contemptuous cackle.

"Oh, no," Bea assured him with languor, although the scarlet burned in her cheek. "Marcia's are nothing to compare to Mrs. ——," mentioning the name of the London actress.

"Oh, I must differ from you." Penfield was suavely positive. "I am surprised that you should say that, for Miss Oldham's are quite the most artistic I have seen."

"Naturally Miss Oldham would have the handsomest set in the market, wouldn't she?" queried Mrs. Ames in what no doubt was intended to be a tone of innocent inquiry.

"Marcia's taste is very beautiful," said Mrs. Habersham coldly.

"And very extravagant, I understand." Mrs. Ames was started now; there was no stopping her. "If one wears beautiful things in these days one must expect to pay for them."

Mrs. Habersham shrugged her shoulders and turning to Hayden asked him when he had last seen his cousin Kitty Hampton; but Mrs. Ames' cracked voice rose above their low tones.

"I wish some one would explain to me—perhaps you can, Mr. Penfield—just how a young woman who hasn't a penny to her name can afford a superb necklace. Such things could not have occurred in my young days; but different times, different manners. Humph!"

Before Penfield could reply, Bea Habersham leaned across the table and addressed her clearly: "It seems to me that such imaginary and absurd behavior would be considered as reprehensible to-day as in the remote era you mention."

Mrs. Ames held her lorgnon to her eyes with one withered, yellow hand, each finger covered to the swollen knuckles with diamonds dim with dust, then she dropped it in her lap with another dry cackle and said with a complete change of tone, as if reverting to some new topic of conversation:

"Mr. Penfield was speaking of your friend, Miss

Oldham, a moment or two ago, Mrs. Habersham. Perhaps you will be able to tell me the identity of the rather elderly, ordinary-looking man with whom I have seen her several times lately?"

It seemed to Hayden that Bea's face grew a shade paler, but his momentary apprehension gave way to a swift admiration for her poise, the casual and careless indifference with which she answered:

"I am sure I can't imagine, Mrs. Ames. Marcia has many friends, more I fancy than you dream of." He also felt a swift longing to take Horace Penfield by the scruff of his thin, craning neck and drop him from the window instead of permitting him to sit there calmly sipping his liqueur with that faint, amused smile as of gratified malice about his lips.

Then he drew a breath of relief. Every one was rising.

"You were magnificent," he whispered as he drew aside for Bea to pass.

She smiled gratefully at him. "Thank goodness, it's to be bridge now and not conversation."

A few minutes later they were all seated at the card-tables and except for the occasional low-toned voicing of the conventions of the game, a grateful silence reigned.

But at the close of the afternoon, just as they were leaving, Bea asked Hayden if he would not drive down-town with her and let her drop him at his apartment. He accepted gladly, hoping in the brief intimacy of the drive homeward together that she would speak of Marcia.

But for a season, Mrs. Habersham cared only to discuss the scene they had just left; the fortunes of the game; the excellencies of this player, the atrocities of that; the eccentricities of their hostess and her apparently ineradicable passion for ugliness.

"It is true," she assured him, "about the red paper and the green and blue parrots in gilt cages; a woman who has seen it swore upon her honor."

They had by this time turned into the Park, and Bea leaned forward to inhale the fresher air. Night was falling fast; the spreading lawn-spaces, the dense shrubbery, the irregularly disposed trees were no longer distinct, but melted together, indistinguishable and unfeatured blurs in the deepening twilight.

Bea drooped her brow on her hand and sat in silence for a few moments. Then she turned to Hayden, her lips compressed, her hands clasped tightly together.

"Isn't it awful! Isn't it dreadful!" she cried. "To think of that old witch of Endor saying all those horrible untrue things about poor lovely Marcia, and worse, spreading them broadcast?"

Hayden lifted his chin in quick determination. "Mrs. Habersham, I can not be ignorant of what you refer to. I have, to my annoyance"—he hesitated and then deliberately chose another word—"to my pain, heard various hints and innuendoes before of the same kind. Now, why is this? Just malice, envy, jealousy? Why"—his indignation vibrated through his voice—"should one so lovely, so above reproach, as Miss Oldham, be the victim of that sort of thing?"

"Because," said Bea bitterly, "Marcia attends strictly to her own business and does not request any advice or permit any interference. Oh, Mr. Hayden, it is useless to tell you what a dear she is. I know from what you have just said that you do, you must admire her. No one could help it," she added, with a simple and loyal conviction. "So you may understand how difficult it is for us who love her, for the very few of us who are in some measure in her confidence, to have to accept the fact that there are certain things in her life which appear odd, which are not—" She broke off, looking at him uncertainly.

"Mrs. Habersham—" Hayden had turned about in his seat so that he could gaze more directly at her, and now, although his face had grown pale, he smiled down upon her his charming smile. "Mrs. Habersham, let me go further and tell you that I have never met a woman in my life toward whom I have felt as I do toward Miss Oldham. Why not put it frankly and tell you the exact truth? I love her."

Bea's eyes brightened delightedly and then grew a little sad. "I suspected as much," she said gently, "and yet, I hardly knew whether you had the courage or not. Now," impulsively moving nearer to him, "I will be as frank as you have been. Nothing in all the world, nothing would please me half so much as for you and Marcia to love each other. I don't know you awfully well, Mr. Hayden, and yet," she laughed, "I do in a way. True, we have only met a few times; but for many years I have been well acquainted with Kitty's 'Bobby,' But," and her dark eyes smiled on him with a soft shining in their depths, "I think that just now when there is all this unkind whispering it is a beautiful and courageous thing for you to love Marcia, and I want to assure you that all the support

I can give to your cause is yours."

Her ungloved hand lay on her knee, and Hayden lifted it and lightly kissed it. "Dear lady," he began, his voice a little broken.

"Oh, wait!" She lifted the same hand in admonition. "My support may not amount to anything. Reserve your gratitude. Marcia is extremely reticent about her own affairs, but, nevertheless, I can give you a crumb of comfort. No matter what every one says, I am sure that she and Wilfred Ames are not engaged and that she does not begin to see as much of him as people think; and I do know"—again her voice was shaken with indignation —"that there wouldn't begin to be as much of this unpleasant talk if it were not for his mother's wicked, frantic fears. Why, what does she wish? She might be glad, proud to have such a daughter-in-law as Marcia. Oh, Mr. Hayden, I can't talk about it. It makes me too angry."

"Mrs. Habersham"—Hayden spoke with that quiet, forceful determination which was under all his impulses the real key-note of his character—"I desire nothing so much in the world as to be of assistance to Miss Oldham. Can't we"—his smile had never been more winning—"can't we clear away these cobwebs of mystery which surround her?"

"Ah," cried Bea Habersham, tears in her eyes, "we who love her all long to do that."

"Then you will help me?"

"Oh, you give me hope that it is a possibility," with one of her radiant changes of mood. "But," and she fell again into depression, "I can not help you.

You must do it all, all yourself."

CHAPTER IX

Even to the impatient heart of youth the longed-for, entreated to-morrow comes with a suddenness which has its elements of shock. The Thursday which Hayden had regarded as so remote was actually here, and he, opening his eyes to the fact after a sound night's rest, was aware of that faint shrinking which comes to us all in that moment of embarkation upon the unknown and uncharted.

This day, he felt, was to be a day of revelations; in an hour, a moment, he might, nay he was sure that he would, learn certain facts, touch certain clues which might change and direct his whole future existence. As he dressed he caused the various circumstances of the past few weeks to marshal themselves in orderly array and pass in review before him.

He, by some irony of chance, had been so fortunate as to discover the wonderful lost Mariposa, the Veiled Mariposa; but although a vast fortune lay before his eyes, within his grasp, he was withheld from profiting by this strange stumble upon Golconda by the intangible potent arm of the law. And all his diligent efforts to find the owners of the property had been in vain. Then he had come to New York, largely to enjoy a long-anticipated vacation, and before he had had time to make definite plans and decide upon the best methods of prosecuting his

search for the owners of the mine, he heard, by the merest chance, of a fortune-teller who called herself Mariposa and who always appeared veiled. This fanciful symbolism might of course be the merest coincidence; but Hayden could not so view it. It was too significant not to smack of design.

And then, by another curious turn of the wheel, he had met a strange and lovely lady with a chain of jeweled butterflies about her throat, a great silver butterfly upon her breast. What significance could be attached to them? Apparently none. They seemed the fad of several great ladies and a very beautiful and extravagant fad; but what was the inner meaning, if indeed there was any? Yet, look at the matter dispassionately as he would, he could not rid himself of the idea that these delicately fashioned, fluttering things had a significance. Well, perhaps the day would disclose it. There was no use in his attempting to arrive at a solution of these enigmas. He could but await the pleasure of destiny. And further, there was that mysterious telephone message, a still unsolved enigma. Daily, he had waited for another message from the golden voiced unknown, but so far, all his waiting and hoping had met with a barren reward.

Then his thoughts reverted to his conversation with Mrs. Habersham, and his heart rose buoyantly with hope. She had, at least, assured him of one thing, and that was that there was nothing definite in these reports of Marcia's engagement to Wilfred Ames; and there were secret intimations prompted not of his vanity, but of a belief in the sympathetic understanding existing between Marcia and himself, which confirmed him in his determination to make the most of a fighting chance.

He managed, with these reflections, his correspondence and the various details of some business matters, to pass the morning; but when at three o'clock he made his way to the Mariposa's apartment he found himself to his own disgust in an unwonted state of excitement, which, as usual with him, revealed itself only in a more calm and leisurely demeanor; but when on stepping from the elevator he realized that his hands were like ice, he was for the moment irritated at his lack of nerve, and then he quickly bolstered himself up with the reflection that the day of destiny comes only once in a lifetime and one would have arrived at a state of vegetable stolidity to meet it unmoved. Then he laughed at himself for clinging so obstinately to the belief that this was the day of his destiny, and this laughter cleared his mental atmosphere. He was himself again, in command of his self-assurance and good spirits.

His ring was answered immediately by the trim maid who conducted him through a narrow hall and into a small reception-room where she requested him to wait while she informed her mistress of his presence.

Left alone he glanced curiously about him. There was certainly no mystery here. The room was agreeably light and sunshiny. It was furnished with several comfortable chairs, and a large round table in the center of the room. Upon this were scattered some of the latest magazines surrounding a vase of fresh and fragrant flowers.

Hayden turned over the pages of one of the books for a moment and then the dark-eyed, rosy, white-capped maid reappeared and announced that

Mademoiselle Mariposa would see him at once.

A few paces down the narrow hall, she drew aside the curtain before the door of mademoiselle's consulting-room, and stood aside for Hayden to enter, letting the portière fall noiselessly behind him. But Robert instead of advancing and taking a chair, although there was none to invite him to do so, for the room was empty, stood transfixed upon the threshold, almost open-mouthed.

Ah, here was the atmosphere he had so sadly missed in the small parlor. This room was large, and it seemed to one entering it for the first time to extend indefinitely, for upon the walls, against a soft, low-toned background, were painted the bare trunks and branches of leafless trees, a forest of them apparently, so admirable and so illusive was the perspective. The eye seemed to plunge into interminable forest vistas of dead leaves covering the ground and even floating on dim, moveless pools. The rounded ceiling was painted with silver-edged clouds, and the only light fell from a skylight like a great yellow moon.

When Hayden finally drew his attention from the walls and ceiling sufficiently to realize that he was not in the autumn woods, he noticed that this apartment was scantily furnished. Two or three chairs, a small table or so. On one of these tables was a bronze tripod upholding a crystal ball and a silk cushion upon which to rest one's hand during a palm-reading. On another table were several astrological charts and small books, presumably works of reference.

As he still stood motionless there was a slight rustle at the door, the curtain parted and the

Mariposa entered clad as always in her graceful black gown, the mantilla and the mask. It was the most effective of disguises and yet, it was negatived, nullified by a positive force of personality so unmistakable and definite that the disguise instead of concealing served more subtly to reveal and even accentuate individuality.

"How do you do, Mr. Hayden?" ignoring the name he had signed to his note and speaking with a marked Spanish accent meanwhile seating herself at the table holding the crystal globe.

"Ah!" cried Hayden, starting forward excitedly. "The waif of the wind! The lovely disembodied voice! How entirely delightful!"

Never had he been more interested and with every moment that passed, he was experiencing a pleasant sense of reassurance. For days he had been putting from him the latent but constant fear that Marcia Oldham and Mademoiselle Mariposa were identical; but a personal atmosphere is unmistakable, and in spite of her excellent and efficient disguise, Hayden felt instinctively that this was no delicate and wistful violet, but a gorgeous tropical bloom swaying from the tallest trees and exulting in torrid sunshine and fierce tempest. Her voice, too, was deeper and fuller, and the accent was, beyond question, genuine.

"I am afraid it is impossible to disguise my accent," she laughed but did not seem inclined to pursue the subject further. "Do you prefer a palm-reading, the crystal-gazing or both?" she asked, and although the words were the usual commonplace phrases that she probably repeated a dozen times a day, uttered monotonously enough, yet through

some vibrant, ringing quality her most ordinary utterances were endued with life.

"I hardly know," he said in answer to her question, and falling in with her mood. "What would you advise?"

"Why not try the crystal?" she said. "You will, I am sure, find it more interesting." Without waiting for his answer, she lifted the crystal ball from its tripod to the silken cushion, and began intently to gaze into its depths.

And now Hayden drew a sigh of intense relief. There was no longer any ground for the shadow of a doubt, for the hands of Mademoiselle Mariposa were not the hands of Marcia Oldham. Marcia's hands, as he had particularly noticed, were small and white, with very pink palms, and long, pointed, rosy-tipped fingers; while this woman's hands were smooth and creamy, the color of old ivory, with square fingers.

For a few moments there was silence between them, and then the fortune-teller began to speak in low familiar contralto tones, tones so near the brink of music that one expected trills and ripples of melody.

"I see mountains, yes, mountains, great bare hills; they change and vary in appearance, but there are always mountains; and I see wide burning deserts stretching on and on, and now there are forests, dark, impenetrable, vast forests. You have traveled much in foreign lands, señor. Now bridges and railroads, oh quite clearly, and natives—Chinese, blacks, Indians—much work in building railroads in many lands. Ah, clouds, clouds, clouds! Now they clear a little. Oh, señor, it is mountains again, ranges

of them. They become more clear, always more clear, and now your figure. I see you very plainly. You are in the mountains. You follow a little trail. It winds curiously among the rocks, twisting, turning, occasionally descending, often doubling on itself. Clouds again, clouds! Ah, now I see you again and in the broad sunshine. You are greatly excited. Your face is white, your eyes are shining—and your hands are full of nuggets, golden nuggets, free gold, señor; it shines and gleams like fire in the sun. Wonderful! I have rarely had so clear a vision!"

Hayden deliberately leaned forward and lifted the crystal from the silken cushion to its tripod. "I thought so," he said. "There, mademoiselle, I believe we can talk better with that out of the way. What language do you prefer? English or Spanish?"

She laughed. Airy, full laughter, trembling like her voice on the brink of music and falling in sparkling cascades into an ocean of melody. "But you are bold!" she cried. "Bold as brass."

"Not at all," said Hayden politely. "All this crystal-gazing is very interesting, very pretty and effective, and serves admirably to show just as much of your hand as you desire me to know. But you forget, mademoiselle, that you revealed your rather wide knowledge of my affairs the other evening over the telephone. By the way, mademoiselle, it's sheer curiosity on my part and I beg you to pardon it," he spoke a little diffidently, "but why 'mademoiselle' with Mariposa? Why not 'señorita?'"

"Euphony," she laughed, "nothing more, I assure you. It is more musical."

"Exactly. But tell me, mademoiselle, shall we not

take up matters where we dropped them the other evening? You have no objection I hope to discussing business?"

She appeared to ponder this proposition a moment. "Bah!" she cried suddenly. "You are right, quite right. It is an opportunity not to be wasted. But one moment, I can not talk with this on."

She swept off the mantilla and threw it aside. Her brown hair was rolled and twisted in great coils about her head, there were tendrils of it which sprang thickly about her brow and neck. The mask which concealed her face was held by a ribbon tied at the back of her head. She pulled at this but only succeeded in knotting it, and with an exclamation of impatience, she bent toward Hayden, murmuring:

"Please, señor."

He skilfully untied the knot, but while at this occupation the tendrils, shining like gold in the warm, yellow glow of the moon skylight, curled about his fingers, electric, tingling, leaving a faint, stinging remembrance.

"Oh, thank you."

She pulled off the mask and tossed it aside with a long breath of relief, and looked up, encountering Hayden's curious and admiring gaze. In that moment of unveiling, he saw before him a lady of high emprise.

"A diamond-drill of a woman!" cried Robert to himself; and the steel of him paid her gallant homage, homage all the more sincere in that she asked it not, neither craved nor stooped to win it. All she asked was the game, the game with the odds

against her. Cool, resourceful, she was concerned with neither doubts nor scruples. To such natures all roads lead to Rome. Before them lie the city of their hopes. That the roads are rocky and beset with unknown perils does not alarm, deter, or even particularly interest them. They see only Rome.

In that brief scrutiny permitted himself by a well-bred man, Hayden decided that she was a Gipsy. Her rather short face, with the full, square chin, was of a clear brown; her intense and vivid eyes were green, a beautiful and rare shade of olive. Her mouth was large, merry and inscrutable, with a particularly short upper lip, a mouth as reckless as Mercutio's. It would be difficult to say which impression predominated, beauty or force of character, or if, indeed, one could be disassociated from the other. Divorced from the sheer individuality, the power which she expressed in every movement, every line of face and figure, would she have been beautiful at all?

While Robert considered this question the Mariposa looked at her watch, then touched an electric bell. It was answered by her private secretary, a dark, pale, colorless young woman whom Hayden had not seen before.

"Eunice," said the Mariposa carelessly, "I do not wish to be disturbed for an hour. Whoever calls within that time, tell them that it is impossible for me to give them a reading to-day. Make other appointments for them at as early a date as possible. That is all." The depressed young woman bowed and withdrew.

"It is exactly half-after three, Mr. Hayden." She snapped her watch shut. "Now we can talk. I fancy

you are quite right. The crystal really did not—what do you say—did not, cut very much ice."

"You think then that, as you suggested the other evening, we shall probably find an interest in common?" he said.

"Undoubtedly. Several of them, perhaps."

He bent nearer. "Including butterflies?" he suggested.

She showed her white and even teeth. "Including butterflies," she repeated.

"But first," he said impetuously, "do allay the curiosity which, I assure you, would otherwise continue to come between me and any business matters we might discuss."

She looked at him with an inquiry which held a sort of prescient reserve. He could see that if not actually on guard, she held herself in readiness to be so.

"What do you mean?"

"You," he said daringly. "I have sat here watching and waiting to catch you tripping in that faultless accent of yours. It must be real. I have lived too much in Southern countries to be deceived."

She looked gratified, her pleasure showing itself in a deepening color. "It was adopted for business purposes, now it has become second nature. I, too, have lived much in Southern countries. The Romany strain, my mother was a Gipsy. You are a brother, Mr. Hayden, if not in blood, in kind. That kind that is so much more than kin. You are here to-day, there to-morrow. The doom of the wanderer is on you, and

the blessing. Take it on the word of a fortune-teller." She spread out her hands smiling her wide, gay smile with a touch of irony, of feminine experience, the serpent-bought wisdom of Eve in it. "You know what it means to hear the red gods calling, calling; to know that no matter what binds you, whether white arms or ropes of gold, you have to go."

"You show yourself a true daughter of the road, señorita, and a student of Kipling. We brothers of the wild are usually not much given to books."

"That is true," she assented. "I have heard them say: 'We know cities and deserts, men and women of every race. What can books give us?' But I tell them: 'Everything can pay us toll if we ask it. A star in the sky, the tiniest grain of sand on the beach. We can demand their secrets and they will not withhold them.'" She mused a moment. "One must learn from all sources, knock upon every door. When I weary of gaining wisdom from the ant or considering a serpent on the rock, or the way of a man with a maid, why, I turn to books. They are my solace, my narcotics, my friends, and my teachers. I take a few, a very few with me on any rough journey I may be making; but when I am here or in London or Paris, any place where I may be living for months at a time, I have my books about me."

"But why do you tell fortunes?" asked Hayden involuntarily, and immediately flushed to the roots of his hair. There was the vaguest something in her smiling gaze, the merest flicker of an eyelash, which convicted him of impertinence. "Forgive me. I—I beg your pardon," he stammered.

She ignored his apologies. "Some day I will tell you," she whispered, going through a pantomime of

looking about her cautiously as if it were a state secret of the most tremendous importance. "But we have talked enough about myself now, señor; the topic for discussion to-day is butterflies."

"An interesting subject might be The Veiled Mariposa," he said.

"Just so. Why beat about the bush?" He felt that she disdained subterfuges, although when necessary for her purposes, he was assured that she could use diplomacy, as a master of fence might his foils. "You, Mr. Hayden, have been lucky enough to find the lost Mariposa, the lost Veiled Mariposa. Is it not so? But you are in a peculiarly tantalizing position. You can not convert gold into gold. Strange. It sounds so simple. But your hands are tied."

"Perfectly true," Hayden assented.

"Then to put the matter in a nutshell and to descend from metaphor to plain business facts, you can not organize a company and begin to operate the mine or rather group of mines, for the reason that you can not secure a clear title, and what is worse, you have not, so far, succeeded in finding any trace of the present owners."

"You seem to know a lot about the matter," said Hayden pleasantly, "but do you know, I think that you are wrong on one point. I think, indeed I am quite sure, that I have found the owners, at least one of them."

"Yes?" Her tone still questioned. "And what then?"

"Well," he went slowly now, "there are some questions I would like to ask them. They may regard

it as an awful impertinence; but it would be a lot of satisfaction to me."

"What would be the nature of those questions?"

"Among other things"—he still spoke slowly, seeming to consider his words—"I should like to ask them why, for years now, they should have let a valuable property remain idle. Even if they have the wealth of Midas it is still a puzzle. No one is ever quite rich enough, you know, and down there is Tom Tiddler's ground to their hand."

"Well, what do you make of it—this puzzle?" She was looking steadily at a ring she was turning about on her finger.

"This!" He leaned forward. For the life of him he could not keep a faint ring of triumph out of his tone. "This, señorita. There is only one reasonable, credible solution—" He paused cruelly.

"Yes?" Her eyes were on his, eager, almost voracious. "Yes?"

"The present owners can not locate the mine, or else they think it not worth the trouble and expense of attempting to do so. That they have allowed the estate to lie idle and in a measure go to waste is also curious and puzzling. I can not explain that."

"Admitting such a thing for the sake of argument," she asked, "what then?"

"Well, I think we will have several things to say to each other then. For, if either of my suppositions is anywhere near correct their hands are tied just as much as mine, so I think we shall have to talk business, do not you?"

"I quite agree with you and I should add, the sooner the better."

"The sooner the better," he echoed, with emphasis.

She nodded. Again, she studied her nails, pink as almond-flowers, with interest.

"And you really believe, you are quite convinced, that this lost or abandoned mine is all that tradition says of it?" she asked at last.

"More," he replied laconically. "I have prospected over every foot of it, and I know that it contains a fortune. A fortune"—he struck the table with the palm of his hand—"beyond the dreams of avarice."

There were dancing sparkles in her green eyes. "Let me congratulate you, 'O gallant knight, gaily bedight, in sunshine or in shadow,' that you have been lucky enough to find Eldorado."

She rose in a sweeping impetuosity, drew up her slender height, and made him a curtsy, a flower bending buoyantly to the breeze, and springing upright again.

"But"—two or three sliding steps of the fandango, and then in her chair—"where did you find Eldorado? That's the history a daughter of the road wants to know. Is it truly 'over the mountains of the moon, down the valley of the shadow?'"

She swept him along on the tide of her high spirits; her laughter ran silver cascades down to the ocean of melody; her sun-flecked eyes held the heart-warming glow, the stimulation of wine. She

was a breeze blowing from the South.

"The romance!" she cried. "Behold an anomaly! Some one actually longing for a traveler's tale. Begin!" Her voice rang imperious, alluring.

Hayden almost caught at the table, a giddiness of the mind, perhaps of the senses, confused him. His face was a shade paler.

"It is too plain and rough a tale to be told except as a matter of business. You are kind; but I should not venture to bore you."

She accepted temporary defeat nonchalantly. "But you"—she did not change her position even by the movement of a finger, and yet, the whole expression of her figure became suddenly tense as a strung bow—"are you so sure that you could ever find your way thither again?"

He looked at her in surprise. "You give me very little credit for ordinary common sense, mademoiselle," he said shortly. "Of course, I made a map, and have any number of photographs." Immediately, he could have bitten his tongue.

"Ah, of course, naturally."

Her indifference, the absent-minded answer reassured him. He did not notice that her whole figure had relaxed.

There was a faint tap on the door and the subdued secretary stood on the threshold. "It is half-after four o'clock, mademoiselle, and your next client is waiting."

Hayden rose. "Time's up," he said. "But, señorita, when do you think the heirs will be ready to talk

business?"

"I think I can promise you an interview within a very short time; and in the meanwhile I will communicate with you. Oh, by the way, in private and domestic life, my name is Carrothers, Ydo Carrothers. Y-d-o," spelling it, "pronounced Edo."

"Ydo," he exclaimed. "It is a name made in Spain; in color it is red and yellow, and it smells of jasmine."

"Yes." She laughed at his description. "The Romany strain again, you see."

"One moment," he insisted. "How did you know my traveler's tale? Was it Penfield?"

"Never mind. It is sufficient that I know it. Good-by." She held out her hand. "You can't say I haven't told you a good fortune, can you?"

As Hayden passed through the narrow hall he saw sitting in the reception-room the next client—the gray-haired man with whom Marcia had dined that evening at the Gildersleeve. But a further surprise awaited him; for just as he reached the door leading from the apartment the rosy and smiling little maid was admitting Wilfred Ames. Hayden almost ran into him, and Ames, with a stare, muttered a surly recognition and passed on in.

CHAPTER X

"Quite right."

Hayden regarded his calendar approvingly. The large red and gold letters stared at him proclaiming arrogantly: "Every day is the best day of the year." And was it not true? Yesterday had proved indeed a day of destiny. It had brought him the assurance of a hope, the confirmation of a hesitant belief that the owners of the lost Mariposa were within reach and, better still, were not entirely masters of the situation. And yesterday, too, he had met Ydo; and, perhaps, Hayden's thoughts had been as much occupied with her as with his discovered but not possessed Eldorado.

But Ydo herself was a sufficient excuse for that. And this was another day. A daring thought came to him. Why not assist Fate and make it the best day in the year—a day that should be Marcia's. At this brilliant idea he looked at his watch and then rushed to the telephone. Surely Marcia, even conscientious Marcia who worked painstakingly at her pretty Little water-colors every day, would not have left for her studio. He would throw dice with Destiny again to-day and push his luck. With this determination, he rang up the residence of Mrs. Oldham. There was a moment or two of delay, and then Marcia's voice answered. Hayden mentioned the beauty of the day —it was overcast—the charm of this soft and mild weather—an east wind blew piercingly—and diffidently assumed that after a day in her studio, she would as usual take the air by walking home through the Park.

Yes-s-s-s, she probably would.

Then since he had hoped to call upon her mother that afternoon, might he not join her and

walk up with her, and would she not be leaving her brushes and canvases early, at half-after four, for instance.

Yes-s-s, he said four o'clock, did he not? Fate again honored him, she would be at the Plaza then calling on a friend.

Hayden had won in his dice-throwing and Fate took defeat handsomely, granting him his desires and throwing a favor or two for lagnappe. By four o'clock the wind had veered, the clouds no longer betokened rain, broken spars of sunshine dazzled over the gold of the Sherman statue, sparkled in the harness of prancing horses, and brightened the whiteness of the great hotel. It was early in March, which, by the way, had decided to enter like a meek little lamb this year instead of advancing with the mien of an angry and roaring lion. The air was cool and fresh and yet held all manner of soft, indescribable intimations of spring. The sky was a sheet of pale gold, the trees were a purple mist against it.

Hayden drew a long breath of happiness as Marcia's steps fell in with his; the sense of contentment and well-being which her mere presence always afforded him seemed the more soothing and potent this afternoon than ever before. Since yesterday, there had run high in his veins the fever of acquisition, and Ydo's personality had disturbed and stimulated until she had wrought in him a sort of mental confusion. But Marcia at his side, smiling in the shadow of her plumed hat, the familiar violets nestling in her dark furs, seemed the visible embodiment of all these soft, sweet intimations of spring. Not yet jocund, as spring come into her own crowned with flowers and laughing

through her silver rain; but a wistful spring still held in the thraldom of winter.

"What have you been doing that makes you look a little pale?" asked Hayden tenderly.

"Am I pale?" She smiled at him. "I dare say. I have been painting the greater part of every day and going out a good deal in the evening."

"What an idler I must seem to you who are always so occupied," he said.

"Not at all. I, too, take vacations. But tell me how you have been idling lately."

"I idled, if you call it that," he said, "yesterday afternoon at the wonderful fortune-teller's."

"Oh, you have seen Ydo?" Marcia lifted her head involuntarily, and then meeting his surprised gaze, the color flooded her cheeks. It kept on rolling up in waves.

Seeing her embarrassment, he was at pains to suppress his astonishment.

"Yes," he said as naturally as he possibly could under the circumstances. "Yes, she gave me quite a long reading. Isn't that the professional word for it—reading?"

"I—I believe so." She had not entirely recovered herself. "And are you quite convinced of her powers?"

He gave a short laugh. "Oh, quite. More than convinced. I never should question them. Mine is the fate of the scoffer. The most rabid persecutor is merely the reverse side of the bigoted proselyter.

Upon me rests not the curse that follows the tolerant. They get nowhere. 'Because thou art neither hot nor cold I spew thee from my mouth.'"

"Really!" It was plain she was a little puzzled, and took refuge in the conveniently inexpressive "really." "Did she tell you a good fortune?"

"How can I say? Fortune is always in the future."

"You are teasing me and telling me nothing," she declared, "and you are laughing, laughing, too, as if over some secret and mysterious joke."

"I am laughing," he said, suddenly serious, "but not over any of the revelations of Mademoiselle Mariposa, I can assure you; and to show you my faith in her prophecies, I am going to tell you something." He was grave enough now. "And yet, I wonder—perhaps—"

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps you will find no interest in what I want to say."

She looked up at him quickly, surprise in her glance. "How absurd! I do not see why you say such things. Why should you fancy that I would not be interested in anything you have to tell me?"

They had turned down a narrow lane of trees, and the skies, a deeper and more luminous gold, were in a net of bare, black twigs. The wind bore the fragrance of Marcia's violets past Hayden's nostrils.

"But you may not feel so when I tell you that I love you, Marcia." His voice low and unsteady thrilled her heart. "I realize the rashness of the whole thing; but I do love you, Marcia."

There was a moment's silence, a silence when Hayden's heart-beats sounded louder than the patter of their feet on the concrete pavement or the distant and mighty roar of the city—and then Marcia lifted her eyes to his.

In a moment the miracle had happened. Above them stretched the same gold sky in its intricate and broken nets, the wind blew softly; but they two had stepped across the boundaries of commonplace days straight into Arcady. Flowers bloomed, birds sang, and the soul of the spring was in their hearts. But, curiously enough, though they were in Arcady, they were also in the Park. Hayden looked up the little lane; north and south marched an unending line of people. They were in Arcady, but deprived of its ancient privilege of sylvan and umbrageous solitude.

She was the first to speak. "Why is it absurd?" And her clear voice trembled a little.

"How can it be, as things stand, anything but absurd?" he answered bitterly. "I am simply an engineer on my vacation, who when that is over will return to the wilds. Oh, Marcia, how can I in common decency ask you to marry me? I can not yet, but I do ask you to let me love you, to forgive me for telling you of my feeling for you, and believe me when I tell you that I would not have had the courage to mention the subject if I did not feel almost sure of a change of fortune. I don't want to tell you just yet. I'm trying not to tell you; but dearest, loveliest Marcia, I believe I'm on the eve of success. I can almost close my fingers around it, and then you will let me tell you I love you, won't you, dearest? Yes, laugh at me, I don't mind."

"But suppose, just suppose this wonderful

fortune never does materialize," she said half-teasingly but still tremulously, a smile on her lips and a tear in her eye. "What then?"

"Never suppose it. It can't help it," he cried confidently. "Why even now I can see particles of gold in the air. To-morrow, next day, the day afterward, we shall have our cake. Will you eat it with me, Marcia, if it's a nice, brown, plum-y cake?"

"You make too many conditions," she said demurely. "I don't care for very rich cake myself. Suppose the cake should not turn out particularly well in the baking? Wouldn't you offer me a piece anyway—Bobby?"

Again he looked up the path and down the path; people still hastening to and fro. Arcady was infested with toilers hurrying home to supper.

"I'd try not to," he said manfully, keeping his eyes resolutely away from hers. "Oh, Marcia, I can't be certain, I'd try not to. I couldn't bear to see you eating underdone cake. It would only mean misery to you. Your manner of life—"

"My manner of life!" she interrupted him scornfully. "Ah, what is my manner of life! Do you fancy that I am deaf as a post and blind as a bat? Do you think that I do not know some of the things that are spoken of me, by Mrs. Ames, for instance, or Horace Penfield, or even Edith Symmes? Do you fancy any word of that tittle-tattle escapes me? Sometimes it is repeated, or hinted in malice; sometimes as from Bea or Kitty in fright, as a warning, almost a prayer. I know that I lay myself open to gossip; but I can not help it, at least at present. It is impossible for me to alter things just

now."

"I know," he murmured tenderly. "I am sure of it. I have realized something of this from the first moment that I met you. But always since that moment I could stake my life on this, that any—any mystery that might seem to exist was not of your making or choosing. And I want to assure you of something, to make you believe it if necessary; and that is, dear, dear Marcia, if you never choose to unravel the tangle I shall still be content."

She looked at him a moment in absolute, speechless wonder, and then tears, happy tears brimmed in her eyes. "Oh, how glad I shall be to unravel it!" She breathed deeply. "How glad! Wait a little—a week, a fortnight. Ah!" She caught herself up hastily. "Come, see how late! It is growing dark and the lights are beginning to twinkle out, and they tell me, even if you will not, that it is time I ran home and got dressed. I'm to dine at Bea Habersham's to-night. You must come in with me when we reach home and let mother give you a cup of tea. You are a tremendous favorite of hers; she says you are wonderfully witty. And then you can drive as far as Bea's with me, and I will have the chauffeur take you on home. Will you?"

"Will I? Will I? Thank you very much, Miss Oldham, for your amiability in Suggesting such a thing; but I could not possibly take advantage of your kindness." If the wit of this sally may be judged by the manner in which it was received Hayden had just uttered one of the great bon-mots of the ages.

"I hope," said Marcia presently, a touch of apprehension in her tone, "that some one has been to see mother this afternoon. Poor dear! She always

feels a little aggrieved if no one comes."

"Let us appease any possible disappointment she may have suffered by taking her a present," suggested Hayden, fired by inspiration. "Women, children, every one likes presents, do they not? Come, let us find shops."

"What an adventurer you are!" laughed Marcia, letting him lead her across the street, a confusion crowded with swiftly moving vehicles and cars, for they had now left the twilight shadows and comparative seclusion of the Park and were walking down the noisy thoroughfare.

"You will have to make a quick decision," she added as they came upon a region of many brilliant shops and sidewalks crowded with people. "What will you take her, fruit or flowers?"

But Hayden was too happy to consider any topic with gravity. "We will take her a swanboat, or one of the Hesperidian apples, or the Golden Fleece."

And although Marcia spent herself in urging him to stick to the conservative fruit and flowers, he insisted on following his own vagrant fancy, and at last decided upon an elaborate French basket of pale-blue satin covered with shirrings of fine tulle. The lid was a mass of artificial flowers, violets and delicate pink roses, and within the satin-lined depths was a bunch of Hamburg grapes.

This, when finally and carefully wrapped, made a huge package; but Hayden insisted on carrying it, assuring Marcia that every one they met would be sure that he was carrying home the turkey for their Sunday dinner. He bore it ostentatiously, and took

particular glee in any passing attention they excited.

"You act as if you were twenty, instead of well—let me guess your age," looking at him with keen scrutiny. "About thirty-five," said Marcia cruelly.

He stopped short to gaze at her with pained reproach. "I am Youth! Incarnate Youth, just eighteen. No doubt to your dulled materialistic vision I appear to wear a coat and hat. Is that true?" with polite, tolerant patience.

"It certainly appears that way to me," she replied. "What do you imagine yourself to be wearing?"

"And I dare say," he continued still patiently, "that you also fancy you and I are strolling about in one of the shopping districts of New York?"

"Yes," nodding affirmatively. "Where else?"

"Wretched, purblind girl! Thirty-five indeed! Why, I am eighteen, and clad in the hide of a leopard with a wreath of roses on my brow, and you, sweet Œnone, are wandering with me on the slopes of Ida—and we are taking your mother, not one, but a peck of golden apples."

"All things considered," said Marcia significantly, "I am glad we have reached our own door."

They found Mrs. Oldham in good spirits in consequence of having seen a number of people who had sufficient tact duly to admire her new costume worn for the first time that afternoon. She had given much consideration to all the effects of the picture she wished to create, and now sat in an especial chair in an especial part of the room, a vision in pale

gray and orchid tints most skilfully mingled. Her feet, in orchid silk stockings, and slippers adorned with great choux of gray chiffon, looked on their footstool as if they were a part of the decorations of the room and had never served the utilitarian purpose of conveyance.

"Oh, I am glad to see you!" she cried, peering past Marcia to Hayden who followed, almost obscured by his great package. She stretched out a hand for him to take, not disarranging her pose by rising and thus spoiling the composition. "Marcia, you're dreadfully late, as usual," a touch of fretfulness in her voice.

"I know," replied her daughter; "and now, I'm going to leave Mr. Hayden to you. Give him some tea, won't you? I'm dining at the Habershams, you know, and he will drive down with me after a while."

"Of course I'll give Mr. Hayden some tea. Send in some hot water, Marcia." She leaned forward, still careful not to move her feet and fussed with the tea things on the table by her side. "I am very glad to see you," she murmured again. "Ah, Mr. Hayden, if it were not for my friends I should be a very lonely woman. You understand, of course, that I do not complain. Marcia is the dearest girl that ever was, so lovely and attractive. Oh, dear, yes. But," with an upward glance of resignation, "quite young people are apt to be thoughtless, you know, and Marcia's social life is so much to her, and indeed, I am selfish enough to be truly glad that it is so; it really is a great bond between dear Wilfred and herself; but of course it leaves me much alone; and it is not good for me to be thrown back on myself and my own sad thoughts so much. Mr. Oldham always recognized

that fact. 'Change, constant diversion is an Absolute necessity to one of your sensitive, high-strung nature,' he would so often say, but," with a long-drawn sigh, "no one thinks enough about me to feel that way now."

"Don't say that," said Hayden cheerfully. "I may not be any one, but I've been thinking about you. Look! I carried this enormous bundle through the streets just for you. Be careful. It's heavy."

She flushed with pleasure through her delicately applied rouge, and stretching out her hands for her gift began eagerly to unwind the various tissue-papers which concealed it. The last of these discarded, she placed the basket in the middle of the table and spent herself in ecstatic phrases, melting from pose to pose of graceful admiration.

"Ah, Mr. Hayden," with one of her archest glances, "you remind me so much of Mr. Oldham." Hayden had a swift, mental picture of that grim old pirate of finance, as represented by his portraits and photographs, his shrewd, rugged old face surrounded by Horace Greeley whiskers. "He never came home without bringing me something. Sometimes it was just a flower, or some fruit, and again it was a jewel. You can't fancy, Mr. Hayden, no words of mine can express to you his constant thought and care for me. You take lemon in your tea, do you not? I thought so. I always remember those little things about my friends. And he had such faith in my business judgment, too. He would often discuss business with me and ask my opinion on this or that matter; and he always, without exception, acted on my advice. He used to say—so foolish of him—that he could not understand why he should have been so favored as

to have found a combination of beauty and brains in one woman."

"It is rare, but as I understand now, not impossible." Hayden took his cue nobly.

"Oh, Mr. Hayden!" A reproving finger was shaken at him with the archest coquetry. "If you talk that way I shan't give you another cup of tea, no matter how hard you beg. But where was I? Oh, yes, I was telling you that Mr. Oldham so often discussed business matters with me."

"And did they interest you?" asked Hayden vaguely, wondering how soon he could possibly expect Marcia to return.

"Oh, yes, I found it more thrilling than the printed page."

"Most men do," he replied dryly. "I didn't know that women felt that way."

"I did." Mrs. Oldham nodded her head in modest acceptation of the fact that she was the exceptional woman. "I found it not only thrilling, but often *so* romantic. I do not see why people will speak of 'the dry details of business.' I think it is full of romance."

Hayden stared at her with the amazement her mental processes always aroused in him.

"It never seemed exactly within the range of romantic subjects to me," he said dubiously; "but perhaps that's the way I've been looking at it."

"Certainly it is," she affirmed triumphantly. "Now I'll prove it to you. As I often say to young people, Mr. Hayden: 'Never make an assertion unless you can prove it.' Now, I distinctly remember Mr.

Oldham telling me of a most romantic business matter. A lost mine of almost unthinkable value which was on an old estate somewhere in Brazil, or no, Peru. Why, what is the matter, Mr. Hayden? Your eyes are almost popping out of your head. You look as if you had seen a ghost."

Hayden caught himself together. "It is only that it is so interesting. Do go on and let me hear the rest of it."

Mrs. Oldham smiled, well pleased at the tribute to her powers as a raconteuse. "Well, there isn't much to tell. I've forgotten the details, and they were so romantic, too; but Mr. Oldham seriously considered buying it."

"And did he buy it?" Hayden's hands were trembling in spite of himself. "This is so intensely interesting, one would like to hear the conclusion of the story."

But Mrs. Oldham only shook her head. "I don't know," she said vaguely. "I think he did; but I can't be sure."

She began another long story, but Hayden, after listening to enough of it to assure himself that it had no bearing on The Veiled Mariposa, gave himself up to the confused conjectures, the hopes, the dreams that thronged his brain.

Was it a possibility that Marcia, Marcia, might be the heiress of the great Mariposa estate? The owner, or one of the owners of it? He felt overcome by the bare mental suggestion. But was it a possibility, even a dim and remote one? Accepting this as a temporary hypothesis, was it not borne out

by certain facts? The butterflies, for instance. Did not those jeweled ornaments symbolize in some delicate, fanciful way, Marcia's way, her ownership of The Veiled Mariposa? And would not that ownership also account for the much-questioned source of her wealth? He stopped with a jerk up against a dead wall. The Mariposa mine had not been worked for years; the ranches were cultivated only by the Spaniard in possession. These facts were like a dash of cold water, extinguishing the flame of his hopes. And yet, and yet, the butterflies! But that, he was forced to admit, might be the merest coincidence.

On that chain of evidence he would find it necessary to regard his cousin, Kitty Hampton, Mrs. Habersham, the London actress, a score of women, as possible owners of his Golconda. Nevertheless, in spite of reason, he could not escape the conviction, unfounded but persistent, that those butterflies were in some way connected with the ownership of that distant lost mine. And this purely intuitive belief was suddenly strengthened by the remembrance of Marcia's embarrassment in the Park, an hour or two before, when she had involuntarily and inadvertently spoken of Mademoiselle Mariposa familiarly as Ydo.

"Yes, Mrs. Oldham, I quite agree with you. As you say: 'One can not be too careful.' Oh, no, I never was more interested in my life."

Ydo! Ydo! He took up the thread of his absorbing reflections again as Mrs. Oldham's voice purled on reciting with infinite detail all the data of one of her Helen-like conquests. Ydo! What bond could exist between the reserved, even haughty Marcia in spite of all her gentleness, and the capricious, wayward, challenging Ydo? A bond

sufficiently strong to permit the affectionate familiarity of first names? He had from the beginning believed that Ydo had some interest in the property, although he had never been able satisfactorily to guess the nature of it. But Marcia! The mere possibility of her being interested in what Ydo merrily called his Eldorado had never struck him before, and his brain was bewildered by the thousand new trains of conjecture it started.

At this point his reflections were broken in upon by the entrance of Marcia herself. She was all in white with the big, ruby-eyed butterfly on her bosom, and the chain of butterflies about her throat. She looked more radiant than he had ever seen her as she stood before them drawing on her long gloves. Her eyes, no longer sad with all regret, were like deep blue stars, and her smile was full of a soft and girlish happiness.

"You look very well, Marcia," said her mother critically. "A new gown, of course. How differently they are cutting the skirts!"

"It's a lovely gown," affirmed Hayden, smiling down into Marcia's eyes. "After all, a simple white frock is the prettiest thing a woman can wear."

"Simple!" Mrs. Oldham's mirth was high and satiric. "Isn't that like a man? Simple is the last word to be applied to Marcia's frocks, Mr. Hayden. It's a good thing, as I often tell her, that her father left us so well provided for."

The lovely happiness vanished from Marcia's eyes. She looked quickly at her mother with an almost frightened expression, and then, with eyelashes lowered on her cheek, went silently on

drawing on her gloves, two or three tense little lines showing about her mouth.

"I think Miss Oldham is very unkind," said Hayden, with some idea of bridging the situation gracefully, "never to have shown me any of her pictures. She paints, paints all day long, and yet will not give one a glimpse of the results. Kitty Hampton has been promising to show me some of the water-colors she has, but she has not yet done so."

"Have you been talking much to Mr. Hayden of your pictures, Marcia?" asked her mother suavely.

The tone was pleasant, even casual, and yet, Hayden, sensitive, intuitive, had a quick, shocked sense of having blundered egregiously; and worse, he had a further sense of Mrs. Oldham's words being fraught with some ugly and hidden meaning. In her voice there had been manifest an unsuspected quality which had revealed her for the moment as not all frivolous fool or spoiled and empty-headed doll; but a tyrant and oppressor, crueller and more menacing because infinitely weak and unstable.

Marcia did not reply at all to her mother's question, but with her lashes still downcast, continued to button her gloves; and Hayden stood, miserably uncomfortable for a moment, and then was forced to doubt the correctness of his swift, unpleasant impression; for Mrs. Oldham observed in her usual petulant, inconsequent tones:

"I don't know that I like that necklace with that frock, Marcia. Your turquoises would look better. I do get so tired of always seeing you with some kind of a butterfly ornament. You never showed the slightest interest in butterflies before your father

died, and you don't, in the least, suggest a butterfly. I can not understand it."

"Don't try, mother dear," said Marcia. "Good-by." She kissed the orchid and gray lady lightly on the top of the head. "Have a good time with your Hamburg grapes and your last new novel."

She slipped her arms through the long white coat Hayden held for her and, followed by him, left the room.

"Marcia, dear, sweet Marcia," he coaxed, as they whirled through the streets in her electric brougham. "I'm sure, almost dead sure, it's going to be a nice, well-baked, plum-y cake. If it is won't you promise to eat it with me? You know you didn't definitely promise this afternoon, and I never could stand uncertainty."

"No," she said positively, drawing her hand away from his, "I will not. I will never give you a definite answer until you offer me a share in the cake, no matter how it turns out in the baking."

"How can I?" he groaned. "You do not know what sort of a life it would be, the hardships, the deprivations, the necessarily long separations when I would have to be in some place utterly impossible for you, for months at a time. It's the very abomination of desolation. And fancy your trying to adapt yourself to it! You, used to this!" rapping the electric. "And this, and this!" touching lightly the ermine on her cloak and the jewels at her throat. "No." He shook his head doggedly. "I won't. I know what it means and you do not. Lovely butterfly"—the tenderness of his voice stirred her heart-strings—"do you think that I could bear to see you beaten to

earth, your bright wings torn and faded by the cruel storms? Never. But," with one of his quick, mercurial changes of mood, "it's an alternative that we do not have to face. For it's coming out all right in the baking—that cake. The most beautiful cake you ever saw, Marcia, with a rich, brown crust, and more plums than you ever dreamed of in a cake before."

CHAPTER XI

"Bobby," said Kitty Hampton one evening as they sat alone together in her drawing-room, "things are slow, deadly slow. Why do not you do something to amuse your little cousin?"

"My little cousin has far more amusement than is good for her as it is," returned Hayden. "But while you're mentioning this, let me say that I am anxious to evince some appreciation of all the hospitality you and Mrs. Habersham and one or two others have shown me; but I don't know just what to do."

Kitty sat up with a marked accession of interest in her expression and attitude. "Dear me! There are quantities of things you could do," she said. "But, Bobby, do get out of the beaten track; try to think of something original. Of course, it's all nonsense, about feeling under obligation to any one for so-called hospitality, but there is no reason why you should not provide some fun. Now, what shall it be?"

"Anything you say," remarked Hayden amiably. "To tell the truth, Kitty, I've been intending to ask

you just what I should do. What can you suggest?"

"It requires thought." Kitty spoke seriously. "But be assured of this: I'm not going to suggest any of the same old things. If you want something really delightful and have a desire to have us truly enjoy ourselves you must have just a few congenial people. Better make it a dinner, I think. That is it. A dinner at your apartment," catching joyously at this idea, "with some original, clever features."

"I thought whatever it was"—Hayden had reddened perceptibly—"I'd like it to be—a—a—compliment, in a way, to Miss Oldham."

"I do not doubt it." Kitty surveyed him with amused eyes.

"I always think of her in connection with the butterflies she wears so much. Would it be a possibility to carry the butterfly idea out in some way?" he asked.

Kitty clapped her hands. She was all animation and enthusiasm now. The habitual, sulky-little-boy expression had quite vanished from her face. "Beautiful! Just the idea! You couldn't have thought of a better one. The butterfly lady has had a great fascination for you, hasn't she, Bobby?"

"Which one?" he asked quickly.

"Which one? Hear that!" His cousin apostrophized space. "Why, I was thinking of Marcia, of course."

He smiled a little and became momentarily lost in reverie, his chin in the palm of his hand, and dreaming thus, Kitty's old French drawing-room and

Kitty herself, her blond prettiness accentuated and enhanced by the delicate pinks and blues of her gown, vanished, and Marcia seemed to stand before him all in black and silver as he had seen her recently at a ball, with violets, great purple violets, falling below the shining butterfly on her breast, her sweet and wistful smile curving her lips and her eyes full of light and happiness.

"Bobby, come back!" Kitty touched him petulantly on the arm. "You've been a million miles away, and you looked so selfishly happy that I feel all shivery and out in the cold."

"Kitty," he said, "I will confess, when I said, 'Which one?' I was thinking not only of Miss Oldham, but of the other butterfly lady—the Mariposa. You know Mariposa means butterfly. Well, it is really the Mariposa who fascinates me."

"Bobby! What on earth do you mean?" Kitty's expression was a mixture of Disappointment and indignation.

"Just what I say. The Mariposa fascinates me; but, Kitty," his face softening, "I love the fairy princess with all my heart. I have loved her from the first moment I saw her."

"How dear! I have thought so, hoped so, for some time." Her face was all aglow. "But you frightened me dreadfully, just now. I was afraid you had gone over to Mademoiselle Mariposa like Wilfred Ames. He is crazy about her, simply crazy. I did not know he could be crazy over anything, except the chance of tearing off to some impossible spot to shoot big game."

"Wilfred Ames! Crazy about the Mariposa!" exclaimed Hayden incredulously; and then he paused, remembering that it was but recently that he had met Ames at the door of Ydo's apartment.

"Yes." Kitty was sulky again. "It's true. And I wanted him for Marcia. But Marcia was stupid about it and always laughed at the idea. Horace Penfield says that he has completely swerved from his allegiance to Marcia. Just fancy how his mother will behave now. Good for her, I say. But, Bobby, have you told Marcia?"

"Yes. I couldn't help it, Kitty, but it wasn't fair. I had no right to say a word until I know how things are going to turn out with me and that, thank Heaven, will be settled in a day or so." He drew a long sigh.

"Bobby," Kitty was looking at him curiously, and a rather hard abruptness had crept into her tone, "has she, Marcia, told you anything about these?" She touched the butterflies clasped about her throat.

"No." He shook his head. "But I believe I have guessed their significance. And it has made me happier than I can tell you. It has made me feel that our interests are one, as if Destiny had intended us for each other."

"I'm sure I don't see why it should," she said shortly, looking at him in a bewildered, disapproving way. "I didn't know you were that kind. It sounds awfully self-seeking. I do not believe you've guessed right." Her face brightened. "That is it. You've got some idea into your head, and it's evidently far from the correct one. You wouldn't be the Bobby I know if it were."

"Then tell me what the correct one is," he coaxed. "If I am on the wrong track, set me on the right one."

"Not I," she returned firmly. "The thing for us to decide is just what sort of a dinner you are going to have. You want some really interesting features. I insist on that."

He threw wide his arms. "I give you carte blanche, here and now, Kitty. All that I insist on are the butterfly effects. Beyond that, I leave everything in your hands; but I must have them."

Kitty's eyes gleamed with pleasure. She loved to manage other people's affairs. "I'll see to them," she affirmed. "Just give me a little time to think them up. What shall we have afterward? Some music?"

"So commonplace," he objected, "and the place is too small."

"Yes-s-s," she reluctantly agreed. "And you don't want very many people. Just our own especial little group."

"It will have to be small," he warned her. "My quarters do not admit of anything very extensive."

"Whom shall we have?" Mrs. Hampton began to count on her fingers. "The Habershams, and Edith Symmes, and Horace Penfield, and Warren and myself, and Marcia, and Wilfred Ames, and yourself." She paused, a look of dismay overspreading her face. "We'll have to have another woman. Who on earth shall it be?"

"A butterfly dinner without the Mariposa would seem like *Hamlet* with the Prince left out, wouldn't

it?" suggested Hayden.

"Oh!" Kitty gasped joyously. "Mademoiselle Mariposa! Do, do, invite her. What fun! Do you think she will come? You know Marcia knows her, but she will not talk about her ever, because, she says, Mademoiselle Mariposa has requested her not to. So she will not say where and how she met her. Mean thing! Of course, I've only seen her in her little mask and mantilla. You do not suppose she would wear them to a dinner, do you? I am dying to see her without them. Horace Penfield knows her very well and he says she is very beautiful and deliciously odd. If it enters into her head to do anything she just does it, no matter what it is. And extravagant!" Kitty lifted her eyes and hands at once. "They say that her jewels and frocks are almost unbelievable. Why, one day when she was reading my palm, I noticed that her gown was drawn up a little on one side, and showed her petticoat beneath, with ruffles of Mechlin, real Mechlin on it. Some people say that she is a Spanish princess, or something of the kind—so eccentric that she tells fortunes just for the fun of it. Oh, Bobby, do, do get her."

"When shall we have this dinner?" asked Hayden, with apparent irrelevance.

Kitty thought quickly. "Give me ten days to decide upon things and have my orders carried out."

"Very good. Ten days. Let me see, that will be Tuesday of week after next. Do you think the rest will come?"

"Of course they will come. They would break any other engagement to meet Mademoiselle Mariposa."

"Then I will find out now if she will come, if you will allow me to use your telephone."

He was lucky enough to find Ydo at home; but when he informed her that he was giving a dinner for a few friends on Tuesday, ten days away, and that he earnestly desired her presence, she demurred.

"What are you doing this evening?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered, "and I am bored."

"Then jump into your electric and come here to my cousin's, Mrs. Warren Hampton's, as fast as you can," he said audaciously.

"How do you know she wants me? You are taking a great deal on yourself."

For answer Hayden handed the receiver to Kitty, who had followed him out and now stood at his shoulder listening breathlessly to every word. "Mademoiselle is in doubt of your eagerness to see her," he said.

"Oh, please come," urged Kitty through the telephone. "Waste no time."

"I will be with you in twenty minutes," said Ydo sweetly.

Back in the drawing-room, Kitty was too excited to remain quietly in her chair, but danced about expressing her delight at the prospect of at last seeing the Mariposa sans mask and mantilla.

"Tell me, Bobby," she insisted, "is she really so eccentric?"

"I fancy she does exactly as she pleases, always,"

he replied.

"And extravagant? Warren says no one could be more extravagant than I."

"She is a dreamer," he averred, "a dreamer who dreams true. Her ideas are so vivid that she insists on seeing them in tangible form. I don't believe she particularly counts the cost or the base material means by which these things must be accomplished."

"Fancy!" sighed Kitty. "Oh, I do hope she will wear one of her stunning gowns and some of those marvelous jewels they say she possesses, set in the most wonderful, quaint ways, Horace Penfield says. But surely she will."

"I think it likely," agreed Robert amiably.

"And is she very clever and interesting?" continued Kitty.

"She is herself," said Hayden. "I can not describe her any other way. She may strike you as a bit staccato and stilted sometimes; but it is natural to her. She is always herself."

There was a faint sound of a curtain before the door being pushed aside, but this, Kitty and Hayden, absorbed in their conversation, had not heard, and now, Mrs. Hampton turned with a stifled scream to see a stranger, a Gipsy, standing almost at her elbow.

"Pretty lady!" The English was more deliciously broken than ever, and so cajoling was the whisper that it would have coaxed the birds off the trees and wheedled money from the stingiest pocket. "Pretty lady, let me tell your fortune. Cross my palm with silver. 'Tis the seventh daughter of a seventh

daughter who asks you."

Kitty looked from the Gipsy to Robert in bewilderment. This was not the dazzling figure in gauzes and satins and jewels she had expected, a capricious lady of a foreign and Southern nobility, whose whimsical and erratic fancy was occasionally amused by a change of role. This was a daughter of the long, brown path, who afoot and light-hearted took naturally to the open road, with the tanned cheek, white teeth, and merry eyes of her kind.

And yet, if not the glittering vision Kitty had anticipated, Ydo was a sufficiently vivid and picturesque figure. Her short corduroy skirt had faded with wear and washing to a pale fawn-tint with a velvety bloom upon it; her brown boots were high and laced, her blue blouse had faded like her skirt to a soft and lovely hue. A red sash confined her waist, a handkerchief of the same color was knotted loosely about her throat, while a yellow scarf was tied about her head and fell in long ends down her back.

Kitty immediately recovered from the shock she had experienced at the unheralded advent of the strange visitor and endeavored to make up in warmth of greeting for the surprise she had shown.

"Forgive me, instead," said Ydo, with charming penitence. "But I was the Gipsy to-night in heart and feeling. I had to put on these. Oh," throwing herself into a chair, "I have suffered to-day. It has been coming on for days. Ennui. Do you know it, pretty lady? And the longing for mine own people."

"Your people are not in this country, are they?" asked Kitty politely.

The Mariposa drew her brows together in a little puzzled frown. "My people!" she repeated. "Oh," with dawning comprehension, "you mean relatives. I," with a short laugh, "I said mine own people. You," turning to Robert, "you understand. One of the greatest, most searching questions ever asked, and which must finally be answered by each of us from the promptings of his own heart, is: 'Who is my brother and my sister?' Ah, I shall soon take to the road again. If I could only go now!"

"To find your own people," asked Kitty timidly.

"One does not seek one's own," said Ydo disdainfully. "One does not 'scour the seas nor sift mankind a poet or a friend to find.' He comes, and you know him because he is a poor Greek like yourself. Dear lady"—she broke into one of her airy rushes of laughter—"in spite of your smiles and all the self-control of a careful social training, you are the picture of bewilderment. See, you can keep no secrets from the fortune-teller. You can not place me. Why do you try? I refused to be announced and mine was the fate of the listener. Brutus there is an honorable man who admits that I am extravagant, even if he condones it. Ah, madame, money is not wealth, it is a base counterfeit, a servant whom I bid to exchange itself for beauty. These"—she stripped the petals from a red rose in a vase near her, and tossed them in the air—"these are the real wealth of the world. And Brutus says I am stilted, exaggerated in my conversation, given to metaphor and hyperbole. That is because I dare to express what I feel, and since everywhere I see parables I voice them. Why not?

"And Brutus says I am eccentric, admitting that I

dare to be myself; and to dare to be one's self, dear lady, is to dare everything. We are afraid of life, of love, of sorrow and joy, of everything. This fear of life is universal."

"And you, are you never afraid?" asked Kitty.

"Of what?" laughed the Gipsy. "Let me tell you a secret; and oh, madame, wear it next your heart, guard it. 'Tis a talisman against fear. The lions are always chained. Believe me, it is so. But our conversation is of a seriousness! Mr. Hayden spoke of a dinner."

"Yes, and he's given me permission to do just as I choose," said Kitty. "So it's got to be a success—"

"And she's trying to say," interrupted Hayden, "that it couldn't possibly be a success without you."

"Of course I am," agreed Kitty, "only I should have put it less bluntly."

"Wait! I have an inspiration." Ydo thought a moment. "I will not come to the dinner. We can make it much more effective than that. Ah, listen!" waving her hands to quell their protests. "Let me appear, later in the evening, in my professional capacity and tell the past, present and future of your guests. Yes, I will come in mask and mantilla, The Veiled Mariposa," with a dramatic gesture, a quick twinkle of the eyes toward Hayden. "I assure you, it will be far more interesting so."



"There is really no doubt about that," said Kitty thoughtfully, and together they silenced Robert's eloquent plea that the dinner would fall flat unless Ydo was one of the guests.

"It is settled, and I must go." The Mariposa spoke decisively. "I shall go home and make Eunice play for me, and perhaps I shall dance off some of my restlessness."

"Oh, dance for us," begged Kitty. "I will play for

you, and you see that the piano is so placed that I can watch you at the same time. What shall I play? Some Spanish dances?"

Ydo, full of the spirit of the thing, considered. "I think I will show you a pretty little dance I learned down in South America."

"South America!" Hayden started as if he had received an electric shock.

Perhaps a heightened color glowed on Mademoiselle Mariposa's cheek; but she gave no further sign of perturbation. "Yes," she answered carelessly, "I have lived there, in one place or another. Any one of those Spanish dances will do, Mrs. Hampton. Watch my steps. They are peculiar and very pretty."

As she stood there swaying like a flower in a breeze, it was, to Hayden's fancy, as if he had never seen color before. Kitty in her pinks and blues was a gay little figure; her drawing-room was a rich and sumptuously decorated apartment, but under the spell of the Mariposa's "woven paces and weaving hands," Mrs. Hampton appeared a mere Dresden statuette, the tapestried and frescoed walls became a pale and evanescent background, and Ydo alone, dancing, focused in herself all light and beauty; nay, she herself was the pride of life, the rhythm of motion, the glory of color.

On and on she danced and Hayden, watching, dreamed dreams and saw visions. She was the Mariposa floating over a field of flowers, scarlet and white poppies, opening and closing its gorgeous wings in the hot sunshine; she was a snow-flake whirled from the heart of a winter storm; she was an

orchid swaying in the breeze; she was a thistledown drifting through the grasses.

Then, at the height of her spells she stopped and laughingly cast herself into a chair.

"Oh!" Kitty was breathless with admiration. "Oh, why, why, when you can dance like that, do you tell fortunes?"

"There's a reason," Ydo quoted, with a little toss of her head toward Hayden. "That is exactly the answer I made your cousin once before. And, oh, señor, apropos of that reason, I have a conference arranged for you to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock at my apartment. I almost forgot to tell you. I meant to have telephoned."

Hayden's face flushed with pleasure. "Really?" he cried. "You really have the people together. Oh," with a long sigh, "it is good news. Suspense does wear on me, señorita." He spoke half humorously, but with an underlying seriousness.

"It will soon be over," encouraged Ydo. "Then, until Tuesday night, ten days hence, *au revoir*, madame; and until to-morrow at four o'clock, *au revoir*, señor. Good luck for ever be on this house! In it I have forgotten temporarily my wanderlust. Good-by."

CHAPTER XII

With his heart high with hope, Hayden lost no

time in taking his way to Ydo's apartment the next afternoon. It was Sunday, a day on which she received no clients, and the maid showed him into neither the consulting- nor reception-rooms, but in a small library beyond them which was evidently a part of her private suite.

In coloring the room suggested the soft wood tones that Ydo loved, greens and browns and russets harmoniously blended. The walls were lined with book-cases, crowded with books, a great and solacing company: Montaigne, Kipling, Emerson, Loti, Kant, Cervantes. These caught Hayden's eye as he took the chair Mademoiselle Mariposa indicated. There were roses, deep red roses in tall vases, and the breeze from the half-opened window blew their fragrance in delicious gusts about the room.

"'The rose-wind blowing from the South,'" quoted Hayden smilingly as he clasped the hand Ydo extended to him from the depths of her chair. Then, clapping his hand to his heart, he bowed exaggeratedly before her. "Señorita, I throw my heart at your feet."

"It did not touch the ground, señor. I caught and am holding it for a ransom," she answered, with the same elaborate and formal courtesy.

He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "It is not worthy a ransom, señorita. I beg you, if you will pardon my presumption in offering so beggarly a gift, to deign to keep it."

"Señor, you overwhelm me. It is I who am unworthy to receive so priceless a token, and only upon one condition can I do so, and that condition is, that you will in return accept mine."

They both laughed like children at play, and Hayden again threw himself in the easy chair and took one of the cigarettes Ydo pushed toward him.

"Well, gallant knight, who have found Eldorado," she said, "I have a disappointment in store for you. One of the rightful heirs has suddenly been called away on business and will not be in town for ten days or so, but he will communicate with me immediately upon his return and I shall wave my wand, in other words, take down the telephone receiver and summon you to a conference."

"He!" Hayden felt a sharp sense of disappointment. Then, after all, Marcia was not the sole owner, even if she were one at all. He wondered impatiently why he clung so tenaciously to that idea. Her father had probably never bought the property, or if he had, it had, no doubt, passed entirely out of her hands.

"Señorita," he implored, "do tell me who these owners are; how many of them are there—something, at least, about them. It is only fair to me, do you not think so? What possible reasons are there for secrecy and mystery?"

"He asks me, a professional fortune-teller, to discard secrecy and mystery!" cried the Mariposa. "Who ever heard the like? No. I have my own reasons for conducting this affair in my own particular and peculiar way, and, as far as I can see, señor, there is nothing for you to do but acquiesce. But listen! 'Tis the professional voice of Mademoiselle Mariposa which you hear now. Do not fear. You may set your house in order and do your wooing with an easy mind. It is all over. Poor brother of the road, you have found Eldorado and

won Cinderella. Ah, the cruel gods!" She lifted her eyes to the ceiling.

"Won Cinderella!" He wondered sharply how much she knew, if anything, and decided she was probably speaking on the authority of recent rumor gleaned from Horace Penfield.

"You seem to imply that the gods are offering me nectar in a hemlock cup."

She nodded several times, each nod becoming more emphatic.

> "Ah, happy he who gains not
> The love some seem to gain."

"Señorita," he protested politely, "your hyperbole is no doubt fraught with wisdom, but it is a wisdom beyond my dense understanding."

"You've forgotten," she replied. "'Twas a lesson we learned 'when you were a tadpole and I was a fish,' It is a bit of wisdom that lies deep in our hearts; but we shrink from it and refuse to heed it, clinging blindly to our illusions."

"You always moralize so unpleasantly." He looked so desperate that she laughed her silver, ringing laughter that shook the rose-petals from their calyxes.

"Well, to change the subject, when you have Cinderella and Eldorado what are you going to do with them?"

"Enjoy life!"

"Child! The rashest of statements! Life resents nothing so much as taking her for granted. When she

hears her mariners cry: 'Clear sailing now,' she invariably tosses them a storm. When they exclaim with relief: 'a quiet port,' she laughs in her sleeve and presents them with quicksand. Now I will tell you something, prophesy, without crystal, your palm or any astrological charts. See, I am always the fortune-teller. Listen." Her voice sank into deep, rich tones. "On your throne in Eldorado, with Cinderella beside you in her gold crown, there will come a day, an hour, when in the twinkling of an eye, all the shimmer, the shine, the purple and gold, the pomp and pride will grow dim before your eyes, and fade quite away, and you will see instead the long, brown path with the pines on either side marching up the hillside, on and on, up and up, and beyond them the snowy tips of the mountains, and you will hear the music that has never been written, the song of the road; all of its harmonies of the wind in the trees and the beat of the surf upon the shingle. It will haunt you until you will sicken for it; and at night, no matter how soft your bed and how silken your coverlets, you will toss and turn and dream of the hemlock boughs and the fern, the smell of the deep, deep woods!"

"Don't!" he cried sharply. "Stop it! It is too realistic. Anyway, I can always go back."

"Oh, no, you can not," she said. "That will be quite impossible after you have lived in Eldorado for a while. You'll forget the way." She shook her head. "You'll never come back."

"Then, I'm willing, glad and proud "—he lifted his head, his eyes shining—"to give it up for her, if she wants Eldorado. Tell me, Ydo," boldly, "have you never loved?"

"Many times." Her eyes dreamed. "Many times have I loved and unloved and forgotten. For that very reason I quote to you:

"'Ah, happy he who gains not
The love some seem to gain.'

"Oh, what an opportunity my scorned profession gives me for knowing the human heart. This woman who comes to me cries: 'If I had only married I should have known the joy of companionship, of motherhood, and children growing up around me,' And this one wails: 'I have made a mistake. If I had not married and been condemned to a humdrum life what a noise I might have made in the world with my gifts and my beauty,' There is only one good, you know, the good we haven't got. They want a life of romance, of charm, and they never seem to think that it must be within them." She struck the table lightly. "Life is only a reflection of one's self."

"And have you found your choice satisfactory?" he asked curiously.

She gave her quick little shrug. "I have lived after my own nature. It would have been impossible for me to do otherwise. Ah, life, life! There has never been a moment that good or bad, I have not loved it! It is a plant—life, a beautiful plant; and most people are in haste to cull its loveliest blossoms and strip it bare of leaves, in the effort to get all it can give, and finally, they even drag up the roots to see if they can not extract something more; but to enjoy that plant, Mr. Hayden"—she spoke with passionate emphasis —"you must love and tend it. 'To get the most out of life' is a horrible phrase. Life offers nothing to those who seek her thus; but to all who ask little of her,

who stand ready and glad to give, she repays an hundredfold."

"What a preacher you are," he laughed.

Before Ydo could answer, the maid entered with a card and handed it to her. The Mariposa sat silent for a moment or two, gazing intently at the bit of pasteboard, a peculiar smile on her lips.

"Show Mrs. Ames in here," she said at last, with sudden decision.

"Mrs. Ames!" Hayden sat in dumb amazement "Mrs. Ames!" What on earth Could that old woman want with the Mariposa?

But before he could voice his astonishment, the visitor appeared. She was in her customary rusty, fringed black, jingling with chains, mummified in expression, and with the usual large showing of dusty diamonds. She surveyed Hayden through her lorgnon with both surprise and disapproval, and then acknowledging his bow with a curt nod, turned to Ydo.

But a change had come over Mademoiselle Mariposa. She was no longer the Dreaming Gipsy, but a *grande dame*, a lady with some subtle, exotic touch of foreign distinction, who greeted the older woman with a charming and reserved grace.

Mrs. Ames seated herself on the extreme edge of a stiff chair. "Mademoiselle Mariposa," her thin voice rang authoritatively, "I had hoped to see you alone for a few moments of private conversation."

"Just so, madame," responded Ydo suavely, "but I have no secrets from Mr. Hayden. He is an old

friend, an adviser, I may call him."

"Humph!" Again the lorgnon was turned threateningly on Hayden. "Very well, since you have brought this on yourself, you may take the consequences. I will continue with what I have to say. Mademoiselle, I have had a recent and most distressing interview with my son. To put it frankly, I was reproaching him with his devotion to a most ineligible young woman, and he, in a rage, informed me that he cared nothing for her, and proclaimed, openly proclaimed, his infatuation for you."

"Wilfred!" Ydo sat upright, her languid gaze brightening. "Really!"

"Wilfred?" the mother repeated, with a rising inflection.

"Yes, Wilfred; you were speaking of him, were you not?" The Mariposa's green eyes sparkled with mirth. "Well, madame"—she spoke negligently —"what can I do for you? You know I do not receive any one professionally on Sunday."

"Would you regard it as professional if I ask you what you are going to do about my son?"

"Not at all. I think it quite natural that you should wish to know. I can quite appreciate your state of mind, maternal anxiety, and all that. To have been in terror for fear your son would marry Marcia Oldham and then discover that he is really interested in me! It illuminates that passage in *Paradise Lost*, does it not? It is sometimes considered obscure. You doubtless recall it. Something about 'and in the lowest depths a lower depth was found.'"

"You seem to have some appreciation of the

situation," said the old woman grimly.

"Believe me, I have. Only the mask smiles Comedy at me, and Tragedy at you. Madame, why do you cluck so over your one chicken?"

"The answer to that," Mrs. Ames tartly replied, "is first Miss Oldham and then yourself."

"The declining scale! Fancy where he will end!" Ydo murmured.

"It may be a circus-rider yet," admitted his mother.

"I have been one," announced Ydo calmly, and Hayden could not tell whether she spoke the truth or fiction. "Well"—there was a touch of impatience in her tones now—"what do you wish me to do?" She lifted a fan from her lap, and rapidly furled and unfurled it, a sure sign of irritation with her. "Find him a pretty doll with a blue sash and a wreath of daisies? You must have urged many a one on him and see to what they have driven him."

"Wait," said the old lady, laying one bony, yellow hand stiff with rings, dusty diamonds in dim gold settings, on Ydo's arm. "Why do you take it for granted that I have come to you to do the tearful mother, imploring the wicked adventuress to give up her son? They do those things on the stage, and I've never regarded the stage as a mirror of life. I have heard more about you than you think, mademoiselle. Horace Penfield sits in my ingle-nook. Now, what I came to find out is what you want with Wilfred, if indeed you want him at all."

"You flatter me," said Ydo. "More, you interest me. Now, just why do you wish to know?"

"Are you going to marry him?"

"It is evidently cards on the table with us." Ydo had recovered her good spirits. "Truly, I have not decided. You see, madame, your Wilfred is a big, good-natured fellow. He is like a faithful, loyal, devoted dog. You and I being cats need neither his assistance, advice nor sympathetic companionship. I can also say truly that his ancient name and his money are nothing to me. But he has something I want." She rested her cheek on her fan, a wistful note had crept into her voice, a shadow lay in her eyes. "Ah, madame, do you not understand that we, to whom all things come easily, are often very lonely? Life's spoiled and petted darlings, we are of necessity isolated. We live at high pressure, absorbed in our enthusiasms and interests, but there come moments of weariness when we would droop on the heart that really loves us, when we would rest in that maternal and protecting love which never criticizes, never judges or condemns, never sees the ravages of time or the waste of beauty, never puts upon us the crowning indignity of forgiveness—only loves. Loves, madame, as Wilfred loves me. 'Tis the rarest thing in all the world."

"And what would you give the poor dog in exchange for this?" Mrs. Ames' voice was dry to sarcasm. But Ydo was unmoved.

"My brains, madame, my knowledge of men, women and the world. My diplomacy, my power of attack. Wouldn't it be a fair exchange?"

Mrs. Ames clasped her stiff hands together and dropped the lorgnon on the floor. "By George!" she cried. "You're a man after my own heart. Look at me! I'm a withered, haggard old woman, fierce as a cat

and ugly as sin. Why? Because all my life I've been baffled. I was born as wild a bird, my dear, as yourself; but I never knew how to get out of the cage and I was always getting into new ones. I lacked—what-d'-y'-m'-call-it—initiative; and all this longing in me for freedom"—she clutched the dangling fringes on her breast—"and life and the choosing of my own path never had an outlet. It turned sour and curdled, and became malice and all uncharitableness.

"Well, when I began to realize that Wilfred would probably give me a companion in the cage I got sick. I could bear the cage myself, I'd learned to do that; but I didn't want another she-bird molting around. And then when it looked as if it would be Marcia Oldham I got sicker. It drove me wild to think of that milk-faced chit of a girl, with a fool of a mother that I've always despised! I tell you what you do, Miss Gipsy Fortune-teller!" She rapped the arm of Ydo's chair emphatically. "Marry Wilfred! Sure if you do," peering at her suspiciously, "that you won't elope with some one else?"

"I may," said Ydo coolly. "Only I have had the experience twice before, and it doesn't amuse me." Again, for the life of him, Hayden could not decide whether this were the embroidery of fiction or the truth. "The first man used scent on his handkerchief, and the second ate garlic with his fingers. I couldn't endure either of them for a week."

"You rake!" chuckled Wilfred's mother, clapping the Mariposa on the shoulder. "Marry Wilfred, do now! Make him president, at any rate a foreign ambassador." She rose. "You've given me fresh hope. I feel twenty years younger. Well, Mr. Heywood—Harden—whatever your name is, we've treated you

as if you were a piece of furniture."

"Regard me instead as a wall," said Hayden pleasantly, "which has ears but no tongue. Won't you vouch for my discretion, Mademoiselle Mariposa?"

"As I would for the chairs and tables to which Mrs. Ames so amiably compares you," smiled Ydo.

When Hayden returned from putting the old lady in her carriage he showed all the elation of one who has scored heavily.

"Aha!" he cried. "Warning me one moment with serious argument against the Inevitable ennui induced by settling in Eldorado and all the time preparing to build your own castles there!"

"But not for permanent residence," she protested, "and I assure you, I have not even decided whether or not to build there at all. My real home is for ever in Arcady. Do you think, seriously think, that there is anything in Eldorado which can hold me when I see the beechwoods growing green, and hear the fifes of June in my ears and get a whiff of the wild-grape fragrance? Then I know that there's nothing for me but Arcady; and it's up and away in the wake of the clover-seeking bee. But you're a man, Bobby, who has—what is that awful phrase?—oh, yes, 'accepted responsibilities,' and you'll stay there in Eldorado, bound by white arms and ropes of gold."

CHAPTER XIII

Marcia had been causing Hayden much perturbation and unrest by keeping him very sedulously at a distance. The glimpses he had had of her recently had been few and far between, and in response to his pleadings and reproaches, he was informed that her time was tremendously occupied and that she was absorbed in a picture she was anxious to finish by a certain time. In consequence, he was inordinately delighted to hear her voice one morning over the telephone—although the reason she gave for calling him up occasioned his undisguised surprise, for she informed him that sometime during the day he would receive an informal invitation from Mrs. Ames requesting him to be present at a luncheon she was giving at the Waldersee the following day.

"Mrs. Ames! Inviting me!" Hayden uttered rapid fire exclamations. "Well, it is a foregone conclusion that I shall not accept, of course."

"Please reconsider your decision before you so hastily decline," Marcia's voice was full of amusement, "please."

A dreadful suspicion shot through Hayden's mind. Why was Marcia pleading the cause of this old woman who had so abominably used her? Had Wilfred returned to his allegiance?

Perhaps Marcia divined some of these thoughts, for she added a little hastily, "It is in reality a luncheon given for Mademoiselle Mariposa, and both she and Wilfred have begged me to be present. It is really for Wilfred's sake that I am going. We have so long been good friends, you know. When I heard you were to be invited, I suspected at once that you would refuse."

"I certainly should have done so," interrupted Hayden grimly, "and you know why."

"I do know," she said sweetly, "and it's dear of you; but now that you understand things you'll accept, won't you?"

"Of course I shall, if you wish it," he replied with fervor.

"Thank you, and—and—I shall not be nearly so busy from now on. I have almost finished my—my—picture."

The answer, the various answers that Hayden made were of the usual order and need not be recorded; but her predictions were speedily fulfilled, for within the hour, Mrs. Ames had called him to the telephone and in the nearest approach to dulcet tones which she could compass was urging him to take luncheon with herself and a few friends at the Waldersee on the following day.

With Marcia in mind, he promptly, even effusively accepted. He was struck by the fact that his prospective hostess had chosen one of the most conspicuous hotels in the town wherein to entertain her guests instead of doing the thing decently and soberly amid the 1850 splendors of her ancestral down-town home. Yes, the eccentric old creature had something in the wind, beyond question, and his curiosity was but increased when he learned, some hours later, from Kitty Hampton that neither herself, Bea Habersham nor Edith Symmes were bidden to the feast.

But not long was he left in suspense, for Mrs. Ames herself hastened to allay his curiosity when she

met him the next day in one of the reception-rooms of the hotel, where he arrived promptly on the hour she had mentioned. He looked about him in some surprise, for although there were several detached people in the room, the rest of her guests, whoever they might be, had not yet arrived.

"I asked you a bit early, Mr. Heywood, Harden, —oh, what is your name? Well, it doesn't matter— Hayden—oh, yes; because there was something I particularly wanted to say to you. You see, this is rather an especial occasion," she settled complacently a row of dull black bracelets set with great diamonds on her arm. Hayden reflected on her odd passion for dusty gems. "Can you imagine who my guests are and why I have asked them here?" she lifted her formidable lorgnon and surveyed him through it, her eyes reminding more than ever of those of some fierce, inquisitive bird.

"Truly, I can not, dear lady," Hayden assured her in all sincerity. "You suggest all manner of unexpected and delightful things."

"My guests," said Mrs. Ames, smoothing her black bombazine impressively and detaching a bit of straw from some tangled fringe, "are, to mention the men first, Wilfred, Horace Penfield and yourself, and my women guests are Marcia Oldham and Ydo Carrothers."

"Really!" was all Hayden could think of to exclaim, and he uttered that somewhat feebly.

"Yes," the old lady nodded her head, all the jet ornaments on her rusty black bonnet jingling together. "Yes, I've been so nasty about Marcia Oldham that I want to make some public reparation."

She drew herself up and spoke virtuously; but Hayden doubted the entire sincerity of the statement. That might be her reason, in part, but he felt convinced of some deeper motive. She might feel that she no longer had cause for active opposition to Marcia; but the girl did not appeal to her temperament and never could. At best, she could regard a woman of Marcia Oldham's type with but tepid interest. "And she's been gracious enough to say she'd come. At first, she refused point blank, but I got Wilfred to persuade her. He and she have always been good friends. Miss Gipsy Fortune-teller was also inclined to balk; but she too will be here. The wild thing!" she chuckled delightedly. "I do hope she'll marry Wilfred. Why, Mr. Hayden, she'd make something of him. Wilfred's not a fool by any means; but he's so dreadfully lazy. She'll be whip and spur to him. What do I care for her fortune-telling and all her wild escapades! I like 'em. They make my old blood tingle. There's a girl after my own heart!"

"Dear me! Who is that?" peering through her glasses. "Maria Sefton and a party! Good!" She went into a series of cackles that positively made her bones rattle. "Every one in town has heard of Wilfred's infatuation for the Mariposa by this time, and there is just one question asked: 'How will that old witch of a mother of his behave now?'" Again she broke into peals of her shrill, cackling laughter. "What will they say to this? Look how I've fooled them! Marcia on one side of me, the Mariposa on the other! They won't know which it is or why the other dear charmer's here, or what it all means." She wiped away the tears laughter had brought to her eyes. Hayden saw now laid bare her underlying motive in urging Marcia to be present. It was really to mystify her world.

"Ah, Mr. Hampton—Henderson—I can truthfully say that through a long life, I've never yet done the thing people expect of me."

"I can well believe that," Hayden assured her. He looked about him, down through the vista of the rooms with their differing and garish schemes of decoration, at the groups of people moving to and fro, at the whole kaleidoscopic, colorful picture. "Lots of people here to-day," he said.

"Oh, dear me, yes," replied the old lady. "This is undoubtedly one of the great hotels of the world. Everything passes through here sooner or later, except perhaps, the law of righteousness. Here comes Horace, he's not bearing it, I am sure. How do you do, Horace?" Penfield, admirably dressed, slim, self-possessed and alert, bent over her hand, and nodded to Hayden.

"I've just been granted an inspection of the new gown Edith Symmes has ordered for Bea Habersham's ball," he said. "We've been at her dressmaker's and she drove me here on her way home."

"I thought you looked pale," said Mrs. Ames, viewing him through the inevitable lorgnon. "Go on, tell me all about it."

"I'm afraid the details are too harrowing," said Horace mildly. "The body of the gown—isn't that what you call it—? the ground-work, you know—"

"Yes—yes, that's all right," nodded Mrs. Ames. "Go on—the body of the gown—"

"Is of a sort of sickly, mustard-colored satin with chocolate-colored trimmings, and wreaths of pink

stuff and coral ornaments that look like lobster-claws. Really, it gives you quite a turn just to see it; and then, she has some kind of a grass-green weeping-willow tree that she is going to wear in her hair. Really, the whole thing is pretty shuddery. Haunts you, you can't throw it off." Penfield looked a trifle blue about the mouth and so depressed that Hayden could not help laughing.

"Edith is going beyond herself," commented Mrs. Ames. "Some one ought to marry her and reform her. Why not you, Horace?"

"'She killed a boy, she killed a man, why should she not kill me?'" quoted Horace gloomily.

"Well, we'll have some luncheon and then you'll feel better," consoled his hostess. "Here come the girls now."

Master of facial expression as he was, Horace could no more have helped his jaw dropping than he could his eyes blinking as Marcia and the Mariposa, followed by Wilfred Ames, came toward them. Hayden was particularly struck by the fact that as the two girls walked down the room laughing and talking, there was no suggestion in the manner of either of their being strangers or even formal acquaintances. There was the easy manner of old friendship between them, and he recalled again the "Ydo" that Marcia had inadvertently spoken that day in the Park, and pondered afresh.

Marcia looked to Hayden's eyes more charming than ever. The slightly strained expression about the mouth and eyes, which always caused him a pang, was to-day quite effaced, and his heart throbbed with pleasure as he caught the dear little smile that she

gave him, and he saw that her eyes were full of a soft and radiant happiness. She wore a white cloth own, with an immense black hat, the butterflies and her beloved California violets, a dewy and deliciously fragrant cluster which Hayden had sent to her that morning. Ydo in rose color was a brilliant and effective contrast to her.

"'As moonlight unto sunlight
And as water unto wine,'"

murmured Penfield who was in the mood for quotation.

Mrs. Ames arose and settling afresh her hideous row of black bracelets, led the way to the dining-room. She had ordered one of the most conspicuous tables at an hour when the huge room was sure to be crowded, and she viewed with unabated, even increasing satisfaction the whispered comments from the tables where any of her acquaintances were sitting. She had created the sensation she desired. Fortune favored her.

"There are enough here to spread this far and wide," she whispered complacently to Hayden, "and Horace is a host in himself on such occasions. One may always trust him to see that the good work goes merrily on. The dear boy!" there was positive affection in her tone. "This will be in every one's mouth before night. It is better to have Horace for a publicity bureau than to get out an 'extra.'"

"Look at the forest!" said Ydo quizzically calling Robert's attention to the tall palms grouped about the room and the exotic, incongruous effect of the long fronds, which should properly have cast their shadows on desert sands, but now must wave above

the white surface of small tables or be outlined harshly against the red and gold panels of the walls. "This is very different from the wilds," she continued. "Hardly savors of the simplicity of drinking from the wayside spring and munching a bit of bread and some fruit as one trudges along. Ah-h-h! That must be soon for me."

"But Wilfred?" suggested Hayden in a low voice. "What are you going to do about him?"

She glanced toward the imperturbable, lazy, blond giant, who sat talking to Marcia, but always with his eyes fixed on Ydo, content merely to be in her presence. Then she lifted her round chin audaciously, "If I decide to let him come with me, he will be well content. He hates cities and loves the open. He will be an excellent *camerado*, I assure you. But, if Wilfred does not care to go voyaging, voyaging, why, then he shall stay; but for myself, I must onward, away for ever from the old tents."

She had lifted her voice slightly on the last words and Mrs. Ames looking toward her had caught them. "Ah, mademoiselle," she broke in, "whenever you begin to talk, I've always got to stop and listen. Not because you utter words of wisdom by any means," she gave a hard little chuckle, "but because when you talk, I hear again the voice of youth. It rings in your tones and smiles in your eyes; it's something as effervescent and sparkling as the bubbles that rise in this wine. You are exactly like the nightingale in the old French fable. Just as irresponsible. You remember he sang all summer while the ants toiled unceasingly getting in their winter stores, and then when winter came, and he pined with hunger, the thrifty ants said: 'Do you not

know that winter follows summer, and that all roads lead to the desert?'"

Ydo leaned forward all aggression and animation. "But that is a wicked fable," she cried, "for it tells only one side of the question. It never tells what the nightingale said to the ants. But I know. He said: 'Pouf! Chut! I have sung my beautiful songs all summer and now you foolish ants think I am going to starve. Stupid, short-sighted little insects! I shall simply spread my wings, and fly away, not to the desert either, but to the bounteous South, and there, under the great, yellow moon, among the ilex trees, where the air is heavy with the fragrance of flowers, I shall sing as you have never dreamed I could sing. Adieu!'"

Mrs. Ames chuckled afresh. "They can't beat you —at any rate."

"By the way," said Hayden suddenly, "isn't that your secretary at the door?"

Ydo looked up surprised. "Certainly, it is Eunice," she said, "I wonder—"

Eunice, mournful and repressed, walked primly down the room in the wake of a waiter and with a murmured word or two with the Mariposa, handed her a telegram. The latter, still with an expression of perplexity, requested Mrs. Ames' permission to open it, acquainted herself with its contents, and then turned to the secretary at her elbow.

"That is all right, Eunice. There is no answer." Then she leaned across Hayden and spoke to Marcia, "Nothing of any importance," with a faint shrug of the shoulders, "I dare say you will get one also. He

merely says that he will not be home quite so soon as he expected."

"He!" "He!" Hayden knew a pang of jealousy, like a stab of a stiletto. What "he" was of such interest to Marcia that he should send her telegrams announcing his return home, or his failure to come? And why should this person, whoever he might be, also telegraph Ydo? His thoughts reverted involuntarily to the gray-haired man "that ordinary, middle-aged person," who had accompanied her the night she had dined at the Gildersleeve, the night that he, Hayden, had returned to her her silver butterfly. Who was this shadowy creature, a sinister and skulking figure always in the background? Doubts and fears assailed him. He suffered a hades of suspicion, a momentary and temporary hades—and then, he looked at Marcia. She was talking across the table to Horace Penfield, and Hayden noted the purely drawn oval of her face, the sensitive, delicate mouth, the sweet, wistful eyes, and all the incipient doubts which had made such an onrush upon his consciousness vanished, were routed and put to flight, and Marcia looked up to meet his gaze and suddenly, shyly, sweetly blushed. Again the world was his and his heart was flooded with sunshine.

Mrs. Ames, well-pleased with the notice her party had attracted, was complacently arranging her bracelets preparatory to rising, when her eye was evidently caught by the iridescent sheen of Marcia's butterflies. She held up her glasses, the better to view them.

"There is no manner of doubt about it, Miss Oldham," she said in a rather dry and grudging fashion, "that your butterflies are exquisite. I'm a

judge of jewels. I know. What's the reason, Miss Gipsy, that you haven't a set? Not economy, I warrant."

Ydo glanced at her from under her eyes, a slow, audacious smile forming about her lips, "I mean to have a set," she said composedly, "but I want mine copied from one Mr. Hayden has in his collection."

Marcia turned surprised eyes on Hayden. "I did not know that you were a collector of butterflies," she said.

"Oh, he is so modest!" Ydo's laughter rang out like a chime of bells, full of elfin malice. "But I am going to tell you a secret. He is the distinguished discoverer of a rare and wonderful specimen of almost fabulous value. A specimen which collectors have supposed to be quite extinct."

Marcia's eyes were as round as saucers, and Mrs. Ames was surveying her unexpectedly distinguished guest with a respectful surprise of which Robert would never have dreamed her capable.

"Why have you never mentioned it to me?" cried Marcia, and there was reproach in her tone.

Hayden, annoyed at first, determined to out-match Ydo in her audacity, "But I have," he cried, his eyes alight with fun, "only I called it by a different name."

"A different name!" she puzzled.

"One of the names in the vernacular," explained Robert with grave mendacity, "is *the cake*! I have often spoken to you, Miss Oldham, of 'the cake.' Of course, it has also its imposing Latin name."

It was Ydo's turn to look puzzled now; the conversation seemed to be slipping away from her into channels that she could not follow. "Truly," she cried, "I want a string of those lovely butterflies, so I will make you an offer, Mr. Hayden. I'll buy that butterfly. Name your price."

"Believe me, mademoiselle, as I have told you before, there is no price you could name which would tempt me to sell outright." His jaw looked very square and his gray eyes gazed very steadily into her dancing green ones.

The Mariposa made a little face, a combination of lifted brows and twisted mouth. "Just so," she said spreading out her hands, "about what I expected; but even if you can't be tempted to sell outright, I dare say you do not mind showing the photographs?"

Hayden smiled grimly. "That is ingenuous, señorita. Of course, I have no objection to showing the photographs—at the proper time."

Mrs. Ames picked up her gloves and rose. "I don't know what you're talking about. It's all Greek to me," with her strident cackle, "but this I do know, Hurlburt—Hammerton—and that is she'll get ahead of you, this Gipsy girl. Never doubt that."

Marcia had grown slightly paler during the conversation, and now she turned surprised, almost frightened, yes, frightened eyes from Hayden to Ydo.

CHAPTER XIV

The day of his dinner having arrived, Hayden found himself turned from his own doors by the ruthless Kitty and adrift upon the world.

"Yes, you've simply got to go," she said firmly in reply to his protestations. "The decorators will be here any minute and then we'll begin to do things. You'll really be much happier at a club or on the streets, anywhere rather than here, for if you insist on staying, you'll be chased from pillar to post. You won't be able to find such a thing as a quiet corner in the whole apartment. Now go, just as quickly as you can."

Meekly he obeyed, humbly grateful that Tatsu was allowed to remain. He could trust Tatsu's diplomacy and powers of resource to save his cherished possessions, and ultimately to restore a seemly order from the chaos, he was sure that Kitty and her decorators would create. On the whole, he succeeded in putting in about as stupid and empty a day as he had expected, perhaps because he had expected it, but late in the afternoon, as he was strolling up the Avenue in the direction of home, he espied, with a feeling of genuine pleasure, the figure of Mrs. Habersham a few paces ahead of him. The prospect of her society, if only for a block or so, was a welcome relief to him. He felt rather aggrievedly that he had been the prey of bores during the entire day, skilfully escaping one, only to be firmly button-holed by another. Therefore he quickened his steps to overtake Mrs. Habersham, whom he had always found especially sympathetic and sincere.

She, on her part, seemed delighted to see him. "I am just on my way home to dress for your dinner," she said, "and I wanted a bit of a walk first. Don't

you feel the spring in the air?"

"Winter contradicts your statement," laughed Hayden, as a cutting wind caused her to shiver and draw her furs more closely about her throat.

"He can't deny those harbingers of spring anyway, no matter how hard he tries," she waved her hand toward a florist's window full of jonquils, daffodils, lilacs, and lilies-of-the-valley. "Oh," with a change of subjects. "I have been hearing on every side of Mrs. Ames' luncheon yesterday. It has assumed such importance as a topic of conversation, that it is now spoken of as 'the luncheon.' There is fame for you! Why truly," laughing softly, "my curiosity was aroused to such an extent that I have just been up to see Marcia and get all the details."

"Then you have seen Miss Oldham to-day?" Hayden attempted to infuse into his tones, merely polite, superficial interest; what he really put into them was an eager longing to hear of his butterfly lady.

"I have just come from her," said Bea Habersham, "I do hope she will be more like herself this evening!"

"Like herself!" Hayden wheeled sharply. "Why, what do you mean? Is she not well? Is she ill?" He could not conceal his anxiety.

"Oh, dear me, no." Mrs. Habersham reassured him with a smile. "Not ill at all, not in the least. It was only—"

"Only what?" insisted Hayden.

"Only that she seemed a bit—well, overwrought,

not quite like herself."

"How overwrought? Do tell me just how she appeared to you. I feel as if you were keeping something back," urged Robert.

"Nonsense. You are building up a great mountain out of a very insignificant mole-hill," reproved Bea with a smile. "It is quite absurd. I see, however," with a resigned smile, "that you will never be satisfied unless I go into the most elaborate details and tell you just how she looked and just what she said."

"Oh, please," so simply and earnestly, that her heart was touched and she gave him one of her rarest and most sympathetic smiles.

"Very well, to begin then," Bea spoke with assumed patience. "Of course, I feel exactly as if I were in the witness box, but what will one not do for one's friends. Then to be quite circumstantial: This afternoon, I stopped at the Oldhams. Marcia was fortunately at home, and I noticed at once that she was looking rather down in the mouth, and was very distrait. She seemed in rather a peculiar state, to alternate from a mood of excitement to one of depression, and more than once while I was talking to her, I saw the tears well up to her eyes. I, at first, thought that her mother had been bothering her, for that Venus was in one of her most exacting and fractious moods, but I soon came to the conclusion that that was not the root of the trouble. Fortunately, Marcia and I were alone for a short time before I left and I endeavored to find out what was weighing on her mind. Not from curiosity, believe me, but because I felt convinced that something of more than usual importance had disturbed her poise.

"She would not really unburden herself to me, Marcia is so reticent and self-contained, you know; but she did admit that she was greatly worried. From the various things she said, I was able to piece out some facts, and you are welcome to them, although, I must confess that I think they throw very little light upon the matter."

"Do let me know them!" begged Hayden. "You know, of course, dear Mrs. Habersham, that I can not bear to hear of her being unhappy or distressed, and I should like nothing in all the world so much as to feel that I could be of some assistance to her."

"I am sure of that," said Bea sweetly; "but to go on. After her mother left the room, I asked Marcia if she were quite well. She looked a little surprised at the question, and then said: 'Yes, oh, yes,' but in the most languid and listless of manners. And all the time that I was talking to her, her mind seemed to be far, far away, as if she were working constantly over some problem, trying to think it out. To tell the truth, she really did not look ill; but just—well, just frightened. That is about the only way I can express it. She really looked frightened."

"But what could possibly have frightened her?" frowned Hayden. "Did she give you any clue?"

"None whatever. As I say, she seemed to be thinking of something else, all the time she was speaking to me of perfectly extraneous subjects, until at last, I felt that I was taxing her powers of self-command, and that the kindest thing I could do was to leave her to herself, since she would not give me her confidence."

"Strange," murmured Hayden. "But don't you

think it was probably some absurd or tyrannical action of her mother's that caused her unhappiness?"

"It wasn't exactly unhappiness," objected Mrs. Habersham. "It was more as if she had had some kind of a shock, and could not immediately recover from it. Of course, I am only giving you my impressions, but it was more as if she feared something, and this fear, whatever it was, grew instead of decreasing."

"Did you happen to learn how she had been putting in her time all day?" Hayden's mind went back to that telegram which had been handed Mademoiselle Mariposa at the luncheon the day before, the telegram from the mysterious man, a message of interest to both Ydo and Marcia. Could that have anything to do with Marcia's present state of mind? He recalled the puzzled and faintly alarmed gaze she had turned first on the Mariposa and then on himself at the conclusion of the luncheon yesterday, and instead of finding any light in these reflections, he seemed to plunge deeper into the darkness.

He shook his head slowly, completely perplexed.

"Did she tell you how she had put in her day?" he repeated.

"Let me see," Mrs. Habersham thought a moment, "she had been at Mademoiselle Mariposa's early in the afternoon; but what she did before that, I do not know. Of course, I suppose, she spent the morning at—at her studio."

"She had been at the Mariposa's? Are you sure?" questioned Hayden.

"Oh, positive." Bea lifted her face to look at him

in surprise. "Yes, I distinctly remember her saying so. We were speaking of what we were to wear to-night, and she mentioned Mademoiselle Mariposa's costume particularly. She said she had seen it this afternoon, that Ydo, as she calls her, had shown it to her."

"Mrs. Habersham," Hayden looked down at her, his square face set, his eyes full of decision, "I do not believe that I am prying into Miss Oldham's affairs, when I ask you, who have been her intimate friend since your early school-days,—what is the cause for the friendship between Miss Oldham and Mademoiselle Mariposa? When did the acquaintance begin?"

Bea lifted sincere eyes to his. "Truly, Mr. Hayden, I do not know. I can not throw any light on the subject. I remember though when we were school-girls, Marcia used to spin some fascinating yarns about the sayings and doings of her friend Ydo; but since the lady has made her spectacular appearance as a fortune-teller, the Veiled Mariposa, and become such a social fad, why, it is simply impossible to get any information out of Marcia. Kitty and I have plied her with questions, because we were both interested in mademoiselle, but Marcia shuts her mouth tight and never says a word, merely remarking that for the present, Ydo desires nothing should be known. The more mysterious she appears, the better it is for business. Do you not think so?"

"Naturally," he replied.

"The only time I have ever seen them together, Ydo and Marcia," continued Bea, who was in a loquacious mood and ready to be lured on by Hayden's interest, "was one evening when I happened to see them dining together at the Gildersleeve. They

were with Mr. ——" Bea hesitated the twinkling of an eyelash, "an elderly man," she concluded rather lamely.

Hayden looked straight ahead. The words seemed to repeat themselves in his brain. He remembered that other occasion when Marcia had been there with an elderly man. His mind leaped to the conclusion that it was the same—the same middle-aged person with whom he had later seen Marcia driving down the Avenue, and Horace Penfield had smiled and made some offensive remark about the rich uncle from Australia. He felt convinced that this was the man who had sent Ydo the telegram the day before, for Ydo knew him. Had he, Robert, not seen him at her apartment? The demon of jealousy began its diabolical whisperings, a mist seemed to float before Hayden's eyes; but with all the strength of his nature, he refused to listen. This demon was a visitor that he was resolved not to admit, no matter how insistent its demands. Had he not promised Marcia his heart's fealty? Had he not vowed to himself that no matter what mysteries encompassed and enmeshed her, he would believe and never doubt? And he again determined with all the strength of his soul to hold that faith so high and pure and clean that it should never know the stain of suspicion.

"We are making too much of this matter," said Bea resolutely, after stealing a glance at Hayden's face. "It is a pity that a person can't indulge in a mood now and then without having it subjected to an elaborate analysis by his friends. Marcia will appear to-night perfectly radiant, I am sure, and you and I will feel like idiots. Do you know, I quite reproached her for going to that luncheon yesterday.

Why on earth should she further any of Mrs. Ames' plans? I told her so frankly; but she only smiled and said that it was trivial to notice such things. That even if Mrs. Ames had been rather catty, Wilfred had always been an especially good friend of hers, and since she didn't believe in bearing malice and harboring grievances, she was only too willing to be persuaded to go.

"But what every one is frantic to know is, what did it all mean? Why really, there are two decided factions. One says it means that Mrs. Ames has capitulated and that she took this method of announcing the withdrawal of all opposition to an engagement between Wilfred and Marcia, and merely invited the Mariposa to show how foolish was the gossip about Wilfred's devotion to her. The other faction asserts that there is really something in all this talk about Wilfred's infatuation for Mademoiselle Mariposa, and that his mother countenances it and took this method of showing the world her approval of his choice. But every one is utterly at sea. No one knows really what to think. So you may fancy how tongues are wagging.

"But good gracious! if I'm to be at your dinner on time, I've got to be hurrying home, don't you think? Look at that darkening sky! By the way, I hope Edith Symmes will not spoil the effect of everything with some terrible gown. Horace Penfield says that he has seen it and that it is the most awful thing she has yet perpetrated."

Hayden could not forbear laughing. "Horace misled you," he said, "he told us all about it at the luncheon yesterday. He had just been at her dressmaker's with her to look at it. He says it is really

the most atrocious thing he has ever seen; but," triumphantly, "it will not grace my humble dinner. It is being saved for a far more important occasion—your ball."

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Bea. "Well," firmly, "I shall put a flea in Edith's ear. She must call a halt. She is simply letting that crazy imagination of hers run rampant. I shall speak to her to-night."

CHAPTER XV

During the ten days allowed her for preparation Kitty continued charmed with Hayden's idea of a butterfly dinner. It suited her volatile fancy. Her enthusiasm remained at high pitch, and she exerted herself to the utmost in behalf of her favorite cousin. As a consequence, although she made a pretense of consulting Hayden about the various arrangements, the final results were almost as much of a surprise to him as to the rest of the guests, and as he walked through his rooms at the last moment he admitted to himself that Kitty really had surpassed herself.

Yellow and violet orchids fluttered everywhere, carrying out the butterfly effect; and while he stood admiring their airy and unsubstantial grace, Kitty floated in followed by Hampton, thin and kindly, with more of an expression of interest than he usually wore.

"Why, Kitty," cried Hayden, shaking hands with Hampton, "you look exactly like a butterfly, a lovely

little blue butterfly attracted here by the flowers."

"But that is what I am," Kitty answered him triumphantly. "A blue butterfly. Don't you see my long wing-sleeves? And look at the blue butterflies in my hair! Oh," as Mrs. Habersham came in, "here is Bea. Isn't she gorgeous?"

Bea herself was the affirmative answer to that question. She was indeed gorgeous, a splendid brown butterfly with all kinds of iridescent effects gleaming through her gauzes. Dark velvet outlined her skirt and floating sleeves, and dark antennæ stood upright from the coils of her hair.

Marcia, who was with her, to Hayden's infinite relief, was a white butterfly, looking very lovely, but, as he noticed with concern, paler than he had ever seen her, and with something like distress in her eyes, quite perceptible to him if unnoticed by the rest. He could not keep his solicitude out of his voice and glance, and this, he felt instinctively, annoyed, instead of gratifying her; for almost immediately she assumed a gaiety of manner foreign to her usual gentle and rather cool reserve.

His attention was distracted for the moment by the arrival of Edith Symmes, and the little group paid her the momentary attention of an awed silence, for she had perpetrated what was, perhaps, the greatest atrocity of her life—a vivid scarlet gown which made her face look a livid wedge.

"Don't you like this frock?" she whispered complacently to Bea Habersham.

"No, you know it is a horror, Edith," that lady replied, with the bluntness of intimacy. "I think,"

turning and surveying her friend calmly from head to foot, "that it is the very worst I have ever seen you wear, and that is saying a great deal. It makes you look like green cheese. For Heaven's sake, put some other color on!"

"Not I." Edith was quite unruffled. "You know perfectly well, Bea, that if I wore what you and Kitty and the rest of the world would call decent clothes, that every one would say: 'How plain poor Edith Symmes is! She dresses well, but that can not make up for her lack of beauty,' But when I wear these perfectly dreadful, glaring things that I love, what is said of me? 'What a stylish, even a pretty woman, Edith Symmes might be, if she didn't wear such criminal clothes,' Don't you see, you handsome idiot, that I please myself and score at the same time?"

Not being able to refute these plausible arguments, Bea contented herself with stubbornly maintaining her point. "But red, Edith, why red? It is a nightmare. Who ever heard of a scarlet butterfly?"

Edith laughed lightly. "I invented one just for this occasion. Such a compliment to Mr. Hayden." Her serenity was not to be marred, and fortunately, before the discussion could go further, dinner was announced.

The dining-room Kitty had transformed into a tropical bower. From an irregular lattice of boughs across the ceiling orchids fell as if they had grown and bloomed there. These were interspersed with long trails of Spanish moss in which the lights were cunningly disposed. Orchids swayed, too, from the tops of the tall palms which lined the walls, and above the bright mass of the same flowers on the table floated on invisible wires the most vivid and

beautiful tropical butterflies.

Hayden was an admirable host. Possessing the faculty of enjoyment himself, he succeeded in communicating it to his guests; and the dinner, as it progressed, was an undeniable success. Marcia, on his right hand, had apparently thrown off the oppression or worry from which she had suffered earlier in the evening, and, according to Mrs. Habersham all through the afternoon; and her evident enjoyment was immensely reassuring to Hayden, for it seemed to him both natural and spontaneous.

"Bobby," said Kitty, a few moments before they left the table, "I'm really afraid after this that the rest of the evening will be a dreadful let-down. I think if we showed the part of wisdom we'd all fly home as soon as we get up and keep intact a bright memory."

"Ah," said Hayden mysteriously, "you don't know what you would miss. The best of the evening is yet to come. I've got a whole bagful of tricks up my sleeve."

"I'm sure it's going to be a magic-lantern, or perhaps stereopticon views illustrating his thrilling adventures in darkest Africa, or New York, with himself well toward the center of the picture," laughed Edith Symmes.

"I wish it were," said Penfield. "By the way, Hayden, you're among friends. We'll all promise to keep your guilty secrets; but do be frank and open if you can, and tell us the romantic story of your discovery in South America, and how you happened to find something a lot of people had been searching for in vain."

Hayden looked at Horace in surprise. That he should have ventured on this subject was odd, and Robert was for the moment inclined to resent it. For the fraction of a second he hesitated; and then caught at the suggestion. He had been wondering how he should tell Marcia that he was the discoverer of the lost and traditional mine on the estate, of which, he continued to believe intuitively and unreasonably, without a scintilla of real evidence, she was one of the owners. Yes, he had been wondering how he should tell her and here was the opportunity.

"Very well, I will," he said quickly. "It isn't stereopticon views, or a magic-lantern, Mrs. Symmes. It's worse. It's photographs, and I'm very well toward the center of the picture. With the best will in the world, now that I've got you all here, I shan't let you escape. You must listen to the story of my life."

He had sent for Tatsu, and, at the appearance of the Japanese servant, Robert whispered a word or two to him and he left the room. Just as he did so Hayden felt a slight pressure on his arm. Turning, he met Marcia's eyes. Her gaze was fastened on him with a frightened, almost imploring expression and he saw that she had again grown very pale.

"What is it?" he said to her in a low voice. "You are not well, or you are unhappy about something. Do not feel it necessary to remain here if you would rather go home."

"Oh, no, no!" she protested vehemently. "I am quite well, and I would rather stay, only, I implore you, I beg of you, not to show any maps or photographs of that mine. I beg it!" Her voice, her eyes besought him.

Tatsu returned at this moment with a package which he handed to Hayden, and the latter, taking it from him, looked carefully over its contents, allowing an expression of disappointment to over-cloud his face.

"The wrong bundle," he said mendaciously. "Too bad! And I might have to search an hour before laying my hands on the right one. I evidently wasn't intended to bore you with any of my ancient mariner tales this evening. This is distinctly an omen." He lifted his brows slightly and significantly to Kitty, and she who was playing hostess, immediately rose.

Hayden carried the package into the drawing-room with him and laid it on a small table. He felt puzzled and perplexed. What did Marcia know, and what was worse, what did she fear? For there could be no doubt that she was badly frightened. How flat had fallen his happy plan of letting her know that he, by some joyous and romantic chance, was the discoverer of the long-lost Veiled Mariposa! But the party was far too small for any one member of it to engage in meditation, and Hayden as host found his attention claimed every moment. For a calm review of this odd occurrence and any attempt to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of Marcia's words and actions he saw clearly he would have to wait until the departure of his guests.

It was a real relief, a positive relaxation from strain, therefore, when Tatsu threw open the door and unctuously announced Mademoiselle Mariposa. There was the slightest rustle of skirts, the faint waft of an enchanting fragrance, and Ydo came forward. As usual, her little mask concealed her face,

revealing only her sparkling eyes, and her mantilla of Spanish lace covered her hair! but she had discarded her customary black gown. She, too, was a butterfly, this evening, a glowing yellow one with deep lines of black and touches of orange and scarlet, a gown as vivid and daring as herself. As she advanced with her exquisite and undulating grace of carriage, a little thrill ran through the group, for although they had moved in an atmosphere of color all evening, she seemed in some subtle and individual way to express deeper and more vital tints, and veiled, as she was, to cause even the lights to flicker and grow dim.

Behind her followed her private secretary, more demure and colorless than ever, bearing the various objects Mademoiselle Mariposa would need in the exercise of her profession.

All of the women, in fact the whole party, greeted her with warm expressions of pleasure with the exception of Marcia who, Hayden thought, looked more distressed, even more alarmed than ever.

Ydo returned their pleasant speech with her accustomed ease, and then turning to Hayden, as if consulting him about the arrangements for her fortune-telling, said in a low tone:

"The man you wish to see has returned and I have arranged a meeting in my library to-morrow afternoon between you and the owners of the property. You will be there, of course."

"Naturally." He smiled. Ah, the thing was really to be settled at last. He drew a long sigh of relief as the burden of this waiting and suspense fell from his shoulders. Hayden's experience since the discovery of

The Veiled Mariposa had convinced him that anything, anything was better than uncertainty.

Meantime, Ydo, her Spanish accent more marked than usual, if anything, had asked: "Which is it first? The palms, or the crystal, or what, señor?" addressing Hayden.

"Do not leave it to me," he answered. "Ask the ladies."

The Mariposa turned inquiringly to the group of butterflies.

"Oh, the crystal," said Bea Habersham. "I'm sure mademoiselle couldn't find a new line on any of our hands."

"The crystal, Eunice."

Ydo spoke to the secretary over her shoulder, and that young woman silently and very deftly set to work. She cleared a small table, placed it in front of the Mariposa, and deposited upon it the cushion and the crystal, and finally, she threw some powder into a quaint bronze incense-brazier, and then seated herself at the piano.

"I will ask the rest of you to remain absolutely quiet," said Ydo. "Now, Eunice, begin."

Eunice obediently struck a few strange chords, and then fell into a monotonous melody with a recurring refrain repeated again and again. The blue smoke from the incense-brazier curled lazily upward in long spirals and floated through the room, filling it with a pungent and heavy sweetness; the monotonous music went on, the strange rhythm recurring in an ever stronger beat. The Mariposa who

had sat motionless gazing at the crystal began to speak.

"Ah, the vision is not clear to-night. I see nothing but clouds. Your figures appear for a moment and then disappear. Ah, here is Mr. Hayden standing on a mountain top with his hands full of gold."

There was an explosion of laughter at this, and the Mariposa paused as if innocently surprised. "Clouds!" she gazed into the crystal again. "Ah, here is Mrs. Symmes. I see you in an immense studio, painting, painting all the time, canvas after canvas. You will in the future devote your life to art, madame. You will give up the world for it."

She paused and Edith, casting a triumphant glance at Mrs. Habersham, admitted that she had been cherishing just such an ambition, looking only the more pleased at the unrestrained horror and surprise manifested by her friends.

"Miss Oldham, I see Miss Oldham, now," continued Ydo. "She weeps. She is not happy. Idle tears."

Hayden did not hear the rest, he looked about for Marcia, but she had vanished, slipped from the room. Strange, he had not seen her go, but then she had that peculiarly noiseless way of moving. While he pondered over it she slipped in again without sound, the faintest of rustles, nothing to attract the attention of the others. She was still as white as a snowdrop, but he thought her expression far calmer and less agitated.

But before any one else had time to notice her reappearance, attention was concentrated on Wilfred

Ames. He had scarcely spoken during dinner, and since they had returned to the drawing-room, he had kept in the background, giving every one rather plainly to understand that he did not care for conversation. Now, he came forward, his face, which had been set and grim and moody all evening, was white and his eyes were burning. Never for one moment, did those eyes waver from the Mariposa. He seemed Entirely oblivious to the rest of the group, and it was obvious that for him they simply did not exist.

"What do you see here for me?" he tapped the crystal with his forefinger. His voice was low and yet so vibrating with strong and uncontrolled emotion, that it reached the ears of all.

There was storm in the air, the whole atmosphere of the room seemed suddenly charged as if with electricity, and there was no one present who did not feel through all the color and gaiety, the pulse and stir of potent and irresistible forces.

But the Mariposa, after her first involuntary start of surprise and apprehension, had recovered her poise and now strove to control the situation. "One moment, give me but a second to gaze deeply into the crystal and I will tell you, that is if the pictures will form themselves."

"Oh, I beg you to drop that nonsense," Wilfred's voice rang wearily. "It's only a pose. You believe in it no more than any one else. Aren't you tired of that sort of game? Of playing with us all as if we were so many children? Well, if you're not, I am. I tell you, Ydo, I've had enough of it. You threw me over yesterday, for no reason under the sun. Just caprice, whim—you can't whistle me back and throw me over

to-morrow. This question's going to be decided here and now for ever. Will you marry me or not?"

"Señor!" Ydo's voice was low, surprised, remonstrating, indignant. "You forget yourself. This is no place to make a scene or to spread before the world our private affairs. I must beg you—"

Wilfred waved his hands impatiently, as if brushing away her objections. "My answer, Ydo. Here and now."



She seemed completely nonplussed, and Hayden divined that this proud and resourceful Ydo felt herself overmatched and outwitted for the first time. She stood perfectly still, but gazing through her mask at Ames. "I—I think that you will get your heart's desire, señor," she murmured at last, her voice broken, inaudible.

Ames stepped forward, still oblivious to the fact that there were other people present. His face had

grown still whiter but upon it there was already an irradiation of joy. "Do you mean it?" he said in a low voice vibrating with some strong feeling. "Do you mean it?"

The little group looked at him in amazement. Was this eager man with the burning, intense eyes, the unruffled and imperturbable Wilfred, to whose placid silence they were so accustomed?

"Why, Wilfred!" exclaimed Edith Symmes. "What on earth has come over you?"

But Ames paid not the least attention to her. It was as if he had not heard her voice. "Is it true?" he said again, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on the black mask of the Mariposa.

"Yes, señor," she almost whispered. "Yes, it is true. But in the future, mind you. I see only the future."

"Then tell your maid to throw all this stuff out of the window," Wilfred again rapped the crystal. "You've done with it for ever."

The spell was broken. Hayden and his temporarily stupefied guests roused themselves, and crowded about Ydo and Wilfred in a chorus of questions and congratulations; but every one felt that the moment for departure had come, and in the babble of adieus Hayden made an effort to get a moment's speech with Marcia alone, but in some feminine and elusive way she divined his intention and frustrated it, and in spite of the congratulations of his guests he was left standing upon his lonely hearth with a desolate feeling of failure.

He could hardly say what was the matter.

Everything had gone without a hitch; that is, until staid old Ames had so hopelessly forgotten himself. The dinner was perfect, the decorations were beautiful, the small group of congenial people had seemed to enjoy themselves immensely, and best of all, Ydo had brought him the wonderful news that his period of suspense and waiting was practically over. By this time to-morrow night he would know where he stood; and yet, reason about it as he would, the sense of elation and buoyant hope was gone, and in its stead was some dull, unhappy sense of foreboding, a premonition of impending disaster.

For him, at least, there had been some ghastly blight over the whole affair. Why, why had Marcia appeared pale and distressed? And what was far more puzzling, why had she begged him not to show the photographs of the mine upon Penfield's request? Was it that she did not wish one of his guests to know too much about the matter? If so, which one? And how did she know anything about his connection with the mine, anyway?

He tossed and turned for hours trying to arrive at some half-way plausible or satisfactory solution; but none occurred to him, and he finally fell into troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

As was natural after so restless a night, Hayden slept late the next morning, but when he awoke it was with his usual sense of buoyant optimism. The

forebodings of the night had vanished, and the good, glad, fat years stretched before him in an unclouded vista. To-day in all probability marked the conclusion of his comparatively lean years. A half an hour of conversation with those mysterious "owners," the disclosure of his maps, photographs, ore samples, the report of the assayers, etc., and then, the final arrangements. It might result in a trip to the property; but a journey made, his high heart promised, with Marcia.

At the thought of her a slight cloud obscured the shining towers of his Spanish castles. He recalled with a pang her pallor, her agitation of the night before. Something had evidently lain heavily upon her mind; she had been greatly distressed, even alarmed; but with the confidence of a lover he saw himself a god of the machine, consoling, reassuring, dissipating grief, and causing smiles to take the place of tears.

Upheld by these pleasant reflections, he breakfasted and then strolled through the rooms. They had been put in perfect order. And with the exception of the orchids, now sedately arranged in bowls and vases, instead of fluttering from palm-trees and lattices, there was no trace of the last night's festivities. Suddenly he bethought himself of getting together his photographs, etc., in readiness for the interview of the afternoon; but they were no longer on the small table between the drawing-room windows, where he had placed them the night before.

After seeking for them in every likely place for a few moments, Hayden rather impatiently summoned Tatsu and demanded to know what he had done with

them. Tatsu, however, was a picture of the grieved ignorance he professed. He said that after every one had left the apartment, the night before, he had locked up very carefully and gone to bed; that he had arisen early in the morning, shortly after five, and had put the rooms in their present and complete order; and he was positive that there were no photographs upon the table then.

Hayden questioned him closely about the extra servants taken on for the occasion; but he insisted that none of them had penetrated farther than the dining-room, and that he, himself had seen them all leave before the departure of the guests.

"There is a possibility that I may have tucked them away somewhere and have forgotten about them," said Hayden half-heartedly. "Come, Tatsu, let us get to work and make a systematic search for them. Don't overlook any possible nook or cranny into which they may inadvertently have been thrown."

The two of them, master and man, made a diligent and careful search, taking perhaps an hour, but not a trace of the lost package could they find; then, dazed, puzzled beyond words, unbelieving still, but with a heavy sinking of the heart, Hayden sat down to face the situation, to make some attempt to review it calmly and to get matters clear in his own mind.

Their recent search eliminated himself from the situation; reluctantly he relinquished the hope that in an absent-minded moment he had disposed of his precious bundle in some out-of-the-way place. No, he and Tatsu had sought too thoroughly for that to remain a possibility. Eliminating then himself, there

remained Tatsu. Although perfectly convinced in his own mind of his valet's innocence, still, for the purposes of inquiry, he would presume him to be the thief. Of course nothing could have been easier than for him to purloin the photographs; but what reason would he have for doing so? The motive, where would be the motive? Would not the reasonable hypothesis be that the Japanese had been approached by some of the owners of the property, who either fearing or suspecting that he, Hayden, held visible proofs of the lost mine, had bribed his servant to gain the desired information? But admitting this to be the case, and Hayden did not believe it for a moment, why had Tatsu remained instead of departing as prudence would seem to dictate?

That of course could be explained by assuming that prudence dictated another line of policy, that he deemed it the best way of averting suspicion. Perhaps! But the conclusion was not particularly satisfactory. Every lead Robert had followed seemed to bring him to a blind wall. He rose restlessly and walked up and down the room, and then sat down again, drumming drearily on the arm of his chair. What now? What new line could he follow? By eliminating the servants, Tatsu, and himself, what remained? His guests. He felt a swift recoil at the bare suggestion, even though a mental and hidden one, of implicating them in this matter, and experienced a succeeding disgust and impulse to abandon his inquiry at once.

Yet, there were the facts, the ugly, inexplicable facts staring him in the face, and he knew that it would be impossible for him to abandon the matter, mentally at least, until he had arrived at some sort of

a satisfactory solution. His guests, he ran them over. In every instance, even if they were capable of such an act, the motive was lacking, save in one case. Steadily as the needle veers to the pole, his suspicions pointed to the Mariposa. There at least the motive was not lacking.

Ah, he reflected, falling into deeper gloom, if she had them, then he was indeed lost. Even now, by this time, there would be a set of duplicate photographs made, and careful copies of his charts and maps. In some peculiar way he would probably find the photographs again on his table, and all further communication with him on the subject of The Veiled Mariposa would doubtless be declined by the owners of the property, their voice being Mademoiselle Mariposa. Within the shortest possible time, one of their prospectors on the property would discover the hidden trail, and the owners would begin immediate operations, and he as much out of all transactions as if he did not exist.

Suppose he put a detective on the case immediately; it was extremely likely that before the man could take any steps in the matter or decide on the line he meant to follow, the photographs would again be in Hayden's possession.

No, he thought in bitter cynicism, he might as well await their return with what calmness he could muster, for he saw little or no use in taking any definite steps in the matter.

For a time he remained sunk in a listless dejection, sitting among the ashes of his hopes, his dreams of vast wealth gone, his shining Spanish castles in ruins about him. But again his dulled brain began to work. How did Ydo secure the photographs,

if indeed it were she who had secured them? She had come late, laid aside her wraps in the dressing-room, and had entered the drawing-room followed by her secretary. From the moment of her first appearance he remembered practically every motion she had made. She had not moved about at all during her brief stay and had certainly not been anywhere near the table which had held the photographs, but had seated herself and gone through her tricks on the opposite side of the room.

Now as to the secretary. Well, she on her part had not moved from the piano-stool. He could see her, too, enter the room and leave it. The whole mental picture of the group was portrayed before him. As he distinctly remembered, the person who stood nearest the table while Mademoiselle Mariposa drew aside the veil of the future, was Edith Symmes, who sat almost directly before it. To the left of her was Marcia, pale and sad, and close beside her Horace Penfield. Heavens! He jumped impatiently to his feet. He was simply getting into a morbid muddle sitting here brooding over this matter. He must have action, action of some kind, and obeying a sudden impulse, he decided to see Ydo at once.

Wasting no time in reflection, he telephoned to her apartment, and impressed upon the surprised and reluctant maid that no matter who was there, or what the appointments for the day might be, he must see her mistress within the half-hour on business of the most imperative nature.

His rapid and excited speech must have impressed the young woman with the urgency of the case, for she presently returned to the telephone with the message that if he would call within the next

twenty minutes Mademoiselle Mariposa would see him.

It is needless to say that Hayden lost no time in getting to the Mariposa's apartment-house, but reached it as fast as a chauffeur could be induced to make the run thither, and was, after a very brief delay, admitted to Ydo's library. She was sitting there alone, looking over a newspaper, and as he came through the door she sprang up smilingly and expectantly to meet him. Then at the sight of his pale and harassed face she recoiled in evident and unsimulated surprise.

"Why, what is the matter?" she cried. "You have aged a thousand years!"

"Matter enough!" he exclaimed. "The photographs and maps of The Veiled Mariposa are all, all gone. They have been taken." He shot the words at her as from a rapid-fire gun, watching keenly from narrowed and scornful eyes the effect upon her.

Her very lips grew white. "Impossible!" she gasped. "Impossible!" Her surprise was as genuine as the slow, sickly pallor which had over-spread her face. He could not doubt her. Supremely clever woman as she was, she was incapable of this kind of acting. He gave a quick sob, almost a sob of relief. If not against him she would be for him and her assistance would be invaluable, especially since their interests were pooled.

"Then you," he stammered involuntarily, "you know nothing about it?"

"I!" Her eyes glittered in quick anger. "Of what

are you thinking? Oh, I see." She was laughing now. "Oh, no, no, no! Dear me, no! That would not suit my game at all. If you knew the circumstances and, if I may venture to suggest it, myself better you would never have dreamed of such a thing. But," frowning now, "when and how were they taken? Begin at the beginning and tell me all about it."

"There is nothing much to tell," he said. "I sent for the photographs while still at the dinner-table intending to tell my guests the story of the mine, but —but—" He stammered a little. "I changed my mind. When we left the table I carried them with me, and placed them on the small table between the drawing-room windows."

"And left them there?" she asked quickly.

"Yes, after laying them on the table I dismissed them from my mind, had no further remembrance of them until this morning. Then I went to get them and found them gone. My first idea was that having the appointment with you for this afternoon so on my mind I had probably gotten up in the night and hidden the package somewhere, either when asleep or in a state of half-wakefulness; but Tatsu and I made a most thorough search of the entire apartment, over-looking no possible receptacle where I might have hidden them, and there is absolutely no trace of them."

"The servants," she said rapidly.

"I was coming to them. They were all taken on for the dinner, with the exception of Tatsu, who has been with me for years, and whom, I think, I would trust further than I would myself. When I questioned him he was extremely clear and quick in his answers.

His story is that the extra servants all departed before my guests did, and that he personally saw them each one leave and locked the door after them. Then, after the guests had gone he locked up the other rooms very carefully and went to bed. This morning he got up early and put the whole apartment in order; and he is positive, and when Tatsu is positive he is not apt to be mistaken, that neither the photographs nor the maps were on that table, nor indeed anywhere in the rooms at five o'clock in the morning."

The Mariposa listened attentively to what he had to say, and then thought deeply for a few moments.

"There are only two possible explanations of the whole affair, which are in the least plausible," she said at last. "One is that some interested person or persons have heard of your find. It might be some prospector who has been tracking you for weeks, and he, or they may have stolen the papers with a view of communicating with the owners, whom they may know and whom they may fancy that you have not discovered. Your valet may or may not be a tool, that remains to be discovered. Well," resolutely, "in that case there is nothing to fear, I can assure you of that.

"The other hypothesis is that one of the guests had a motive for removing those especial maps and photographs, thus securing possession of them. But who and why?" As she pondered this question an expression of most startled and amused surprise swept over her face, and then she burst out laughing. "How funny!" she cried. "How awfully funny!" The peals of her silver laughter rang through the room.

"What is so awfully funny?" inquired Hayden

politely, but with an irritation he could not conceal. "I assure you, it does not seem funny to me."

Ydo had evidently recovered her spirits; the sparkle had come back to her eyes, the color to her cheeks. "Don't bother any more," she counseled blithely. "It's all going to turn out right now. You see."

"I should prefer to know how." Hayden's irritation was increasing instead of diminishing, and he spoke more stiffly than before. "As it is a matter which concerns me primarily and which has caused me much worry I think it only fair that you should share with me the knowledge which seems to justify you in drawing such happy conclusions."

Hayden would never again be nearer losing his temper completely than he was at this moment, for Ydo, after gazing at him for a moment with a sort of whimsical, mock seriousness, again broke into laughter. "Who would ever have dreamed of her doing such a thing?" she apostrophized the ceiling.

"Her!" Hayden felt as if his heart had stopped beating for a moment and then begun again with slow and suffocating throbs. Perhaps Ydo saw or guessed something of his emotion, for she again repeated reassuringly: "It will be all right now within a few hours. You Will see."

"It's going to be dropped," he said in a dull, toneless voice. "It's my affair, Mademoiselle Mariposa, and you are not going to make the least move in the matter. Your suspicions—whichever one of my guests they affect, and I can not even surmise which one you are trying to implicate—are quite beside the mark. This is entirely my own affair, and I

tell you, we are going to drop it. Do you hear?"

Ydo leaned forward, her chin upon her hand, and surveyed him with a humorous, unabashed and admiring scrutiny. "Brother in kind if not in kin, little brother of the wild, you are great. But do you mean what you say? Are you really willing to run the chance of giving up a fortune to protect—"

"Nonsense!" he broke in roughly. "Don't go any further. There's no use in talking the thing over." He again sank into somber silence.

But Ydo was apparently unmoved. "There is one thing I meant to ask you this afternoon," she said, "but since I shall probably not have an opportunity to do so I want my curiosity appeased. Why is that mine called The Veiled Mariposa? Did you happen to find out?"

"Yes," he answered, still entirely without interest. "Because, as the maps and photographs show, the only way to reach it is by a little hidden trail just back of a waterfall. You would never suspect it. I happened on it by the merest chance, followed it, and discovered that the mine lay behind this mountain cascade."

"Ah, beautiful!" Ydo clapped her hands. "I remember, I am sure, the very cascade. Although perhaps not, there were many."

"You have been on the ground then?" he asked.

"Ah, yes, with prospectors. But," with a shrug of the shoulders, "we were not so lucky as you."

"The interview for the afternoon is of course off," he said, rising heavily and stretching out his hand for

his hat.

"I suppose so," conceded Ydo. She smiled and sighed. "The pretty little coup I had planned is smashed. I have been arranging it for weeks, ever since I learned that you were interested in—But the gods have decreed it differently and have taken the matter into their own hands. Ah, well! But I shall hear again from you to-day; and you will hear from me."

CHAPTER XVII

Hayden was half ill when he left Ydo's apartment. He felt a curious stifling sensation, a longing for air and motion and so strong was this feeling that he decided to dismiss the motor and walk home; but he had proceeded only a block or so, when he noticed an electric brougham draw up to the sidewalk. His heart gave a quick throb for he saw that Marcia's chauffeur was driving; but a moment later, his hopes were turned to disappointment, for instead of Marcia's dear face, the somewhat worn and worried countenance of her mother gazed out.

The moment she caught a glimpse of him, she brightened perceptibly and with a quick motion summoned him. Almost mechanically he made his way across the crowded sidewalk and took the hand she extended.

"Oh, Mr. Hayden," with a plaintive quaver in her voice, "won't you drive about a little with me? I must

talk to some one. I must have advice and—and the sympathy that I know your generous heart will be only too ready to give. It may be unconventional to ask you, and I may be taking up far too much of your valuable time. You will tell me frankly if this is so, will you not?"

Hayden murmured a polite protest, and expressed his appreciation of the privilege in a few words, scarcely conscious of what he was saying, and then sank into the seat beside her, inwardly lamenting his stupidity that he had so impulsively dismissed his waiting taxicab.

"So unconventional!" again murmured the lady as he took his seat, "but then, I am all impulse and intuition. As Mr. Oldham has so often said to me, 'I would rather depend on your intuitions than on the reasoning of the wisest statesmen.' Very, very absurd of him, and yet so dear and in one sense, true."

"True in all senses," said Hayden with the gallantry expected of him. This Venus Victrix was not so critical as to cavil at the manifest effort in his tones. Let it be forced or spontaneous, a compliment was a compliment to her.

"Mr. Hayden, Robert, if I may call you so, I am very, very unhappy this morning, and—and I have no one, no one to console or comfort me."

Hayden felt a quick impulse of pity, for there was that in her speech and appearance which convinced him that she really was fretting over something, and he saw that under her careful powder and rouge her face looked worn and worried.

"Dear Mrs. Oldham," he said with the effect at

least of his natural manner, "I am sure you are bothering. Will you not tell me why and let me at least try and be of some service to you? You know that I shall be only too delighted to have you make me useful in any way that you can."

He spoke with sincere earnestness, for the small, frail creature beside him, her Dresden-china prettiness all faded and eclipsed, her coquetry extinguished, roused in him a sense of pity and protection.

"Ah, Mr. Hayden, Robert,—you gave me permission to call you Robert, did you not?—you are too, too kind," She leaned her head back against the cushions and carefully dabbled her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Now please, do not think of that," he urged; "just consider what a pleasure it is to me to be of service to you."

"Ah," she threw aside all pretense now, and turning to him clutched his arm, "the most terrible things have been happening and I have had to bear them all alone. Marcia," petulantly, "has left me to bear all things alone. She did not come home at all last night, but Kitty Hampton telephoned quite late, after I had gone to bed, that she would spend the night at her, Kitty's, home. Fancy! Rousing me from my sleep like that! And then, early this morning, Marcia telephoned herself and said that she could not possibly be at home before evening. Imagine! The thoughtlessness, the heartlessness of such a thing!

"But that," resignedly, "that was a mere drop in the bucket. I wish her father were alive! How he

would tower in indignation at the thought of my being so neglected and ignored, and by my own daughter, too,—a girl on whose education he lavished a fortune! Why, Mr. Hayden, forgive me, Robert, he would turn in his grave, literally turn in his grave, and"—in a burst of fitful weeping—"he may be quite aware of it, for all we know, and he may be turning in his grave at this very minute."

"Dear Mrs. Oldham," the late and ever lamented Oldham himself, could not have been more sympathetic, "you must have been very lonely indeed, and very much bored, I can quite understand that, but surely, you are not making yourself unhappy over this—this seeming neglect on the part of your daughter. Believe me, you will find that she has some good reason for this action. Surely that is not the only thing that is worrying you."

"Certainly not," The little lady tossed her head and spoke with emphasis. "Marcia's selfishness and thoughtlessness and indifference toward one who should be the dearest thing on earth to her is very hard to bear, very; but I am not made of the stuff that could break under an affliction of that kind. Mr. Oldham used so often to say that he never saw such fortitude and courage, never dreamed that such qualities existed in women until he knew me, and saw the way I met trouble. Oh, no indeed," again dabbling her eyes, "that is not it at all. No, my only feeling about Marcia's conduct is that I have been left to bear intolerable grief and Insult alone."

"Intolerable grief and insult alone!" Hayden really roused himself. "My dear Mrs. Oldham, those are strong words. What can possibly have happened?"

"That is just it. It is a case requiring strong words," she said firmly. "Who do you think paid me a visit this morning? Why, Lydia Ames, who hasn't darkened my doors since Wilfred became interested in Marcia. The idea!" overcome by indignation. "What did she want? A princess of the blood? Apparently not! She wants instead a fortune-teller, a madcap like Ydo Carrothers. She spent the whole time this morning telling me how charming and fascinating Ydo was and what a fillip she gave to life. I told her frankly that I had been very thoroughly acquainted with Miss Ydo Carrothers from her youth up, and that she would be a handful for any one. I'd as lief undertake to chaperone a cyclone. She only chuckled in that disagreeable way of hers and spoke of Wilfred's admiration for that Gipsy. When, Robert —you see I was able to say it that time—when every one has been talking, for the past year of Wilfred's devotion to Marcia. Such a dear fellow and so rich! I loved him like a son; and now, now they Will say that he has jilted her, jilted Marcia, and you know, Robert, a girl never recovers from that sort of thing.

"And then, Lydia Ames, horrid thing, said, oh, how can I tell it, that she was anxious to present Ydo, Ydo Carrothers, forsooth, with a set of butterflies as beautiful as Marcia's. Oh, Mr. Hay—Robert, did you, did you ever hear of anything so cruel? Oh, I tried not to think she had any particular reason for saying it, when in walked Edith Symmes, Edith Symmes of all people, and do you know, Robert, she began to get off the same thing."

She paused to let the enormity of this sink into his consciousness. The tears were streaming down her face, a mask of tragedy, and Hayden could only gaze at her in profound perplexity.

"I'm afraid, I don't know quite what you mean," he said slowly.

So absorbed was she with her grief that she did not appear to have heard him. "You know how malicious they both are," she wailed, "and both of them coming at the same time meant something. 'Talking of butterflies'? Edith Symmes said in that way of hers, 'Well, Mrs. Oldham, you needn't put on such airs because Marcia has the loveliest set in town; nor you, Mrs. Ames, because you're thinking of ordering a set, for I'm going to have a set myself,' Oh, you see, it meant something."

"Mrs. Oldham," said Hayden with the calmness of desperation, "will you not kindly tell me just what you mean? I am utterly and entirely at sea."

"They mustn't know the secret of those detestable butterflies," she answered miserably.

"What secret, Mrs. Oldham?"

"Why, the way Marcia is involved. Oh," weeping afresh, "it's too, too much. Oh, if Mr. Oldham were only here!"

It was impossible to get a coherent explanation from her, and Hayden felt as if he could bear no more. He had only one desire, one longing, to escape, to be alone, to sit down in some quiet spot, and try to pull himself together sufficiently to think things out.

"Dear Mrs. Oldham," he said gently, "I am convinced that you are worrying yourself unnecessarily. Won't you go home now and rest, and let me see you this evening or to-morrow? I am sure you will then take a calmer view of the matter. I am

going to leave you now. I have some business matters which must be attended to at once. Good-by."

CHAPTER XVIII

By the time Hayden had reached his own door his nerves were steadied and his poise somewhat restored. He felt sore and bruised in spirit, however, and desired nothing so much as to sit by himself for a time and think out, if possible, some satisfactory arrangement of this tormenting matter. But, as he threw open the door of his library with a sensation of relief at the prospect of a period of unbroken solitude, he stopped short, barely repressing the strong language which rose involuntarily to his lips.

In spite of the fact that spring had at last made her coy and reluctant début, there had been a sharp change in the weather and winter again held the center of the stage. Regardful of this fact, Tatsu had built a roaring fire in the library to cheer Hayden's home-coming. The flames crackled up the chimney and cast ruddy reflections on the furniture and walls; last night's orchids seemed to lean from their vases toward this delightful and tropical warmth, and there, with a chair drawn up as near the hearth as comfort permitted, was Horace Penfield, long, lean, cold-blooded, enjoying the permeating glow and radiance.

He turned his head lazily when Hayden opened the door, and Robert in his indignation felt a faint

chill of apprehension as he met that glance. Penfield's eyes had lost their usual saurian impassiveness. They were almost alive, with that expression of interest which only the lapses and moral divagations of others could arouse in them.

"Hello!" he said, indifferent to the fact that Hayden still stood frowning in the doorway. "I've been waiting about half an hour for you."

"Anything especial?" asked Robert coldly, walking over and standing by the mantelpiece, his moody gaze on the burning logs.

Penfield chuckled. "Oh, I don't know." There was an unconcealed triumph in his tones; but he had no intention of being hasty, he meant to extract the last drop of epicurean pleasure that was possible in this situation. Penfield was not lacking in dramatic sense, and he had no intention of losing any fine points in the narration of his news by careless and slovenly methods of relation.

"No," he continued, "nothing particular; but I've lately run across one or two things which I fancied might be of interest to you. By the way," with the effect of branching off with a side issue, "of course you know that Ames' engagement to the Mariposa is announced?"

"I know nothing of Ames' private affairs," returned Hayden shortly. "How should I?"

"You might have judged that from the way he behaved last night." Penfield again indulged in a series of unpleasant chuckles. "His mother! Lord! There'll be the deuce to pay there! Look at the way she's been behaving over his attentions to Marcia

Oldham, and then just fancy how she'll take this! She evidently gave that luncheon the other day to propitiate Marcia, and invited the Mariposa to show the world that Wilfred's so-called infatuation was merely an amiable and tepid interest. I wouldn't miss seeing the fun for a farm—no, not for all those lost mines of yours. I think that I shall drop in for a cup of tea with the old lady this afternoon, and murmur a few condolences in her ear, and then watch her fly to bits." He rolled about in his chair in paroxysms of silent mirth. "But," sobering, "it's too bad to think of missing the interview between the Mariposa and herself. I really do not know which one I would put my money on." He considered this a moment. "But that isn't the only interesting thing I've gleaned in the day's work." He glanced keenly at Robert through his white lashes, and again the triumph vibrated in his thin voice. "Hayden, do you know I've discovered the owner of your lost mine?"

Robert sat silent a moment, motionless, apparently thinking; his face at least betrayed nothing. "The owners," he corrected.

"No, I don't mean owners at all," returned Penfield coolly, "I mean just what I said—the owner. Ah," the most unctuous satisfaction in his voice, "for all your non-committal manner I don't believe you know as much as I do."

"Perhaps that's true," said Hayden sharply. "Whom do you mean by the owner?"

"Why, the elderly gray-haired man with whom Marcia Oldham is seen more or less," affirmed Horace, self-gratulations in his tone. What if his field was petty? He did not consider it so, and his feats were great.

Hayden dropped the hand with which he had been shielding his eyes and stared at the gossip on the other side of the hearth. "What on earth are you talking about?" he demanded.

"I'm giving you facts, straight facts, dear boy," replied Horace, his pale eyes shining through his white lashes.

"But—but—"

"Oh, there's no 'but—but' about it." Horace was consummately assured. "That man is the owner of your lost mine, so go ahead and dicker with him. I know. You can take my word for it."

"Is this a fact, Penfield?" asked Robert gravely. Horace had at least succeeded in impressing him.

"True as I'm sitting here. There's absolutely no doubt about it. Yes, I've got down to the secret of that old lost and found mine of yours." He chuckled at his wit. "But," his complacency increasing to the point of exultation, "that isn't all I know, by any means. All winter long I've been bothering my head about those butterflies the women are wearing, and now, at last, I've got a line on them."

His voice sounded curiously far away to Hayden and he did not at once take in the meaning of the words. His head was whirling. So, that middle-aged, gray-haired man was really the owner of the mine, and it was for him that Marcia—No, he would not think of it. He would not let those torturing doubts invade his mind. With every force of his nature he would again resist them and bar them out.

"Yes," Penfield was gloating, "I'm on to the butterflies, at last."

"Why should you imagine that they have any special significance?" Hayden's voice sounded faint and dull in his ears.

"Because I have a nose for news, Hayden. I was born with it. I feel news in the air. I scent it and I'm rarely mistaken. I said to myself last November, those butterflies mean something, and I intend to get to the bottom of them. And where do you think they led me? Oh, you will be interested in this, Hayden," smiling. "They led me right to the root of Marcia Oldham's secret."

Hayden threw up his head, a flash of anger on his spiritless face. "You can't discuss Miss Oldham here, Penfield."

"Oh, easy now," returned Horace cynically. "It's nothing to her discredit, far from it. You remember the night you suggested that she might live by the sale of her pictures, and I scoffed at you and said that all the pretty little pictures she could paint in a year wouldn't keep her in gowns? Well, you were nearer right than I for once."

A light came into Hayden's face. He opened his mouth as if about to speak.

"Now, just wait," Horace admonished him. "The reason your suggestion struck me as ridiculous was this: One must have a reputation to make a decent living as an artist, and who ever heard of the Oldham pictures? Where were they on exhibition? Who bought them? Nothing in it, you see." He moved his hand with a gesture of finality. "But," impressively, "Marcia Oldham can paint just the same, and beautifully; but that is not all she can do. It appears that as a child she very early showed a marked

artistic talent. Her mother always disliked it; though her father encouraged it in every way; but she developed a rather peculiar bent, and in the years that she spent abroad she devoted herself to the designing and making of jewelry and *objets d'art*. Her especial fad, you know, were those exquisite translucent enamels, just like her butterflies.

"Well, when her father died, and the crash came, Marcia, who was already ranked as a professional among people who knew about those things, decided to go into it as a business and support her mother and herself.

"But that is where the old lady comes in. Obstinate as a mule, weak as water, with a lot of silly, old-fashioned pride, she absolutely balked, had hysterics, took to her bed, did all the possible and impossible things that women do under such circumstances, with the result that Marcia was at her wit's end. Finally, the mother capitulated up to a certain point. Marcia might go ahead and pursue her avocation in peace under one condition, that it should be a dead secret, that not a whisper of it should reach the world.

"At first, Marcia rebelled at this decision; but one of her friends in her confidence, probably Kitty Hampton, who has considerable executive ability, persuaded her that it held certain advantages. For instance, she as a noticeable figure, not only on account of her beauty, but also because of her style and her positive genius for dress. Now, Kitty held—and as events have proved, correctly—that Marcia, by keeping the business end of it dark, could, by appearing as a devotee of social life, advertise her wares as she could no other way, especially when

aided and seconded by Mrs. Habersham and Mrs. Hampton.

"But neither of these two women is financially interested with her. That being the case, who backs the business? I am inclined to think"—Horace spoke thoughtfully and yet with sufficient assurance—"that that person is identical with the man who is the owner of the lost Mariposa. By the way, you did not ask his name. It is Carrothers."

"Carrothers! Carrothers! Why, that was Ydo's name. Ydo Carrothers." Hayden huddled down into his chair. He could not think. His brain, his dazed and miserable brain had received too many impressions. They had crowded upon him and he could not take them in. Penfield was talking, talking straight ahead, but although Robert heard the words, they conveyed no meaning to him. Then from the maze of them, Marcia's name stood out clearly. Horace was speaking of her again.

"Hayden, are you asleep? I've just asked you why Marcia Oldham was so surreptitiously carrying off that package from the little table in the drawing-room last night. She wrapped it up in her gauze scarf and carried it off as stealthily as a conspirator in a melodrama."

Hayden threw off his lethargy with a supreme effort. "Did she?" in a tired and rather indifferent voice. "I dare say she was afraid of disturbing the others. I asked her to take them home with her and look them over."

"Oh!" Penfield's voice was a little disappointed but not suspicious. He rose. There was no use in wasting any more time on a man who took news,

real news, so indifferently as Hayden. He thought with a smile of various drawing-rooms where his bits of information would create a sensation. Then why should he who could take the stage as a man of the hour, the most eagerly listened-to person in town, longer deny himself that pleasure?

"Good-by, Hayden," he said hastily, nor waited to hear if he was answered.

CHAPTER XIX

Hayden's feeling of intense relief at Penfield's departure was succeeded by an almost numb dejection. The revelations of Horace in regard to Marcia and the photographs had, to his own horror, occasioned no surprise in him, and the rest of Penfield's news had sunk into insignificance beside this confirmation of his suspicions which lay like lead on his heart and which he had refused to confess even to himself. He seemed to have known it all the time, to have known it from the moment the photographs had disappeared. He had no feeling of anger toward her, no blame for her, it went too deep for that.

It was a gray afternoon, and as it wore on toward evening now and again a flurry of snow blew whitely from the sullen skies, and the leaping flame of the fire which had put to rout any lurking shadows was now in turn defied by them.

"A lady to see you, sir." Tatsu stood at Hayden's

elbow.

"A lady to see me? Here?" Hayden roused from his apathy to exclaim.

"Yes, sir."

But before he could make further explanation, or Hayden could give orders either to ask the lady to enter or to beg that she excuse him, there was a soft, hesitant footfall, the delicate feminine rustle of trailing skirts, the faint delicious fragrance of violets, and he sprang to his feet, his heart pounding. In some mysterious uncannily skilful manner, Tatsu vanished.

Marcia was very white, her long, dark gown fell about her, her face gleamed pale as a lily, wistful as regret, from the shadow of her large black hat.

"Mr. Hayden, Bobby." She made a step toward him. "Why, how tired you look! You are ill!" she broke off to cry, deep notes of tenderness and solicitude in her voice.

"I am a little tired," he said, with an effort. "But you, too, look pale. Do not stand. Come near the fire. Lay aside your furs. I will have some hot tea brought."

She allowed him to lead her to a chair, her eyes fixed still upon his face. "Something has worried you, is bothering you still. Isn't it so?"

He dismissed the question. "You must believe me," he said, "when I assure you that I am quite well, and that everything is all right."

She was still standing, and now she turned to him and laid her hand upon his sleeve. There was an

intensity, almost a wildness in her expression. "Ah," she cried, "you have missed the photographs. I was afraid of that, but I couldn't get here sooner. I telephoned twice, but I could not reach you. You know that I could not have dreamed of coming here, here to your apartment except for the most urgent of reasons. Bobby"—she burst into tears and clung to his arm—"it was I—I who stole your papers and photographs."

"My dear," bending above her, "do not say such things." His voice trembled. "If you borrowed my photographs you did it for some good reason, for cause which seemed right and proper to you. That is enough for me."

"Oh, Robert, Robert!" She was weeping now, her whole figure shaken with sobs. "Your goodness, your sweetness overwhelms me. It is more than I can bear. But, Bobby, you mustn't believe the worst things of me. I didn't take them from the motives you may attribute to me."

"Dear Marcia," he said soothingly, "do not talk of motives. Whatever your motives were, they were right. But you are going to tell me no more now. You are going to sit down here and have a cup of tea, and rest quietly a few moments before you attempt to tell me anything more. Here, you must lay aside those heavy wraps."

He took her furs, he begged her to remove her hat, then occupied himself for a moment in fussing over the fire and giving orders for hot tea, and was rewarded presently by seeing that the color had returned to her lips and cheeks, and that the frightened, strained expression had faded from her eyes.

"There," he said, after Tatsu had brought in the tea things, and he had poured some for her. "Two lumps of sugar, one slice of lemon. You see, I remember your tastes."

She smiled gratefully at him. "Please, may I tell you all about it now?" she asked.

His face fell again into the lines of dejection. In spite of the cheerfulness he had forced himself to assume, and in spite of the compassion he felt for her weakness, he would have postponed for ever this confession which must condemn her.

"Why," he asked, "why not bury the incident in a wise oblivion, and never mention it again? Indeed, indeed, it is better so. One of the best mottoes in the world is, 'Never explain.'"

His lips smiled, but his eyes pleaded, and his heart passionately protested:

> Must we lose our Eden,
> Eve and I?



Her languor and weariness disappeared in a moment; she drew herself up now, the pose of her head haughty, her eyes chill. "Never explain?" she repeated. "It is, as you say, an excellent motto—for those who are best assisted by a wise silence. But I assure you I am not trying to gain your pity, or tolerance or forgiveness. I took your photographs and maps yesterday evening and acted probably on incorrect reasoning and mistaken impulse, but I should do exactly the same thing again under the

same circumstances; and now, I insist upon your listening to those circumstances."

She laid aside her cup and with the scarlet still glowing on her cheek began:

"Yesterday morning I received word from Mr. Carrothers that a man who had all the charts and photographs of The Veiled Mariposa had been discovered, and that that man was you. You may imagine my sensations. At first, I could not grasp it, it seemed too inconceivable and incredible to be true, and then, as the facts of the case were given me and I was able to realize it, to take it in, why—I was overcome with joy. Ah, B—— Mr. Hayden, no one was ever so happy as I yesterday morning. Your words of a week ago, the afternoon that we had walked in the Park, came back to me. Your mysterious allusions to the good fortune which was almost within your grasp—and this was it! And to think that I—I should be one of the owners of the property! Why, it was like a fairy-story."

"And are you really one of the owners?" he interrupted her to cry.

"Indeed, yes. But let me go on. I was also told that your information would be in our hands within twenty-four hours, and then, I learned that Ydo was conducting the negotiations. That was the rift within the lute. I immediately became frightened. I did not know what it meant. What I did know was that Ydo stops at nothing to gain her ends. And of course, she, being interested, too—"

"How is she interested?" he interrupted again. "I have not discovered that."

"I will explain later. I want to go on with this part of my story now. But, as I say, knowing Ydo, her daring, her indifference to anything but her own game, her powers of resource—"

"Oh, come, you are unjust to her," he exclaimed, forgetful of his own base suspicions.

"Oh, I know it, but believe me, I am not"—again her head was haughtily lifted—"I am not trying to gain your sympathy by criticizing her; I am merely trying to make you understand the case as it appeared to me. As I say, I was frightened. It was all my own superstition. Indeed, I know that it was; but I got in a panic, and could not reason clearly. No," as he strove to take her hand, "please wait. And then, last night when Horace Penfield asked you to show the photographs I saw a confirmation of my fears, and when Ydo entered I was still more frightened. I suspected an arrangement, a plot between them. There were the photographs and maps on that little table where you had carelessly thrown them; any one could take them; and then when Ydo was going through her nonsense over that glass ball and had every one's attention fixed on her Horace crept around and stood so near the table that I was sure he was going to seize them, so I took them myself. I twisted the gauze scarf which was about my neck around them and carried them out that way. No one noticed. And here they are." She lifted the package from her muff, still wrapped in the scarf, and held it out to him. "No one has even glanced at them; not even myself."

"And you did this to save me! Oh, Marcia, Marcia!" He was more moved than he could express.

"Wait!" She lifted her hand imperatively. "I

haven't finished. There are lots of things to tell you yet."

"Postpone them!" he cried ardently. "Forget them until to-morrow! Ah, dearest, you are tired. You have borne too much strain already."

"No, no!" she cried. "It grows late, and I must, must tell you these things before I leave you."

"Leave me!" he cried. "Try it. When you go I go with you."

They both laughed. "But listen, Bobby," she pleaded; and at that "Bobby" his heart glowed, he was surely forgiven. "Don't you want to know how I happened to be the largest owner of the vast Mariposa estate?"

"Oh, indeed I do!" he said. "Are you the largest owner?"

"Yes," she nodded. "You see, at the height of his prosperity, my father bought it from a Mr. Willoughby, whose wife inherited it. No one knew it, but even at that time my father's mind was affected, and before long his disease, a softening of the brain, had fully manifested itself. His greatest interest in life had always been business, and after this change came upon him he got all kinds of strange ideas in his head, among them a perfect mania for destroying papers. It is principally for that reason," with a slight shrug of her shoulders, "that we were left almost penniless. But he had a head clerk, a Mr. Carrothers, Ydo's father, by the way, who saw how things were going, and who, by various ruses, succeeded in saving some of the papers, among them those relating to the Mariposa estate. These were intact.

"After my father's death, as you have probably heard, there was practically nothing left, nothing for my mother and myself to live on. So I decided to go into business. I am," with a little smile, "both a designer and manufacturer of quaint jewelry, ornaments and things; but there wasn't any money. But Mr. Carrothers, who had more or less, was crazy about the Mariposa property. He had looked up the history of the Willoughbys and found that everything that Mr. Willoughby claimed was true, and he wanted an interest in the estate, so he offered to finance my little venture if I would give him a third interest in the property.

"I was glad enough to do so, and he and I went into partnership. It has been a success. We have made money, but it left little time for anything else. Nevertheless, Mr. Carrothers has never lost his enthusiasm in regard to The Veiled Mariposa, and that has kept up my flagging interest. We have not been idle about it either; but have kept prospectors down there almost all the time. Ydo went over the ground two or three years ago. But this year, we had decided to make a special effort. We were to send down some great expert and a seasoned old prospector or two who could positively smell ore on the rocks.

"I sent out my little messages in the shape of the jeweled butterflies, and Ydo, who had not been in this country for several years, decided to tell fortunes under the name of The Veiled Mariposa, and to carry out the idea in her disguise. It was a clever idea because she could advertise, and any one who had anything to communicate about the mine would naturally connect her with it and seek her out. And sure enough, this has proved our lucky year, for you,

you discovered it—The Veiled Mariposa." She smiled happily at him.

"To lay it at your feet." He caught her hands and drew her up from her chair. "Ah, Queen of Eldorado, will you take it with my poor heart?"

They were both laughing; but it was laughter that trembled on the verge of tears. "Sweetheart," she murmured, her arms about his neck, her face hidden on his shoulder, "my mine, my butterflies and my heart are yours for ever."

"Ah!" He held her so closely that the violets, crushed upon her breast, protested in wafts of fragrance.

"There are more things I want to tell you," she murmured.

"You will do nothing of the kind, O Scheherazade! Not, at least, until you have had something to eat. Ah, we will go to the Gildersleeve, where we first met, or at least first talked. Come, your hat and wraps, no delay."

He assisted her into her long cloak, and laid her furs about her shoulders.

"How can I pin on my hat," she asked desperately, "when you—"

"Yes? When I?" he said encouragingly. "Why are you blushing?"

"Nobody can properly pin on a hat when some one is kissing her," she protested.

"I am from Missouri," he replied. "You must show me. In other words, I doubt the assertion. Now,

to prove it, you try to pin on your hat and I will endeavor to kiss you at the same time."

"You will do nothing of the kind," she insisted. "You will go and stand on the other side of the room. Ah—"

There was no room for further argument, the door was thrown open and Ydo, brilliant, laughing, gorgeous as a tropical flower, entered. Behind her loomed Wilfred Ames with all the radiance it was possible for his stolidity to express.

"Here!" cried Ydo, the music of her laughter filling the room as her eyes fell on Marcia. "Ah, I knew it! What did I tell you?" turning to Hayden.

"What do you mean?" cried Marcia, startled, flushing.

"I mean this," laughed Ydo. "That he," pointing to Hayden, "came to me about noon, frantic over the disappearance of his claims on Eldorado. After he had explained the circumstances to me I knew in a minute that thou wert the woman. I didn't have to gaze into my crystal or run the cards to see that. But why, why? I knew that you didn't take them for—well, reasons that others might have taken them for; but why take them at all?"

There was no gainsaying Ydo. "Because I thought some one else would take them if I didn't," faltered Marcia.

"Meaning me!" Ydo's laughter seemed merciless to Marcia's shrinking ears. "I don't mind the implication. But Wilfred, Bobby, to fancy I would do anything so clumsy! Who says that women are not cruel to women?"

"Ydo, forgive me," pleaded Marcia, "I am humiliated, ashamed." Her voice trembled.

Ydo's green eyes twinkled upon her. "Oh, la! la!" with a friendly, careless little push. "Sweet, dainty lady of the butterflies, I have nothing to forgive. I comprehend you, and he who understands all forgives all. It is simply that you do not understand me. Shall the violet understand the orchid? It is not a thing to think of again, so forget it for ever.

"And speaking of orchids, Mr. Hayden, may I have a few to wear to-night from that vase yonder? They will just suit my gown."

She moved with him across the room, leaving Marcia and Ames standing together; but she did not stretch out her hand to take the orchids he offered, but stood looking at him with her dazzling smile, sweetened, softened with some touch of feeling so deep and yet so evanescent that he could not fathom it.

"Little brother of the wilds, now that you have won Cinderella and Eldorado, as I predicted, I wish you a divine unrest. It is the best I Can hope for you. Eldorado and domesticity mean the fishy eye, the heavy jowl, and the expanded waistcoat; and remember that although the red gods may be silent so long that you will forget them, yet there will come a day when they will call and you will hear nothing else. Then, as you would keep your happiness, get up and follow—follow 'to the camp of proved desire and known delight.'"

"Advice from one about to settle down—don't settle." He strove to speak lightly, but failed.

"I settle! Don't harbor any such vagaries. We may meet again, oh, I don't mean in this sort of a way, I mean where the open road winds on like a great river, and the pines go marching up and down hill, and the blue smoke of the tent-fires curls up to the morning skies. We may meet again, Bobby, on the outward trail that leads from Eldorado to Arcady."

She swept across the room, pausing to kiss Marcia lightly on the cheek as she passed her. "Come, Wilfred," she cried. "We are *de trop*. Let us see how quickly we can vanish."

The door closed behind them, but the room still held the faint echo of her laughter, the lingering breath of evasive and enchanting perfume.

Marcia had thrown her furs about her shoulders and now she picked up her muff. It fell to the floor, unheeded, as Hayden caught her hands in his.

"What was Ydo saying to you?" she asked.

"She was giving me some geographical information about the relative situations of Eldorado and Arcady, and condemning the former as a health resort."

"Bobby! You're fooling! I can tell by your eyes."

"But her knowledge is incorrect," he announced triumphantly. "For instance, she is not even aware that the towers and treasures of Eldorado lie in the very heart of Arcady, and that we will dwell there for ever and a day, my adored lady of the Silver Butterfly."

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK
THE SILVER BUTTERFLY ***

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